Framing identity: social practices of photography in Canada (1880-1920)

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PHOTO-COLONIALISM

Still, there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them by seeing themselves as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects symbolically possessed (Sontag 1978: 14).

Photography emerges at a historical moment that witnesses the birth of what the French Situationist Guy Debord (1983) termed “the society of the spectacle.” This term refers to an evolution of capitalism characterized by a commodity culture simultaneously privileging image, display and visuality (Solomon-Godeau 1992: 328).

As noted American writer Susan Sontag’s quotation underscores, the photographic image has the power to capture and transform an individual into an object that symbolically can become the possession of another. Edward Said (1978), among others, has argued that colonial powers have used photography strategically to represent non-Western peoples as an exotic other in order to achieve both political and economic dominance (Hirsch 2000: 148). This use of photography as a tool for collecting evidence and writing a colonial narrative has become known as photo-colonialism. In this chapter my reading of photographs as cultural objects is informed by this concept. Specifically, I focus upon the degree to which the Arctic portraits of Aboriginal people made by the Canadian photographer Geraldine Moodie may be viewed as examples of photo-colonialism.

As literary theorist Jonathan Culler (1988) has written, it is important to choose the framing of the sign that is relevant for cultural analysis. Following Culler’s advise, I frame
my reading of Moodie's photographs in a manner that compares her work to that of others who have employed the colonizing camera. These include men who photographed as part of early Arctic expeditions, other women who made photographic portraits of Native peoples and finally a contemporary photographer, myself.

Previously, in Chapter Two, I discussed some of Moodie's portraits of Aboriginal peoples made for commercial purposes. By the time Moodie went into the North in 1904 she was already well established as a professional photographer, having run three commercial studios and received several government photographic commissions, including one from the prime minister of Canada. Conforming neither to the established formalities of portraiture, nor the faux dispassionate gaze of scientific documentation, Moodie's photographs exhibit characteristics of both, their poignancy often located within the sometimes uneasy alliance between the aesthetics of studio art portrait and anthropological evidence. One hundred years later, it is this intersection that provides the site of my analysis.

As in Chapter Two, my approach will be to analyze images that were made to showcase difference. As part of establishing their own identity, photographers such as Geraldine Moodie selected and photographed the exotic other. My analysis of Moodie's images will be informed by ideas of difference and deconstruction as they relate to identity set out by the French theorist Jacques Derrida in his essay “Différence” (1967). While fundamentally agreeing with the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, that the process of signification or meaning-making is defined in terms of how signs differ from other signs, Derrida expanded upon de Saussure's argument, stating that because meaning is always deferred in time and space, it is never possible to find a final, stable meaning (Morton 2003: 26).

To give an example of how this applies to the present study, just as the notion “civilized” can be defined by its difference from “savage,” a similar oppositional strategy can be employed by the colonizer seeking to establish identity by producing images, in this case photographs, of the colonized as exotic other.

I will also connect my analysis to the work of post-colonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Together with other post-colonial intellectuals such as Homi Bhabha and Robert Young, Spivak has used Derrida's deconstructive strategies as a conceptual framework from which to question the justification for subjection and exploitation of the other or, to use Spivak's terminology, the subaltern (Spivak 1976, Morton 2003: 27). In military language, a subaltern is a subordinate or individual of lower rank (Spivak 1988: 281). Spivak has appropriated this term and expanded upon its use by applying it to the discussion of marginalized women. In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988 [1985]), Spivak juxtaposes claims of certain French intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze to speak for the marginalized, with the claims of British colonialism to “rescue” Indian women from the Hindu practice of widow self-immolation, or sati. According to Spivak, despite the apparent benevolence of their ideals, instead of speaking for these women, what both Foucault and Deleuze do is appropriate their voices, thereby silencing them.
once more (56). To counter this, Spivak proposes a non-exploitative strategy that takes into account the political struggles and histories of marginalized women. By expanding the concept of subaltern to include these women and establishing that “these disempowered women receive their political and discursive identities within historically determinate systems of political and economic representation.” Spivak is better able to respond to the voices of these women without silencing them in the process (Morton 2003: 67-69).

This question is central to my analysis of the photographs to follow. By photographing her Inuk subjects, does Geraldine Moodie replace their voice with her photo-colonial representation or, by recognizing difference, does she allowed them to visually “speak”? It is also important to keep in mind that the framework in which these images were made is a boundary to be respected. As in the previous chapters, I follow the guidelines for cultural analysis for the reading of historic photographs in the present as set out in the writing of Mieke Bal. Bal warns of the “complicity of critique” and the “impossibility of showing and saying ‘no’ to the object in the very gesture that shows it” (1996: 195).

**THE SHADOWCATCHERS**

Some North American indigenous peoples believed that to be photographed meant that some part of their life force was diminished. They referred to those who photographed them as “shadowcatchers,” the shadow referring to death or the death of the soul (Lippard 1992: 30). Shadowcatchers travelled extensively to seek out their Indian subjects. They were almost exclusively Euro-American and male. The best known is the controversial American photographer, Edward Sheriff Curtis (1868–1952). Curtis was a late nineteenth century Pictorialist who began photographing aboriginal peoples in 1895. It was not until he travelled with the E. H. Harriman Expedition to Alaska in 1899, however, that he came to realize the importance of documenting what he saw to be the “vanishing ways” of Indian people (Lyman 1982: 37). At the time, this was a common colonialist view (Bal 1996: 47). It justified its proponents’ documenting and collecting activities by presenting targeted individuals and groups as “fragments of the real world” or representative examples of a “vanishing” culture (201). This attitude is known today as the “ethnographic alibi” and has been critiqued by Bal who observes that no matter how academic the collector’s motives, the practice inevitably reduces the subject to a stereotype (47).

If Curtis had any such concerns, he was little deterred by them as he vigorously set out to create his vision of the North American Indian. In 1900, Curtis began travelling extensively across the continent on what was eventually to become a 30-year project. Together with a team of assistants, he photographed Indian tribes in the Great Plains, the Southwest and the Pacific Northwest. By 1906, having acquired the financial backing of the American industrialist J. Pierpont Morgan and the endorsement of President Theodore Roosevelt, Curtis published the first of what was to become a 20-volume set of
books entitled The North American Indian (Curtis 1970 [1907]). The final volume appeared in 1930. When he died in 1952, Curtis's work had all but been forgotten, although in the 1970s, his imagery enjoyed a certain posthumous commercial success.

As a consequence of deconstructions by both Indigenous and Euro-American, post-colonial writers, his work has more recently been subjected to increasingly critical reviews (Lyman 1982: 13). It has become known that in keeping with his background as a pictorialist, Curtis fictionalized and aestheticized many of his images. Often he dressed his Native subjects in inauthentic or incorrect clothing and on occasion, even added wigs and make-up to enhance his vision. Although lacking credibility as documents, the resulting pictorial sophistication of Curtis's photographs allowed them to function admirably as romantic icons. Ostensibly an attempt to capture the dying ways of what in his day was perceived to be a disappearing race, Curtis's photographs are now regarded more as exemplars of the tendency of Euro-American photographers to produce images illustrating the romantic myth of the "noble savage."

While Curtis was by no means the only shadowcatcher to produce images of this type, his obsessive and methodical approach and the scale of his production make him the paradigm. The portrait Oglala Sioux, The Medicine Man — Slow Bull, 1907 (Fig. 4.1) is typical of his work. The photograph shows Slow Bull full-length, turned slightly to the right and looking away from the camera. He is wrapped in a light, sheet-like fabric that leaves his chest, right shoulder and arm exposed. Curtis was infamous for fabricating costumes for his subjects, and this item appears to be no more than a piece of canvas rather than a genuine item of apparel (Curtis 1970[1907]). His sturdy legs are bare and on his feet he wears a pair of hide moccasins. With his left hand, Slow Bull holds the fabric against his body, while his right grasps a ceremonial peace pipe. The pipe and the skull are symbols of a Medicine ceremony or prayer. Slow Bull's chin is lifted high and his gaze is directed beyond the camera, as if surveying some distant point. The low-placed camera angle gives the viewer a sense of looking up at him from below. This causes the figure to dominate a landscape made ambiguous by selective focus. The dramatic sky behind Slow Bull, so obviously inconsistent with the ambience of the rest of the photograph, has also been chosen for its contribution to the overall effect. As was common practice at the time, it has been drawn from another negative and added to the photograph in the darkroom.
In their book, *Reading National Geographic*, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins propose breaking down the “multitude of gazes” within images of the other to include the photographer’s gaze, the magazine’s gaze (the institution), the magazine reader’s gaze (the viewer), the non-western subject’s gaze, a direct viewer’s gaze and the refracted gaze of the other. Lutz and Collins conclude that these disparate points of view account for the different kinds of meaning found in photographs:

...at the root of a photograph’s ambiguity, each gaze potentially suggesting a different way of viewing the scene .... It is the root of much of the photographs dynamic as a cultural object, and the place where the analyst can perhaps most productively begin to trace its connections to the wider social world of which it is a part (214).

In Curtis’s photograph of Slow Bull, the photographer’s gaze and the viewer’s gaze overlap and are “entangled” (Lutz and Collins 1993: 104). The viewer’s eye is encouraged to follow the photographer’s sightline up to the face of Slow Bull; the low camera angle, the strong vertical of the standing figure and the narrow drapery hanging from the pipe facilitate this movement of the eye. This gaze creates a distance between the subject, the spectator and the photographer. The subject is elevated above the viewer by the low camera angle, forcing the viewer to look up to him. This gives Slow Bull a position of significance within the frame and, not coincidentally, also corresponds to a gesture that to Western eyes signifies pride and nobility. It also contributes to objectifying the Medicine Man, effectively turning him into a display object.

Curtis also orchestrates Slow Bull’s gaze. Instead of having Slow Bull engage with the camera, that is, of course, the surrogate viewer, Curtis has him look out over the spectator, as if searching the horizon for something anticipated but not yet seen. Slow Bull’s “far away” gaze makes him appear spiritual, introspective, beyond worldly concerns, a shaman or wise man looking toward a future that only he can imagine. This gaze serves a further purpose too. By not looking directly into the camera Slow Bull also makes no direct engagement with the viewer. The viewer is thus given license to look at him for as long as she or he wishes. Thus, as the focalizer of the image, Curtis has carefully contrived every aspect of its presentation. The placement both of subject and camera, the pose, the gaze, the costume, the props and the setting are all directed toward supporting a view consistent with the expectations of his audience. This is the Medicine Man displayed as exotic other, a cultural artifact collected in a photographic image, then literally framed for sale to a viewing public. As Robert Hirsch has observed, “Others are viewed as static objects rather than active subjects who possess the same desires and needs as the viewer” (2000: 148). Any hint of Slow Bull’s individual character has been forfeited to portray instead a Euro-American stereotype of Indianess. His significance or nobility is established by emphasizing his status as a Medicine Man. At the same time, he is depicted as a primitive wrapped in a blanket.
Several writers have noted this relationship between the photographic representation of Native Americans and the "noble savage." In his book *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, historian Daniel Francis argues that the camera-bearing Euro-American played a significant role in the creation of this mythic figure. A rationale is provided by anthropologist Peter Mason (1990), who shows that the notion of "noble savage" is a construction that grew out of the need of Europeans for an Aboriginal having both positive qualities, such as "innocence" and dubious qualities, such as "primitive." Mason writes:

The appeal of the North American Indian as Noble Savage to those who had become disenchanted with European civilization in the Enlightenment has been amply documented (e.g. Kohl, 1981; Sheehan, 1980: ch.1). For the period immediately before and after the discovery in 1492, however, it is the European image of the Wild Man, with its positive and negative characteristics, which influenced the European perceptions and representations of the New World (47).

Curtis's approach to photographing Native North Americans leads to a consideration of Geraldine Moodie. Whether Moodie shared Curtis's view of the "vanishing Indian" is not documented, although the significant differences in her approach and style make it unlikely. As an unabashed illusionist and pictorialist, Curtis's approach required his Native subjects to give up almost all control over their representation to him. Moodie, on the other hand, attempted a more realistic representation. Her more straightforward, documentary approach to photography left her subjects more room for individual expression. While Curtis carefully controlled every aspect of his pictures, using whatever means he deemed necessary to support his mythic vision, Moodie limited her use of illusory tools to a makeshift studio and a neutral background. As a result, her subjects often appear to have just stepped before the camera and then to have stood still only long enough for the shutter to open and close.

The effect of this approach is apparent in Moodie's photograph of the Inuit man, She-Nuck-Shoo (Fig. 4.2). This image was made in 1904 aboard the vessel *The Arctic* while it was over-wintering at Fullerton Harbour, NWT. She-Nuck-Shoo is shown wearing an outer parka made of animal skin and fur mukluks. He is also wearing thick, fur mittens, despite the apparent indoor location. In his right hand he holds a whaling harpoon and a coiled rope. While this shows his occupation as a whaler, to Western eyes, She-Nuck-Shoo's posture also echoes a stereotypically formal, military stance that suggests a possible further intersection of two cultures. She-Nuck-Shoo's gaze almost meets that of the camera, but he avoids any direct confrontation by deflecting his eyes slightly above the lens itself.

Art historian Estelle Jussim, states that for an image to be a portrait, the subject must be aware that s(he) is being photographed (1989: 32). This statement is correct as far as
it goes, but of greater importance is what it implies, that once established, awareness also provide an opportunity for subject response, that the photographer cede to the subject the power to determine how much or how little of themselves they are prepared to reveal. Thus for a photograph of a person to go beyond being a mere physical likeness, portraiture demands that control of the process be shared. Inevitably though, with the camera operator controlling the moment of the shutter's actual opening and closing, the balance of power always remains with the photographer. When the photographer is a colonizer and the subject the colonized or other, this power differential can become even more aggrandized. Of equal importance is consideration of the commonality of the photographer's and subject's understanding of what constitutes portraiture, both product and process. This is especially significant when the photographer and subject derive from substantially different cultural backgrounds. As has already been mentioned, Native North Americans, for example, had a radically different conception of the consequences of photographic self-representation than Europeans, seeing it quite literally as taking some part of themselves away.

Thus although She-Nuck-Shoo is undeniably aware of the camera, Moodie's photograph of him is by no means a profound portrait. Even though in this respect it reaches well beyond Curtis's picture of Slow Bull, its revelation of She-nuck-shoo's individual character is still limited. She-Nuck-Shoo's facial expression is relaxed and there may even be a trace of a smile but, despite the aforementioned gestural relationship to European military posture giving a superficial impression of confidence, a closer examination reveals just how tentative this really is. While a casual viewer might be deceived as to She-nuck-shoo's level of comfort before the camera, in reality, this impression results more from the order and calm of Moodie's superbly balanced composition than anything emanating from She-nuck-shoo himself. Compared to the Curtis photograph, the relative disposition of power between photographer and subject in Moodie's image may be more evenly distributed, but the photographer is still very much in control, and the subject knows it. Rather than a portrait, this is primarily still a photograph of a man having his photograph taken. He may be aware, but he certainly gives away little more of himself than he must.

While differences in the results produced by Curtis and Moodie are largely explained by
their differing approaches, much can also be ascribed to differences in their conception. While Curtis’s work was overwhelmingly shaped by a desire to illustrate a mythic vision of the noble savage, at least one aspect of Moodie’s motivation was more banal: Her photographs were also commodities. As is evident in the photograph of She-Nuck-Shoo, Moodie had a propensity to copyright her work. She knew that photographs of Native people were a popular commodity, a curiosity that provided income for their producers (Silversides 1994: 3). Copyrighting her work was a means to ensure that any remuneration from its publication or sale would accrue to her.

The photograph of She-Nuck-Shoo discussed above was eventually deposited at the Museum of Mankind in London, England as part of the Canadian copyright collection. There is also a second photograph of She-Nuck-Shoo, made at the same time. It is housed at the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Museum in Regina, Saskatchewan and even better illustrates how readily Moodie’s photographs lend themselves to commodification of the other (Fig. 4.3). In this image, She-Nuck-Shoo appears more posed. He stands slightly in profile and looks out of the frame to the right of the camera. Of greater interest is the caption that was almost certainly added later by museum staff. The message in the text is contradictory. The caption, “She-Mick-Shoo, (sic) Chief of the Ivaliks; an Ivalik whaler with Harpoon” directs the viewer to see “the Ivalik whaler” as a representative of a type rather than as an individual. It serves both to identify the subject and objectify him. Although the intention of the photograph may have been to illustrate the text, what actually happens is the reverse. Roland Barthes points at this reversal apropos of advertising and press photography. In analyzing the press photograph, Barthes argues that “the image no longer illustrates the words, it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image...” and concludes, “...the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination” (1982: 204-205 [1961]). This describes exactly what happens with Moodie’s image. By labelling the photographic subject as a cultural specimen, the caption shapes and limits a viewer’s interpretation of the content.

Captions such as this are shaped by the frame in which they were created. In the introduction to his book Orientalism, Edward Said reflects on the difference between pure
and political knowledge. He states that the individual cannot disclaim the main circumstances of her actuality. She comes to a circumstance, event or geographical location with a certain amount of “baggage” (1978: 11). At the turn of the nineteenth century, most Euro-Canadians’ views could be termed inherently racist:

To those who were inclined to see the world as a struggle between good and bad, God and the Devil, Indians were “pagans, devil worshippers.” To those who accepted Darwin’s theories of evolution, Indians were seen as halfway between men and beasts, simple people who needed to be eventually “raised” to the level of Western civilization through education and training (Doxator 1988:13).

Cultural historian Donny White argues that in this respect, Geraldine Moodie did not share the views either of her partner, J.D. Moodie, or her grandmother, Susanna Moodie, both of whom regarded Native people as “inferior and savage” (1993: 6). Based on her being permitted to photograph the Cree sun dance ceremony in Battleford, Saskatchewan, White maintains that Geraldine Moodie had “a special rapport with the Indians” (1993: 6). While this may well have been true, it is equally apparent from her photographs that Geraldine Moodie was also influenced by the romantic, noble savage view of Native people espoused by Edward Curtis and other shadowcatchers of her time.

Where Moodie differs is in lacking the beneficent paternalism that drove Curtis’s vision. Moodie had no illusions about saving the ways of a vanishing race. As a professional photographer, her photographs of Inuit are intended for sale to an audience she knew to be fascinated by the exotic, hence her style which can best be described as a blend of conventional studio practice and the subject-as-specimen approach employed by ethnographers. Paradoxically, it is this and Moodie’s commercial experience, rather than any personal rapport with Native peoples, that most permits her subjects’ small opportunities to intervene in their own representation.

To understand the subtle difference resulting from these interventions, in the next section I will compare Moodie’s work to that of other white photographers working in the Canadian Arctic.

**THE COLONIZER AND THE CAMERA**

In her essay “Postcards from the Edge,” Bal questions the actual function of the reproducing and exhibiting of colonial postcards (1996: 209). What is particularly fascinating is that these images often tell as much about the colonizer operating the camera or more, than they do about their colonial subject. As Bal has argued, “More intriguing than the colonized is the colonizer; more intriguing than the object of the scholarship is its too-well hidden subject” (223).

Although the more documentary style of her approach differentiates Moodie’s images from the Pictorialists, her studio photographs discussed previously are also stylistically
different from those of her male colleagues who photographed Inuit during this expedition. There is a photograph made by one of them in a snow-house interior. Entitled Artungelar, March 22, 1905 (Fig. 4.4), it shows an Inuk man from the Kenepetu group. The photographer is most likely George Comer, who is known to have made at least one other photograph in the same space at roughly the same time. The photographer has seated his subject on a sleeping platform above a wooden board on which are hand-printed the date and the man’s name. Artungelar is dressed in a heavy, animal skin outer parka and is seated on a pile of furs. His gaze is difficult to read, but he seems to be looking out of the frame to his left. His awkward pose, with raised hood and arms thrust forward, gives him the appearance of an overstuffed, toy bear. This is not a portrait but a documentation of a specimen of an exotic other, a treatment that contrasts sharply with Moodie’s photographs. In Moodie’s image of She-Nuck-Shoo (Fig. 4.2), for example, the disposition of She-Nuck-Shoo’s figure within the frame, the consideration given to lighting and the carefully selected moment of exposure all demonstrate attention to process. For the viewer, this translates as respect, not just for process but also, by proxy, for subject. It therefore becomes easy to accept that She-Nuck-shoo’s presentation as a hunter and the decision to deflect his gaze slightly from the viewer’s could be as much his choice as the photographer’s. From her years operating commercial studios in the south, Moodie knew what all studio photographers know, that her success depended upon her producing an image of her sitters that corresponded with their understanding of themselves.

Another photograph that features subject labeling is Arctic Bells (sic) (Fig. 4.5). This image shows five, young, Inuk women lined up in the cave-like interior of a snow house, or igloo. All are wearing fur outer parkas. Internal evidence suggests that it was made at the same time as the photograph of Artungelar and, again, almost certainly by George Comer. In contrast to Moodie’s photographs, there is little evidence that the photographer has given much consideration to composition or lighting. As with the photograph of Artungelar (Fig. 4.4), the photographer has included a wooden plank on which is written

3 George Comer was the captain of the Era, an American whaling schooner that also over-wintered in Fullerton Harbour. See White (1998: 92).
a text, in this case identifying the sitters as “Arctic Bells,” thereby consigning them to the objectified role of specimens or collectibles.

Whether intended at the time of making or not, in the context of the final image the term “bell” becomes unavoidably ironic, as the photograph makes the women appear dirty and disheveled. Each being dressed in rough, animal skin outer parkas and having similar pigtailed hairstyles, there is little to distinguish between them. All five return the camera’s gaze directly. Only the woman in the middle stands out at all. Partially this is due to her central positioning, but also because of her longer, decoratively wrapped braids, a hairstyle indicating that she has borne a son.

The women sit on the edge of a hide-covered bench that runs along the wall. The two on the outer edges lean inward in response to what must have been the photographer’s direction. Above their heads are visible the outlines of snow blocks used to build the igloo. The snow blocks are darkened with soot from the burning blubber oil used by Inuit for

FIGURE 4.5
Photographer Unknown, Arctic Bells, Cape Fullerton, March 22, 1905, gelatin silver print, National Archives of Canada, C1155
both heat and light. On the left is a shelf covered in scraps of hides. A line has been strung on which mittens hang to dry. The photograph gives the whole a dirty, cave-like appearance that adds to the gritty atmosphere of the image.

When I checked the National Archive records for details of this image, I found that these women are identified only by their whaling names: Rosa, Hattie, Nellie, Cooper and Tidley Winks, confirming that some are the same individuals that appear in Geraldine Moodie’s portrait series discussed in the previous chapter. Unlike Moodie, the photographer in this case appears not to have recorded their Inuit names. The use of whaling names, such as “Tidley Winks,” is demeaning to these women.

Another photograph (Fig. 4.6), taken on the same expedition, also by an unidentified photographer, is even more problematic. It shows six Inuit women lined up in two rows against an unmarked, canvas backdrop. This strategy effectively diminishes the perception of these women as individuals, emphasizing instead their facial tattoos, animal-skin
clothing and beaded parkas. By presenting them as “spectacle,” the photograph forcefully highlights their “otherness” from Europeans. As Mary Russo points out in her essay “Female Grotesques: Carnival and Theory,” making a spectacle of a woman results in the loss of her boundaries (1986: 213). In this example, the boundary crossed is the women’s dignity. The women are pictured in such a way as to make their features appear monstrous, a direct contrast to the way in which they are portrayed in Moodie’s photograph discussed in the previous chapter. This technique of dominance and control is a common characteristic of the relationship between the camera and the colonial subject.

The type of tightly controlled lineup portrayed in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 made picture taking easier. It was especially difficult at the time to make spontaneous, candid photographs indoors without using flash powder, a notoriously tricky technique to master. Without it, lengthy poses were required to facilitate the long exposures demanded by the slow lenses and relatively insensitive films then available.

In Fig. 4.6, several of the women avoid looking into the camera, and those that do seem unsure about the situation in which they find themselves. In particular, the three women in the back row of the grouping seem especially uncomfortable. The photograph was made to show variations in facial tattooing and parka beadwork decoration among different Inuit tribes. This interest in facial tattoo photographs is confirmed by an entry in Captain Comer’s diary. On February 16, 1904, he wrote, “Today got several of the women to tattoo their faces with paint, as the tattooing on their faces will not take and show in a photograph” (cited in White 1998: 93). In this, Comer is describing an approach that is precisely the same as Edward Curtis’s: to manipulate the appearance of Aboriginal subjects so as to create more compelling images of an exotic other. The anonymously authored photograph shown in Fig. 4.6, however, goes well beyond this. The woman in front row on the left has moved during the exposure, which has caused her face to blur. The resulting exaggeration and distortion of her features makes her appear grotesque and turns the image into a construction of other as monstrous. It is possible, and given the obvious lack of sophistication on the part of the photographer indeed likely, that all of this was unintended. If true though, the question then must be why did the photographer choose not to discard a negative showing such a blatant technical flaw? Why was the image preserved? I speculate it might have been because this error produced a desired result: a look, a monstrous look that conformed in some way to the photographer’s perception.

In this regard too, I would also like to compare Geraldine Moodie’s approach to photography with that of her partner, John Douglas (J. D.) Moodie, who became the governor of the Hudsons Bay district in 1904. I shall examine two photographs made by John Moodie when he was stationed aboard the “Neptune” at Fullerton, NWT as part of the 1903 Albert P. Low Expedition. The Low Expedition was a government expedition that chartered a whaling ship to patrol northern waters of the Arctic to assert Canadian sovereignty (Burant 1998: 77). Made a year before Geraldine Moodie went north for the first time, these

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4 It is worth noting that unlike modern electronic flash techniques, flash powder could not guarantee instantaneous exposures or movement-free images, especially when the photographer was working alone. He or she would first have to have opened the shutter, thus initiating the exposure with available light, and then moved to ignite the flash, which itself could burn for at least 1/15 of a second while the shutter remained open. See Leggat (1995) www.leggat.com/photohistory/history/lighting.htm.

5 This particular photograph, in the National Archive of Canada, has no attached caption or record identifying the subjects. I was only able to identify the women in the front row after finding another image, made at the same time, that was captioned. Left to right the women are Pikey of the Neetchille tribe, Flattie of the Kenepetic tribe and Nellie of the Iwili tribe. An unknown photographer who was part of the Hudson Bay Expedition aboard CSS Arctic made the image at Cape Fullerton, NWT.

6 J. D. Moodie also photographed. There is sometimes confusion about which Moodie should be credited with an image.
photographs are exemplary of the kind of images made by southerners of Northern Inuit. J.D. Moodie was one of four members of the expedition who made photographs; the other three were George Caldwell, A.P. Low and Lorris Borden.  

J.D. Moodie’s photographs, titled Group of Eskimos and Crewmembers on board the “Neptune” at Fullerton, NWT, Christmas, 1903 (Figs. 4.7 & 4.8), show a mixture of Inuit and Christian cultural practices. The two photographs are taken from slightly different angles. They show a gathering of white and Inuit subjects during a Christmas Eve dance on board the Neptune. The light source must have come from a flash powder explosion. The resulting high contrast of washed out highlights and dark shadows gives the images a dramatic, theatrical appearance. The frame is crowded with people in Western and Inuit style dress that have gathered around two, tall, masked central figures. These figures appear to represent a cultural hybrid — a blend of Inuit shaman and the Christian icons of Mary and Joseph. The figure on the right holds a small, hide-covered bundle that appears to stand in for the baby Jesus. She wears a light-coloured skirt and a fur cape. A mask covers her face. On her head she wears a flat hat that features two, large, fluffy horns that might be white feathers. The male figure beside her fulfills the role of Joseph. The long beard attached to his mask is also reminiscent of Father Christmas.

At first glance, the most obvious difference between Geraldine’s photos and J.D. ’s is that hers are skillfully made in a studio style. The two images described above are typical of what today would be considered snapshots, that is, casually made, personally meaningful images of occurrences such as birthdays, special events and holidays. But John Moodie made these images well before the era of point-and-shoot photography. Their creation would have required substantial preparation and an extended period of subject cooperation. While unlike Geraldine’s photographs, the documented event was not solely photographically purposed, the associated picture-making ritual would have differed little. The fact remains, however, that the motivation behind their creation was clearly that of the snapshooter. As such, these images hold special interest. One of their most distinctive features is that the subjects are both Inuk and Euro-Canadian. Further,

These include the celebrated American photographer, Gertrude Kasebier (1852-1934), Harriet Smith Pullen (active 1906), Mithilda Cox Stevenson (active 1879), Alice Fletcher assisted by E. Jane Gay (active 1903), Katherine T. Dodge (active c. 1900), Mary Schaffer Warren (1861-1939), Kate Thompson Cory (active 1905-1912), Mamie and Emma Gerhard (active c. 1900), Grace Nicholson (active 1906-14) and Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952). See Sandler, (2001) and Bernardin et al. (2003) for a discussion of women photographers who photographed Native Americans.

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FIGURE 4.8 John D. Moodie, Group of Eskimos and Crewmembers on board the "Neptune" at Fullerton, NWT, Christmas 1903 (another version), gelatin silver print, Royal Canadian Mounted Police Collection, National Archives of Canada, CR1820
the leading portraitist of the day (Michaels 1992: 11). Art historian Naomi Rosenblum notes that Kasebier is “without question that most renowned of American women portraitists” (1994: 77). Although known primarily for her images depicting motherhood (see Fig. 2.5), early in her career, Kasebier produced a number of important, yet relatively unknown, portraits of Native people. These photographs were all made between 1892 and 1912 when Kasebier invited a number of members of the Sioux Nation to pose for portraits in her studio. These individuals were performers in a sort of early, travelling theme park called Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show that had been created by an ex-army scout, buffalo hunter and frontiersman named William Cody. Unlike the male shadowcatchers and Moodie, Kasebier never went into the field, choosing instead to host and photograph indigenous subjects at her studio.

Kasebier maintained a lifelong fascination with Native people. As a child growing up in a small, Colorado town, the majority of her playmates had been Native children. Speaking of what she sought in an aboriginal subject, Kasebier made clear her own views of Native people, “I want a real, raw Indian for a change...” she said, “…The kind I used to see when I was a child” (Michaels 1992: 30).

This she found in Chief Iron Tail, whom she depicted as a regal yet “wild Indian” (Fig. 4.9). This was the kind of image that not only the public wanted, but also what Iron Tail himself preferred (31). The photograph shows him in profile, a pose that emphasizes his prominent, angled bone structure. He is depicted as a symbol of what white society considered the noble savage. The chief’s headdress that Iron Tail wears is a featured part of the composition and one of the key props worn in his role as a “show Indian” in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West troupe.¹² Kasebier used this prop, as did Iron Tail, as a sign of the construction of Native American identity that was easily accessible to white culture. It is, as Bal says, part of the “index of colonial imagination” (Bal 1996: 222).

¹² See Verhoeff (2002: 300-304) for an excellent analysis of Buffalo Bill’s shows and their double performances — the show and the films in the show.

Media theorist Nanna Verhoeff points out that films about Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show were made in response to a “Myth of the Wild West” that emerged just at the time that the “real” Wild West was disappearing (2002: 140). Like these films and, indeed, the
show itself, Kasebier’s portraits of Aboriginal people hired to act as “real Indians” are a reflection of this nostalgic “re-staging” of the not-so-distant past. Verhoeff writes, “The recent past was thus embalmed, made ready to become an object of desire — of instant nostalgia” (141). I argue that Kasebier’s photographs of Chief Iron Tail and his colleagues from the Wild West Show were a consequence of this same desire.

Michaels also considers the idea of duality. She contends that in her images of Aboriginals, Kasebier had “two concurrent, if conflicting aims”: to capture the archetypical Indian and, at the same time, to reveal the individual personality (1992: 30). For example, Kasebier made a series of striking photographs of a young Sioux woman, Zitkala-Sa (Red Bird), also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin.13 Zitkala-Sa was a talented writer and musician and an early activist for Native rights. Kasebier’s photographs reveal the cultural duality present in this young woman’s life. Two of the nine portraits show Zitkala-Sa in Sioux costume (Fig 4.10), while in the other seven “there is nothing recognizably Indian about her” (43). In the latter, Zitkala-Sa wears Euro-American dress. Tagg argues that “the portrait is ... a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of a social identity” (1993: 37 [1998]). Thus Zitkala-Sa’s social identity is flexible and varies with which of Kasebier’s portraits of her is being analyzed. A similar duality can be seen in Moodie’s portraits of Inuit women (Fig. 2.11 & 2.12) that were analyzed in the Chapter two. The idea of photographing the subject wearing both Indigenous and Euro-American dress had become common practice in the photographic representation of Aboriginal people.

This contrasts sharply with the work of Joseph Keiley, a photographer who also made portraits of Zitkala-Sa. Keiley gave his images allegorical or general titles, such as The Indian Madonna, in order to make the image more readable to a white audience (Michaels 1992: 44). Some even showed Zitkala-Sa in Chinese dress, revealing Keiley’s view of her as an exotic other “to be costumed at will” (44). Most of Keiley’s images follow the formula of his 1898 Zitkala-Sa portrait and include only head and shoulders. The subjects are passive, romantic figures that float in a dreamy, soft-focus haze. Zitkala’s becomes no more than a decorative object, her gaze passively lowered so as not to contest or even engage

13 See Zitkala-Sa and Hafen (2001) for a collection of the writings and biographical background of Zitkala-Sa.
the viewer. This type of image is typical of the Pictorial movement discussed in earlier chapters, one of the primary aims of which was to give aesthetic pleasure.

In contrast, Kasebier’s portraits present a more active young woman. For example, in *Zitkala-SA*, made, like Keiley’s photograph, in 1898 (Fig. 4.10), Kaesbier poses her subject in profile with her hand shading her eyes. Michael’s describes the gesture “as more than a conventional Indian pose, but an expression of yearning for the West, a sentiment with which Kasebier empathized” (43). It is unusual to see portraits of Indigenous people made in profile during this period. Kasebier, however, used this pose when photographing both Zitkala-SA and Chief Iron Tail. As noted in Chapter Two, at the end of the nineteenth century the profile was still a preferred pose in portrait photography, denoting for contemporary audiences that the sitter was someone of gentility and breeding. Speaking of the portraiture of that era, Tagg observes that being photographed frontally “signified the bluntness and ‘naturalness’ of a culturally unsophisticated class” (1993:36 [1988]). As a professional photographer, Kasebier must have been aware of this convention and thus her employment of it to assign “civilized” status to Zitkala-SA, a.k.a. Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, cannot have been accidental. This pose also distances her from the spectator’s gaze while her own gaze, directed out of the frame, implies that she is “forward looking, future-oriented and determined” (Tagg 1993:36 [1988]). As Michaels has suggested, however, the messages conveyed by this image are nothing if not ambiguous. Zitkala-SA’s gesture, costume and long, unraveled hairstyle clearly sign her as a “savage,” exotic other and make less than flattering implications about her character. During this period loose hair was often associated with a wild, and therefore supposedly sexually available or “loose,” woman. In another portrait, similarly titled *Zitkala-SA*, 1898 (Fig 4.11), Kasebier presents her subject as a talented, young violinist. In this one though, there is no reference to Zitkala-SA’s aboriginal heritage.

This use of photography to mark the intersection of two cultures, the colonizer and the colonized, is common in visual anthropology. An example is a photograph of two Yukahir women (Fig. 4.12) made by Russian anthropologist Dina Jochelson Brodskaya in 1897. Jochelson Brodskaya was part of the Jesup North Pacific Expedition (1897-1902) that
produced more than 3,000 photographs of peoples of the northwest coast of Canada and the northeastern coast of Siberia. It was organized by Franz Boas, then a young curatorial assistant in the Anthropology Department of the American Museum of Natural History. The purpose of the expedition was to investigate the origin of American Indians (Freed 1997: 9). Jochelson Brodskaya undertook all of the anthropometric and medical work and also made many of the photographs. Most of her images were documents of "physical types," made in accordance with what are now considered guidelines for Visual Anthropology:

Subjects were shown from various angles — usually front, side-profile, and three quarter views in order to illustrate facial and bodily features found in the tribal populations at large (Miller and Mathe 1997: 20)

Jochelson Brodskaya made the photograph of the two Yukaghir women as part of the
research for her doctoral dissertation on the comparative anatomy of native women for the University of Zurich. She and another woman, Sofia Bogras, were allowed to join their partners on the expedition provided that they worked without salary and allowed their scientific work to become part of the expedition results (Kendall 1997: 67).

The photograph shows two young women looking directly into the camera. The woman on the right appears if not unhappy, then certainly uncomfortable. Her eyebrows are lifted and she leans into the frame. Both women are dressed in a combination of traditional and European dress, showing evidence of cultural fusion. This can be clearly seen in the two rows of metal buttons that decorate the jacket of the woman on the right. In keeping with the anthropological intent, the photographer has selected a neutral background so as not to distract attention from the women subjects. The image is typical of ethnographic photography of the period. It is noteworthy only because the anthropologist who made it was a woman, women anthropologists being a rarity at the time. While, as might be expected, the image concentrates less on relationship and more on facial structure and general physical appearance than is the case in any of Geraldine Moodie’s portraits, in both, the effect of the plain background is the same: to focus a viewer’s full attention upon the subject.

So far I have compared the work of Geraldine Moodie to two other women photographers, a studio portrait photographer and an anthropologist. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Moodie’s photographs of Inuit encompass elements of both the traditional studio portrait and ethnography. Much of the power of her imagery derives from this combination of styles and approaches. They are examples of what anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards refers to as metaphors of power in which “ideas of both [the] scientific and the aesthetic operate simultaneously, the nuances of meaning shifting to the contexts in which the photographs ‘performed’” (cited in Bernard 2003: 7). Now I will turn to the present and compare Moodie’s work to my own and consider the concept of collaborative practice as it relates to portrait photography.

JEFF THOMAS AND ME

In 1998 I attended a conference in Amsterdam where I presented a paper about the relationship between art practice and theory. I spoke as a photographer who made images drawing on and, in turn, informing theory, specifically referencing a body of my own work produced in the preceding year. The intentional framework for the project had been informed by the writings of Kaja Silverman (1996) in which she deals with a theoretical and cultural analysis of love. Silverman argues that we cannot idealize someone without identifying with him or her. This idealization is what she calls the “psychic activity at the heart of love” (2). My response comprised several series of large, photographic, colour portraits, the subject of which was the relationship between an individual and the people or objects that they love. In making the photographs I sought to investigate the
possibility of producing a visual equivalency for the link that Silverman makes between idealization, identity and the emotional state of “love,” an active response that she calls “the gift of love.” I presented the resulting images as a series of triptychs in which each of the relational subjects first presents themselves individually to the camera and then appears together in a separate frame with a person or object that they love. The portraits were undertaken as a collaborative process between the subjects and me, as far as possible, my own contribution being limited to establishing a common setting and operating the camera at the moment of mutually determined exposure. Whatever my subjects idealized and/or chose to bring to this process might or might not change their presentation of self. I posed or manipulated the sitters to a minimum degree. The viewer is challenged to respond to the image with a semiotic reading of the signs that relate the emotional bonds of the depicted relationship."

As mentioned, I view the making of portraits as a collaborative undertaking, a sharing of choices. As the photographer, some of those choices inevitably were mine. For example, I selected the camera, its placement and distance relationship to the subject. I also determined that the location would be my greenhouse studio, as I wanted to provide a luxuriant, “Garden of Eden” background that would provide the subject with a relaxing, yet theatrical environment in which to present themselves. It also provided a fantasy setting for their imagination. I wished to make the experience of being within the photographic frame a pleasure. The subject was free to choose their mode of dress, the person or object of their love, the form and, together with the photographer, the moment of recording their presentation of self. Following processing of the film, I chose a glossy-surfaced Ilfochrome as a presentation medium for the final prints. The mirror-like surface of this material, its brilliant purity of colour and crisp rendition of detail all serve to enhance the impact of the images, making them sensuous and visually tactile. My paper analyzed a selection of the resulting photographs and examined how they functioned as self-aware spectacle in the construction of a personal narrative about identity. The presentation included slides of examples from the project.

I also took to Amsterdam one actual piece, a triptych of independently framed 16” x 20” prints. Choosing which work to take was difficult, but as it was awkward and expensive for me to take more than one piece on the long journey from Canada, a decision had to be made. My choice and its associated rationale links my photographic practice to Geraldine Moodie’s. After much deliberation, the piece I selected was a triptych entitled The Father and Son Triptych, 1988 (Fig 4.13). It is a portrait assemblage of the photographer and curator Jeff Thomas and his son, Bear. Jeff and Bear are Aboriginal Canadian or, as they prefer to self-identify, Urban Iroquoian.

In her book The Threshold of the Visible World, cultural theorist Kaja Silverman discusses how we feel photographically “framed” when a social gaze is upon us. The converse is also true. Silverman argues that when a camera is “trained on us we feel ourselves
subjectively constituted, as if the resulting photograph could somehow determine “‘who we are” (1996: 135). *The Father and Son Triptych, 1988* (Fig 4.13), is more low key and less performative than other pieces that I made in this series. At first glance it is no more than a set of three photographs featuring two men. The first two images show each individually and the third, the two of them together. Closer examination reveals both men to be Aboriginal. Each presents himself directly to the camera. They exhibit a striking physical similarity and as their age difference appears to be no more than 20 years, they could easily be mistaken for brothers. In the image in which he is the sole subject, the father, Jeff, seems to be far less comfortable confronting the camera than does his son, Bear. Bear presents himself as being less concerned about revealing himself than does his father, who is clearly more guarded in respect to the camera.

In her book, Silverman quotes the commentator in the art film, Bilder: “When one looks into the face of an intimate one also brings in something of a shared past. The photograph captures the moment and thus crops away the past and future” (157). The third photograph of the series reveals just such a shared moment. Bear’s openness visibly affects his father, who is obviously more relaxed than in the image in which he appears alone. Jeff’s guard, so apparent in the first photograph, drops away and, through his pleasure in his son, he reveals himself. The image shows a strong bond between a father and son,
who acknowledge each other with what the American theorist Marianne Hirsch calls the “familial gaze.” The subjects’ gaze interlocks as they consider each other within the context of family. This is a record of an “active gift of love” (Silverman 1996).

From this series I concluded that the most apparent changes of presentation of self occurred in those sequences documenting a parent and child relationship, such as the triptych of Jeff and his son. Parents visibly softened and showed pleasure when interacting with their children. However, the changes were dependant on how open the participants were to collaborating in the process of making the portraits. Jeff made the transition from questioning to accepting — a transition facilitated by the emotional bond with his son, Bear.

I have said that in this work I recognize a link between Geraldine Moodie and me, but have come to realize that this linkage goes well beyond the simple act of making portrait studies of Aboriginal people. The experience has caused me to reflect at length on what motivated me to present the series of Jeff Thomas and his son in Amsterdam rather than any other, how in turn, that choice relates to the choices made by Moodie in her representation of Aboriginal people, and the degree to which underlying perceptions of otherness have really changed over the years between her time and mine. In the moment, I believed I had selected the images of Jeff and Bear because I saw them as revealing a close father and son bond and because, in my view, they successfully addressed the theoretical
framework that I had established. This was certainly true, but subsequently I have had to ask myself to what extent did I also choose this series because the subject was Aboriginal and I was going to Europe where I believed that, even more than in North America, there remains a tendency to view Native people as "exotic other." Could I have overlooked the possibility that I was more likely to advance my career by showing these, rather than other photographs?

These questions were further amplified after my return to Canada where Father and Son Triptych was purchased by the Regional Government of Ottawa-Carleton for its art collection. Jeff Thomas is a well-known, Ottawa-based curator and often attracts media attention for issues related to Aboriginal representation in art. Did the prints sell because of their inherent quality as art or because the subject was a well-known, local cultural worker who happened also to be Aboriginal? Even if inadvertently, was I not receiving advantage from the currency of Aboriginal identity? If so, what then, if anything, differentiated my practice from that of Moodie, Curtis and all of the other shadowcatchers of history? Was I not deserving of the same criticism as they? Reflecting on these questions has made me reconsider my own photographic practice. It has also shed a different light on the images of Moodie and her fellow shadowcatchers for, in a way, had I not joined them myself?

While I gave more control of the presentation of self to my subjects than did Moodie, my portraits are still the work of a shadowcatcher. At the end of the nineteenth century for example, a shadowcatcher photographing a parent and child would commonly have had the parent dress in traditional attire while outfitting the child as a "white" (Bernardin 2003: 7). This was done to indicate the progressive assimilation or the "civilizing" of Aboriginal people. While I did not ask my subjects to pose in traditional aboriginal dress, clothing does play a role in my images. In the triptych of Jeff and his son, both men are casually dressed in a fashion that to those recognizing their Aboriginal heritage would be seen as typical of the so-called "Urban Indian." This is especially true of Bear, who advertises his globalized awareness by sporting a crocheted beret stereotypically associated with the Jamaican Rastafarian community. On the one hand, this demonstrates his "hipness," while at the same time, it is both an expression of solidarity with another traditionally oppressed, non-white minority and a statement of resistance.

Like Moodie's, my photographs exist at a cultural intersection. Ostensibly made for one reason, in the case of mine, to investigate the "active gift of love" between father and son, like Moodie's, in the final analysis they too reveal far more than their purported purpose.

But there are differences that indicate changes in shadowcatching have occurred. I may be a shadowcatcher but, far more than my predecessors, I am a self-conscious one. Unlike Curtis, my photographing of Jeff Thomas and his son was not an attempt to document examples of a vanishing race. I made no attempt to idealize or stereotype. Unlike

17 See McMaster's (2000) for further details on the work of Jeff Thomas. See also Thomas (2004) for a recent exhibition catalogue of Thomas' photography.
the expedition photographers, I do not use the camera to collect people as anthropological specimens. As far as is possible for a photographer, I try not to exert or convey dominance and control. While Jeff may be uncomfortable before the camera, it is not the discomfort of fear or ignorance, but rather the discomfort of someone deeply aware of how vulnerable the photographic subject can be to the assumptions of a viewer. As a photographer himself, he knows better than most that identity is more readily secured behind the camera than in front of it. The relationship between photographer and subject is founded in mutual trust, not the colonial power differential of dominance and submission. Photographs made by the shadowcatchers of the past were seldom if ever, seen by their subjects (10). Thomas has substantially more control over the use of his “shadow” than his ancestors would have had sitting before Curtis or Moodie. It must be stated, however, that he has this control only to the degree that I choose to share it with him.

**MOODIE’S SHADOW**

**Although best known for her portrait work,** Moodie also made photographs of Inuk engaged in traditional activities, both aboard the ship the *Arctic* and on the land. She is also credited with a number of images featuring only the landscape, although with these it is often difficult to differentiate between her work and that of her partner, J.D. Moodie (White 1998:105).

In a curious way, Moodie’s landscapes are reminiscent of the work of the nineteenth-century American artist Frederic Edwin Church. Church’s large paintings featuring Arctic subjects exemplify the classic luminist canon. Works such as *The Iceberg*, 1891 (Fig 4.14), became popular symbols of Euro-American struggles for sovereignty and survival in the Arctic. The iceberg towering majestically in the brilliant, northern light symbolized the beauty and danger that awaited the northern explorer. This was a recurring theme in Church’s work. In another of his paintings, *Aurora Borealis* 1865 (Fig 4.15), he replaces the iceberg with a spectacular display of northern lights. Again, the intent is to show the vastness of the Arctic landscape and to represent it as a site of overwhelming, heroic grandeur. In this and indeed all of his paintings, Church strove to conjure the feeling of awe known as the *sublime*, a term that gained philosophical and aesthetic currency during the Enlightenment and generally referred to an experience that was beyond human

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18 I discussed exhibiting this portrait series with Jeff Thomas before doing so and gave him a copy as a wedding gift in 2004.

19 I am grateful to Mieke Bal who, in my first conversation with her at Carleton University in Ottawa in 1995, suggested the relationship between Moodie and Church.

20 See Wilmersing (1980).
comprehension (Preziosi 1998: 582). In both paintings Church uses a small sailing ship to represent an almost insignificant humankind dwarfed by a natural world of awesome scale.

Moodie’s photograph of the Steamer “Arctic” in the ice at Fullerton Harbour (Fig 4.16) seems at first glance to be a similar, if rather less grandiose, attempt to portray the same kind of relationship between humanity and nature. The photograph shows the vessel Arctic trapped in ice, dwarfed by surrounding snow banks. Like Church’s paintings, Moodie’s photograph certainly suggests that the most dominant power in the North is nature; however, being a photograph rather than a painting, in the latter case, the metaphor points to a colonizing hegemony rather than humanity’s confrontation with the natural world. Unlike today, at that time a photograph still had currency as incontrovertible evidence that the expedition had conquered the difficulties of Northern navigation and had indeed arrived at its destination. More interesting though is the photograph’s notably different way of expressing the world. When seen in conjunction with the painting, the photographic rendition of scale demonstrates emphatically just how unbelievable the latter is. The effect is very much to diminish the painting’s power, for comparison makes clear the degree to which the painting is an overblown, imaginative statement, a fantasy that, like a dream, loses its power when we open our eyes. Thus while undeniably less dramatic than Church’s painting, the photograph’s more realistic and therefore more believable representation of nature’s power is ultimately more effective.

Since beginning my research on Moodie, there is one landscape image in particular that has captured my attention: a photograph in the National Archives of Canada, captioned simply “Eskimo Konacka with dog and sleigh, 1906” (Fig. 4.17). It shows a snow-covered landscape backed by distant mountains. In the middle ground are a sled, a number of resting dogs and a person wearing a traditional Inuit parka. What distinguishes this image and raises it beyond the ordinary, though, is a foreground shadow that clearly depicts a large format camera on a tripod and a figure standing beside it. The photograph was made at the same time that Moodie was in the North and although un-attributed, on the basis of internal evidence, I am prepared to argue that she is its creator.

First, the image is structured and balanced. There is an awareness of the frame suggesting the eye of an experienced picture-maker, a quality completely absent from the work of any other member of the Hudson Bay Expedition. Further, there is the decision-making.
From the image, it is fully apparent from the positioning of the camera that the choice of viewpoint was purposeful, not accidental. By setting the camera a few metres to the right or the left, it would have been perfectly feasible to avoid having the photographer’s shadow appear in the frame and yet still include all of the same information. The speed and casualness of photographing with modern, hand-held cameras, particularly in the hands of amateurs, often leads to oversights, such as the inadvertent inclusion of a wayward finger or an unwanted shadow. The demands of working from a tripod and photographing with the kind of heavy, cumbersome, plate camera clearly shown in this photograph, however, make such mistakes almost impossible. Whatever its pictorial merits, what is seen in this photograph is no more nor less than what the photographer wanted to show.

The idea of framing a space and marking it by tracing it in silver has in some way been what every photographer has done since the Englishman Henry Fox Talbot in his *Pencil of Nature*, described as drawing with light. By allowing herself into the frame in this way
the photographer, and I firmly believe it to have been Moodie, becomes the self-aware spectacle, simultaneously Kaja Silverman’s voyeur, captured at the keyhole, and Mieke Bal’s focalizer, pointing out to us where to look. By recording her shadow on the Arctic landscape, Moodie marks the territory as hers. The shadowcatcher captures herself as she captures the land and its inhabitants.

In this chapter I have positioned Geraldine Moodie as a professional woman photographer whose images both reflect a dominating, colonial, hegemonic ideology and, more benignly, also seem to present an alternative, more realistic view of an Indigenous people. I have compared her work and methodology to those of the male shadowcatcher
Edward Curtis; other, mostly anonymous, male photographers of her time; to Gertrude Kasebier, an American woman and to myself, a present-day shadowcatcher. Moodie and other shadowcatchers of her era highlighted difference to create an other. More than their purported subjects, what the photographs show is their makers at Silverman’s keyhole looking in upon the world of the exotic other. In recording what they see in the photographic frame, these photographers hope to define themselves by what they are not. As such, and no matter what else they offer, at base their photographs “evidence ... the objectionable, colonizing, meaning production, of the colonial” (Bal 1996: 209). In most cases, their photographs were intended simultaneously to document the subaltern and captivate the white society to which they were marketed.

Like all photographs, Moodie’s images are symbols as much as they are souvenirs. In framing an experience, event or person the photographer always imposes control and can choose the degree of that control. It would be naive to say that because Moodie made sympathetic images of her Aboriginal subjects, she was not guilty of using her camera as a tool of photo-colonialism. And like those sitting in Plato’s cave, we, viewing them today, would be in error if we took her photographic shadows to be true representations of reality. They are simulacra of Native peoples before the camera; fundamentally, no more nor less than pictures of people having their pictures taken.