BEYOND THE SMILE

The therapeutic use of the photograph

Linda Berman

Beyond the smile

Photographs may be used as an adjunct to many kinds of therapy; in her own practice Linda Berman found that patients often brought photographs of their own accord. This encouraged her to think about what lay behind the photographs in the family album, and how they could best be used to help her patients. *Beyond the Smile* is the record of her personal journey, an exploration of the meanings of photographs and an examination of the ways in which photographs can enhance the effectiveness of a psychotherapy session.

The book focuses on the relationship between the photograph and the self and stresses the need for the therapist to understand his or her own personal images before approaching those of others. Individual case studies, with appropriate illustrations, show how photographs can highlight the themes within the patient's internal and external worlds, stimulating new awareness of interactional patterns and illuminating in a very personal way how the past influences the present. Linda Berman shows how photographs can be incorporated successfully into many therapeutic styles and settings and demonstrates how therapists may use their own personal photographs to further self-development.

Beyond the Smile will be of great value to students and professionals in pyschotherapy, psychology and counselling, and to all those interested in the hidden messages behind the photographic image.

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Beyond the smile: the therapeutic use of the photograph

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Preface

During my work as a therapist, many patients have brought to me photographs of parents, spouses, siblings, children. Often, having responded with interest, I felt uncertain about using them therapeutically and would be left with a sense of missed opportunity. Gradually, however, I began to explore ways in which the photographs could be utilised in the session and my interest in them began to grow and 'develop' within my own clinical practice.

My research widened out considerably as I contemplated writing this book, leading me into new and exciting areas. Each new discovery, each step, led me further into the fascinating and complex and uncertain world of photographs as therapy.

I feel privileged to have been allowed into several people's personal worlds through sharing their photographs. I have 'met' their relatives and friends and 'watched' them through the growing up process. I have shared the intense pain and joy as repressed memories cascade through time into consciousness, and I have witnessed the subsequent dawning of new insight.

My desire to produce this book was born out of a wish to communicate how intrinsically *useful* photographs are, not only in therapy, but also in our lives generally. My material comes from both inside and outside the psychotherapy situation, reflecting the fact that photographs are also meaningful in our everyday lives. It is, however, important to diffentiate at the outset between the use of photographs in our lives generally, perhaps for purposes of memory and nostalgia, and their use in therapy. Whilst the former may provide us with a therapeutic experience, it is not therapy; photographic exploration within the accepting yet analytical atmosphere of the therapy session is a very different experience. The patient is frequently surprised when photographs that have been perused many times at home suddenly take on a whole new meaning in therapy.

While the main focus of the book is on the use of photographs in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, I hope that it will also be of interest to therapists of all disciplines and approaches and to anyone who is curious

about how to look at photographs with an eye to their psychological meaning.

Much has been written about photographs, but there is relatively little about their use in therapy, especially in Britain. There are certainly therapists of all kinds using photographs to help their patients, but photo-therapy,[1] as it is sometimes called, is a fairly new medium, needing systematic exploration in order to understand in what ways – and in what settings – photographs can help people.

In the first chapter, I explore the many meanings and implications behind photographs and how they are used by us all in our lives in different contexts. It is very simple to take a quick snapshot, but the complexities within the developed picture may be reflected on and pondered over for generations to come.

Chapter 2 illustrates some of the paradoxes and contradictions that are inherent in photographs. These stilled images can function as powerful reflectors of the ambivalence, confusion and inconsistencies that patients bring to therapy. They serve to highlight many of the themes within the patients's internal and external world. The exploration of this ambivalence often leads to some acceptance, resolution of inner conflict, and the self-understanding that so many of us seek.

Photographs can also be successfully incorporated into many different therapeutic styles and techniques. In Chapter 3, I shall give an overview of the various methods of photo-therapy, so that interested readers may make their own choice. Some therapists encourage a more active form of photo-therapy, with the patient engaged in the actual taking and making of the pictures. I have no formal photographic skills myself, and I am more interested in the meaning of the photograph than the process of taking it. I shall, therefore, mainly concentrate on the use of the patient's ready-made images in therapy.

I proceed further in Chapter 3 to an examination of some of the theories behind the use of photographs in therapy, showing how photographs may fit into the various therapeutic processes. The more detailed clinical material in the following chapter will illustrate some of these theoretical principles, providing an in-depth example of the use of photographs in therapy.

There follows, in Chapter 5, an exploration of the family album in a way that is intended to increase the therapist's skills in 'reading' photographs, in deciphering their secret language. There is also photographic illustration of how past experience influences present relationships. The theme is continued into the next chapter, which reveals how the family album can permit a new awareness of interactional patterns.

Chapter 7 describes the various groups of people who may gain from the therapeutic use of photographs, and explores how photographs can be adapted to different therapeutic styles and approaches.

Finally, Chapter 8 focuses on the relation between the photograph and the self, and the importance of the therapist's understanding of her own personal images. The purpose of this is to increase the therapist's self-knowledge and awareness through photographs, so that she can help others to do the same.

Some of the photographs in this book are posed by models, in order to protect the confidentiality of patients and their families. The reader will no doubt detect many anachronisms. In recreating the photographs, I have aimed for psychological accuracy in terms of feelings, atmosphere, expression and mood. I have not attempted to achieve historical correctness in relation to setting and dress.

My intention is to help readers of this book to look at photographs with a new and creative attitude, so that they will begin to see their therapeutic potential. So often, the manner in which we receive a photograph matches and reflects the shallow endeavour of the photographer. We, too, have a superficial approach as we peruse the countless 'happy' photographs of people responding to the mindless injunctions: 'Smile please. Say cheese. . . .' There is no conscious awareness of what the smiles might conceal.

Perhaps as you, the reader, leaf through this book, you will feel inspired to search out your own photographic memories. By maintaining an attitude of creativity, curiosity and openness, you may begin to discover what lies beyond the smile.

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Without the assistance of photographer Yoka Jeffrey-Moeton, I should not have been able to recreate patients' photographs with such authentic realism. I am indebted to her for giving me so much of her time and for her most skilful contributions to this book. She has used her considerable abilities to copy the original photographs as far as possible, even when, in doing so, she was going against her own creative grain. Yoka is a professional photographer working near Manchester. She may be contacted at: Yoka Photography, 551, London Road, Stretton, Near Warrington, WA4 5PH.

Many of my friends and relatives have been invaluable as models, patiently posing, adopting difficult expressions; I do appreciate their considerable efforts on my behalf.

I am particularly grateful to Gloria Wade, Lisa Herzog and Janice Costa, all of whom have very considerably influenced my work with people who have been sexually abused.

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Chapter 1

Photographs in everyday life

'One for the Album'

Who will recall
That the red dog had fleas this summer
And stank of the barn?
That one child broke his brother's nose
In August
And the farm roof leaked?
Those apples on the ground
Hummed full of bees
And smelled of rot.
The camera never lies.
It earmarks truth more ruthlessly than brush
Making us climb forever there
Over the white fence
Under the apple tree
Into the sunlit field.

(Margaret Newlin, *Day of Sirens*)

Why do we like looking at photographs? Why do we often take such care with them, storing them and cherishing them, like treasures?

Before we take a more detailed look at the therapeutic use of photographs, it is necessary to understand their wider significance in our lives. Therapy is set against the backdrop of the world; it is important, therefore, to appreciate the wide range of cultural, social and popular attitudes to the camera and photographs and to consider the uses that we make of these in our day-to-day living. Therapists must develop and foster within themselves a keen awareness of these wider issues before beginning to contemplate the use of photographs in therapy. For photographs are not brought into therapy out of a void; they are taken out of life, and as such carry with them a whole set of issues and implications.

Let us take the time, therefore, to consider these broader themes in relation to photographs, thinking around them and beyond them. For it

appears that, despite much careful preservation, the images on the whole tend to be viewed quite superficially, without thought for their deeper significance and meaning. With more profound examination, the pictures pose a multitude of questions.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Importance and appeal

The *Sun* newspaper once asked its readers: 'What would you grab first if the fire alarm went off?' One woman replied:

> After the family were safe, I'd grab my photographs.
> I can replace possessions, but not a lifetime of memories.

The appeal of the photograph is not restricted to any social class; its attraction is universal. The royal family obviously treasures its photographs as much as any family would. These, however, have an additional function; they simultaneously document the history of a family and that of a nation's monarchy.

Photographs perform useful practical functions in countless areas of life. They have for example, become an indispensable asset to the police, as identification, evidence and proof. They record events in newspapers and books, illustrating historical facts and giving information. They allow us to see the famous – and the infamous – at close quarters, giving pleasure to countless teenagers in the form of 'pop' posters – and bringing their heart-throbs right into the bedroom.

The fact that photographs 'have become an integral part of our lives' is confirmed by the results of a survey on photography conducted in June 1990 by a large photographic company. This nationwide survey revealed that:

> We use photos to record those special moments and to underline our personal values.
> 96% of adults in the country love to keep photographs which capture their happy memories.
> Eight out of ten of us hate to throw photographs away and almost half of us put them in albums.
> There is a camera in 80% of British households.[1]

Thanks to the camera, it is relatively easy to express aspects of ourselves in pictures and to visually record selected features of our lives. The facility of photography is available to us all. Daguerre himself, who invented the first practicable photographic process in 1838, emphasised this point:

> By this process, without any idea of drawing, without any knowledge of chemistry and physics, it will be possible to take in a few minutes the most detailed views, the most picturesque scenery, for the manipulation

> is simple and does not demand any special knowledge, only care and a little practice is needed to succeed perfectly. . . . This important discovery, capable of innumerable applications, will not only be of great interest to science, but it will also give a new impulse to the arts, and far from damaging those who practise them, it will prove a great boon to them. The leisured class will find it a most attractive occupation, and although the result is obtained by chemical means, the little work it entails will greatly please ladies.
>
> (Trachtenberg 1980: 12–13)

Having been able to take a picture with such ease, we most often look forward to seeing the results of our photographic efforts. When photographs are collected from the processors, many people feel a sense of excitement at the prospect of seeing themselves, their families and friends, through the camera's eye.

The inhibited among us may wait for a private moment for perusal and possible censorship. The young and more open element often find it hard to keep the newly developed photographs in their envelope until they arrive home; they are excitedly opened on the spot.

For, in general, children love photographs. This love appears to relate to the delight in seeing themselves reflected. Catching a surprise glimpse of themselves in a mirror, a puddle – or a snapshot – is sure to produce squeals of joy. Children have a fascination with their own image, gazing enquiringly. They are also enthralled at the recognition of other family members on film. The reflection is confirming – of themselves and their identity. For children, the image can be a sign of the security of their place within the family and their world. From very early in life, this need to have oneself reflected is crucial to the development of the self:

> Every child has a legitimate narcissistic need to be noticed, understood, taken seriously, and respected by his mother. In the first weeks and months of life he needs to have his mother at his disposal, must be able to use her and be mirrored by her. This is beautifully illustrated in one of Winnicott's images; the mother gazes at the baby in her arms, and the baby gazes at his mother's face and finds himself therein . . . provided that the mother is really looking at the unique, small, helpless being and not projecting her own introjects on to the child, nor her own expectations, fears and plans for the child. In that case, the child would not find himself in his mother's face but rather the mother's own predicaments. This child would remain without a mirror, and for the rest of his life would be seeking a mirror in vain.
>
> (Miller 1987: 49)

Children need to be recognised as the unique and interesting small human beings that they are; *not* to be seen, to be ignored, or 'looked right through' is a most distressing experience for children and adults alike.

Reflected in the eyes of another, children can learn about themselves and their own identity. Thus, the sharing and recognition of their photographic image provides an exciting added bonus for children in the quest for identity and recognition; it validates them and their individuality, confirming both their separateness in the world and their relatedness to others. To be seen and admired in a photograph gives children a strengthening experience as they communicate the message 'This is me.'

The photograph provides us all, young and old, with an extra way of seeing and being seen; it helps us get ourselves noticed. As we select our photographs, we often show ourselves in the ways that we want to be seen, ways that match our desired internal image of ourselves. In showing the photograph, sharing it with others, we tend to watch their faces as they react to our image, checking out our impact on the other people, seeking their reflected acknowledgement and appreciation.

The effective therapist will be aware of this universal human need to have the self reflected, and will ensure that she helps the patient to have an experience in therapy of being heard, seen and understood in the eyes of the other.

Issues of control and rebellion

We want to keep our memories for all time; the very having of our photographs gives us a feeling that we have some control. This may be illusory, a denial, yet we cling tenaciously to our pictures. A recent television advertisement has as its theme song 'They can't take that away from me.' The film depicts a woman treasuring the photographic memory of a lost relationship.

We take such care of photographs because we know they connect us with our past; they are precious confirmation that we have existed, experienced, that we have been. They literally help us picture ourselves at different stages in our lives. The photographed moment, stretching out to infinity, lends us the time to absorb details at our leisure; we can control it in a way that gives us a feeling of power.

We may use photographs in any way we choose, employing fantasy and imagination. We can adore them, hate them, stick pins in them, display them, hide them, destroy or censor them. We can use them to deny or to confirm reality, to laugh or weep over, to preserve our desired image and maintain our fantasies.

The issue of control is often also present whilst the photographs are being taken. We can use the camera itself as a shield to avoid having to relate to people, or to intrude on their conversations. Photographing people gives the photographer the licence to control others by infantilising them and issuing orders:

> Right, everyone, smile for the camera . . . Mabel, smile love, it may never happen. Elsie . . . please . . . stand still and move a little nearer to George. . . . Watch the birdie everybody!

We often react in a child-like way to these infantilising orders. Our behaviour whilst being photographed may be silly or absurd, as if we act out repressed urges. To some degree, this may be a reaction to feelings of self-consciousness and embarrassment, but the camera does also give some amongst us a freedom to relax our inhibitions and 'grab the limelight'.

Teenagers, especially, seize the opportunity to behave in a zany manner when faced with a camera. It is often a way of using their power to rebel against adults who want to control them into posing for a 'good' picture.

There are, however, people who hate being photographed. Perhaps they have unpleasant memories of being forced to pose as children, and now are using their adult choice to refuse such an experience. If they are 'captured' without permission, they may cover their face, turn away, protesting that they are 'camera shy'. A refusal to be photographed may also reflect a low self-image, a fear of seeing and being seen in a way that feels ultimately inescapable.

We can also use photographs to control others, especially through subjecting them to 'compulsory' looking. It is very difficult to decline an enthusiastic invitation to view someone's proudly proffered holiday snaps, for it would feel as though we were rejecting a part of them. There is a need in most of us to show our photographs to people who matter to us. It is good to have them admired and accepted, to have the approval of others and an unspoken confirmation that we are worth looking at.

Sometimes it is quite easy to appreciate another's photographs – they look interesting and one feels free enough with that person to browse through the snaps in an unconstrained way, without pressure. However, at other times, the showing of such holiday snaps is accompanied by a controlling, detailed and tedious narrative. Photographs reflect the person in more than one sense – the manner of presentation tells us much about their owner.

For the most part, other people's holiday snaps are just not as interesting as our own. Unless the presenter of the pictures is sensitive to this fact, the often reluctant onlookers are faced with a rather boring, repetitive set of holiday images – and one set looks very much like another.

But our own photographs are different – we have the memories; we can recollect the evocative smells, the warmth, the music, taste the food, reminisce over the new-found friends and reflect on the excitement of holiday romances. The pictures are treasured both as souvenirs and an important way of preserving our reminiscences.

Children on display

Often, photographs can become very special gifts, especially within the family. They may be presented in the form of cards, sent on special occasions, often expressly designed with a slot for the picture. School photographs are frequently sent to grandparents, who proudly exhibit their framed collections on pianos, mantelpieces and window-sills, delighting in their ever-increasing numbers. Perhaps the pictures stand as symbols of what they themselves have achieved and assurances that the family line will continue long after they have gone.

Furthermore, there is a curious truth in the fact that the photographs come to express their own reality, a larger than life quality, a sense of other-worldliness. They develop a value all of their own, an extra dimension. This point can be humorously illustrated by the following well-known Jewish joke:

> Mrs Levine, her face wreathed in proud smiles, was taking her infant daughter on her first outing. On the way, she encountered a neighbour who gushed over the baby.
>
> 'What a beautiful child!' the neighbour cried.
>
> Mrs Levine smiled delightedly. 'This is nothing,' she boasted. 'You should see her pictures!'
>
> (Spalding 1969: 378)

Photographic mistakes and their relation to the unconscious

Not all photographs turn out as 'well' as Mrs Levine's. The family's camera is brought out to record all kinds of life events, and there are millions of photographs developed every year – with varying results.

For the seasoned amateur, it is sometimes difficult really to see what is framed by the camera's lens; often there is an anxiety to take the photograph quickly so we can carry on with life, for taking the posed picture momentarily stops everything. Photographer and subjects are stilled. In our haste to come back to life, to resume movement and action, we perhaps are not consciously aware of all we are seeing in one brief moment through the tiny viewfinder, with its capacity for instant time-seizure.

At times, maybe we try too hard to take a 'good' picture, with the result that the subjects tire, or adopt stilted poses. We may therefore be surprised that our pictures are quite different from how we had envisaged them at the moment of taking. Some give us untold pleasure, and emerge from the developers just as we would have wanted; others are disappointing 'failures'. We all have, at some time or another, taken photographs that are 'mistakes'. Sometimes, we may be frustrated because our pictures have not 'come out' as we consciously intended, or we may even be faced with

Photograph 1

blank prints. We discard them impatiently as if, momentarily, the sun in our life had been eclipsed, obscured. They feel like a waste, an opportunity missed, a kind of loss.

But what of the prints that are not blank, yet have not turned out as we expected? Can they, too, have meaning for us? I refer to the kind of photographs where father's head has been chopped off, where plants appear to be growing out of mother-in-law's hat (see Photograph 1), where wife is photographed at the zoo, with two zebras quietly copulating in the background.

Are these accidental 'mistakes'? Did the photographers really not see all that they were capturing on film? Or was there an unconscious desire to ridicule, have power, create humour? Perhaps this is a safe and subtle way of showing anger and rebelliousness, having the last laugh, getting one's own back, being care-less. Such errors may have significant unconscious meaning, and give us clues as to the hidden feelings towards the subjects. We may blame chance, or lack of skill, even a faulty camera or bad light for our mistakes. Yet we have made them, not the camera. This connects to the verbal 'accidents' we have, the slips of the tongue for which we may similarly deny responsibility, resisting seeing any deeper significance.

An example of such a photographic tongue-slip is described by Pierre Bourdieu:

> The truly complete honeymoon is revealed by the couple photographed in front of the Eiffel Tower, because Paris is the Eiffel Tower, and

> because the true honeymoon is the honeymoon in Paris. One of the pictures in J.B.'s collection is bisected by the Eiffel Tower; at the bottom is J.B's wife. What seems to us an act of barbarism or barbarity is actually the perfect fulfilment of an intention.
>
> (Bourdieu 1990: 36)

Subsequently, Bourdieu wonders: 'Conscious or unconscious?'

There are also occasions when photographs function as deliberate and somewhat mischievous mistakes. When on holiday in France, a friend was, apparently, snapping his two children, frolicking in the pool. But he obviously had frolics of a different kind in mind at the time, for the finished photograph reveals a woman wearing a topless bikini, behind the youngest child, and at the centre of the picture. The child in front of her poses for the camera, believing that the focus is on him. The older child, in the background, looks as though he has some suspicions about his father's true photographic motivation.

Another example of a deliberate photographic mistake: a friend's teenager, in the throes of considerable adolescent rebellion, was enjoying himself at an amusement park. By chance, he was asked by some strangers to photograph them as a family. When they had gone, the boy turned to me and said impishly: 'I cut their heads off. . . .' He had gleeful visions of their reaction when they saw the developed pictures; yet he was totally safe in the knowledge of his anonymity. This was mischief, power and control at a distance, a way of not doing what he had been asked, whilst appearing to do so.

In a more constructive way, 'accidental' mistakes can be used creatively. In his book about the experience of photography, Jeff Berner urges his readers to use their mistakes to produce another kind of image, another angle on the world. He stresses the importance of being able to capitalise on one's mistakes, see them as 'tools for deepening the range of creative possibility'. He suggests that these be explored and treasured for their artistic and impressionistic qualities. Berner quotes the example of one R. Buckminster Fuller who had blurred vision for the first four years of his life:

> . . . his eyesight was so fuzzy that all he saw were large patterns. Faces were oval areas that spoke, houses were rectangular things with holes for walking in and out, and so forth. Before his vision 'handicap' was detected and corrected with glasses, he had time to learn the world as a complex of interrelated blurs of energy. So he did not begin his training as most of us do, with emphasis on getting details straight. Fuller grew up to become one of the most comprehensive and global thinkers of this century, and has spent his life teaching entire generations whole-systems thinking. His basic research is made up of details, but his mind remains omni-directional and highly conscious of the fact

> that the world is movement. One of his many books is titled *I seem to be a verb.*
>
> (Berner 1975: 100)

These mistakes, then, our photographic spoonerisms and tongue-slips, need to be seen as potential areas of insight and learning about ourselves, from a different perspective. They may point to and emphasise the existence of the unconscious, and the contradictory messages and motivations that beset us as human beings. They can widen our view of the world.

CAMERA AND PHOTOGRAPH AS COMMUNICATION

Photographs constantly provide us with a vivid method of communication. Sometimes, concepts, feelings or visual experiences can be difficult to express linguistically and we may use photographs to enhance or replace our verbal description. It will be further shown in Chapter 7 how photographs may enhance communication for people who are unable to connect with others through words.

The taking of a photograph can also enhance communication, especially where there are language difficulties. Whilst on a touring holiday abroad, our coach stopped for a visit to a school. The children were eager to know about us, but they were also shy and uncomfortable. They spoke only a little English, and were reticent to use it. Something was needed to break the ice. Then, we decided to take a photograph. Immediately, the children grouped themselves for the camera (see Photograph 2). Responding excitedly, they posed happily for this universally familiar experience.

It had not been easy for the children to relate to us, a group of strangers, speaking in a foreign tongue. Yet note the connections made as they gestured at the lens, relaxing into communicative and friendly poses. Up to that point there had been little eye contact, but after the taking of the photograph, inhibitions lessened and communication was easier than before. As we photographed, they began to get in touch, literally and metaphorically – gesticulating, clowning and waving, all determinedly trying to get themselves in the picture.

Sharing the finished photographs with people from a different country also provides a way to diminish the language barrier, for they have a unique ability to cut across such restrictions on cross-cultural interaction.

Photographs can be seen as a powerful form of language: what is the nature of this language? How do photographs communicate their message? In what intricate ways can these soundless images speak to us? What are the limits of this language?

If we begin to consider these questions closely in relation to photographs, we may discover in them many new and interesting features. The pictures may soothe or shock, amuse or frighten, disgust, repel or attract

Photograph 2

us. They also ask questions that make us think and ponder. They give us a specifically descriptive kind of information, showing us more about the world in which we live. Exploring photographs with an open mind, using our powers of imagination, deduction and identification, we can receive strong and irrefutable messages from the visual images that remain uncluttered by the verbal.

To illustrate, let us examine Photograph 3 before we have the verbal explanation. Try to look at this picture in a new way, examining every part, perceiving the smallest nuances and expressions. In this way, it may actually be possible to perceive more than the actual photographer himself saw at the moment of taking the picture. We can view the moment at our leisure, as the photographer could not do, although, paradoxically, we are seeing less than he of that real moment in real time.

We see a man and a woman walking together. From their outward appearance, they look like fairly religious Jews, he with his beard, both with heads covered, most likely husband and wife. They look long married, perhaps they are into middle age. His collar and tie and formal buttoned-up coat could indicate that he has been at work; he carries a loosely tied parcel, she a torn basket. Her hands and face seem to indicate that she may have worked hard domestically, a homely, motherly woman. Her clothes look like those of an everyday housewife; perhaps she intended going to the market.

Photograph 3

The powerful impact of the photograph lies in the facial expressions, gestures and body-language of the two people. The woman looks shocked, stunned, as if the man is conveying some painful news to her. She seems to be gazing into space, thinking about what he is saying, perhaps beyond what he is saying, whilst listening intently to his words. The shape her mouth makes indicates her shock; the way her hand touches her face is perhaps an unconscious attempt to comfort herself.

Desmond Morris refers to this kind of behaviour as self-intimacy:

> Self intimacies can be defined as movements that provide comfort because they are *unconsciously mimed acts of being touched by someone else.*
>
> . . . There are many such ways in which we behave as if we were two people. The majority are only minor self-intimacies – little more than a fleeting touch – but the clue is there just the same: a little comfort is

> needed. The most common actions are those in which the hand comes up to touch the head.
>
> (Morris 1986: 154–6)

We can tell, therefore, from this universal gesture, something of her consternation.

The man's hand points towards his chest – a gesture that says 'I' or 'me' – he is obviously talking about himself in some context. His face appears almost disbelieving and strained as he looks at his dismayed wife. A head taller than she at least, his steps are larger, but somehow her pace seems delayed and slowed by her emotional state. She is obviously his confidante, the two sharing some intensely awful news. They are not touching, but there is a feeling of closeness and involvement in their relationship.

There are other stories in the photograph. If we study it carefully, we can see that they are in a town or a city that is old and somewhat poor. The pavements are well worn, cracked and broken, the buildings shabby. Some of the people seem to be workers, going about their business. Perhaps it is their lunchbreak – the shadows are short and may indicate that it is around midday.

Two of those sitting on the bench in the background appear to be looking at the couple in the front of the picture, perhaps talking about them. If we let our imaginations wander, maybe we can hear the noises and smell the smells, feel the tension and worry that appears to be expressed in the faces.

We can glean much from the picture's silent communication. Yet, once we have such information from the photograph, there will remain unanswered questions. Whilst the photograph has in many ways spoken for itself, there are, inevitably, explanations it cannot give. We need some narrative to clarify and confirm the visual messages.

Here, then, are the facts the photograph cannot tell us: it was taken in the Warsaw Ghetto by Roman Vishniac in 1937. He explained that after taking it, he asked the couple about their problem:

> The husband told me that he had just been fired from his job as manager of his firm. The owner had been well satisfied with him for twenty years, but that morning three men came to the office to check whether any Jews were employed there. He was immediately dismissed, with no compensation, no hope of another job. The good life was over in an instant.
>
> (Vishniac 1983)

A photograph can also express a powerful message when it is used in a metaphorical way. Metaphor has been described as 'transfer of meaning' (Ortony 1975: 45) and is a vivid and indispensable method of communicating through images and symbols. We can use photographs to express our