Networks of Memory: Vernacular Photography, (New) Media, and Meaning Making

by

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art, and Technology

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Spring 2017

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Abstract

Vernacular photography can be broadly defined as “ordinary photographs, the ones made or bought (or sometimes bought and then made-over) by everyday folk from 1839 until now” (Batchen, 2001, p.57). At first glance, with digital media and online communication technologies that allow us to send and receive countless images on a daily basis, contemporary social conventions associated with vernacular photography appear vastly different than they did in the mid-nineteenth century. What persists in the use (and reuse) of vernacular photographs is how they are called upon in meaning-making activities to help understand the past in and for the present.

In this dissertation I examine meaning-making activities linked to recalling and reflecting on the past in specific ways: how historical exhibitions of vernacular photographs have influenced current practices of online exhibition; and how vernacular photographs are remediated and taken up in memory practices involving two particular projects, Collected Visions and Dear Photograph, that display crowd-sourced vernacular photographs in both gallery and online spaces.

My research is informed by Actor-network theory (ANT) approaches that emphasize how action takes place in nodes where different actors meet and influence one another (Latour, 2005). Vernacular photographs and their exhibitions are the result of complex interactions between people, media, and technologies where information and meaning making is transformed, translated, and modified (Latour, 2005, p. 39).

Research for this dissertation included visits to museums and archives and interviews with artists and curators who work with vernacular photographs. The variety of methods employed complement one another and allow for a type of ‘process-tracing’ where a variety of different data from different sources are examined to consider “the links between possible causes and observed outcomes” (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 6).

Through analytical ‘origin stories,’ I present narratives of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph tracing how vernacular photographs are used, remediated, and displayed in ways that allow for the possibility of online spaces of exchange. I then offer ‘microstories’ that describe encounters with specific images and texts in Collected Visions and Dear Photograph in an effort to document memory work processes that emerged during my research.

Keywords: vernacular photography; exhibition; remediation; memory; online communication
Acknowledgements

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Jan Marontate, whose continued encouragement helped this project develop and whose continued support allowed me to see it through. I am a fortunate and grateful recipient of Dr. Marontate’s kindness and patience.

The members of my committee, Dr. Alison Beale and Dr. Kate Hennessy, offered thoughtful insight into my work and I am thankful for their support.

Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Simon Fraser University School of Communication for funding this research project.

Many thanks are owed to the individuals who made time to share their knowledge with me in interviews for this dissertation: Grant Arnold, Karen Duffek, Martha Langford, Lorie Novak, Hélène Samson, Jeff Topham, Andrew Topham, and Brian Wallis.

I also thank those individuals, Céline Michel, Marianne Nicolson, and Jeff Topham, and institutions, the McCord Museum and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia for permission to include their photographs in this dissertation.

My colleagues at the Student Learning Commons, the Graduate Research Commons, the British Columbia Electronic Library Network, and the Visual Studies Lab have enriched my time at Simon Fraser University. Thank you, in particular, to Lisa Poole, Maggie Chao, and Nathan Clarkson. Nathan, you encouraged me to use logic on the first day I met you, and I have endeavoured to do so ever since.

Thank you to: Gillian Batey, Dana Gage, Michelle Harper, Steph Jameson, Andrea McCrea, Jen Paulin, Drew Paulin, Michal Ruhr, and Michelle Savich. Whether near or far, I have been so fortunate to have you in my corner through this process.

To my aunt Margot, uncle Donald, cousins Andrea and Brandon: simply and always, love and thanks.

Mum, Dad, Grandma, Ian, Roxanne, Maëlle – none of this would have been possible without you. You are my daily reminders that all of us are better when we are loved.
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The vernacular is the place where everything meets.

(Myles, 2015, p. 50)
Chapter 1.

Introduction

The photographs we surround ourselves with remind us of connections to family, friends, special events, and everyday occasions that we want to remember. The ways we preserve, display, and share these photographs that help us recall memorable events in our lives are influenced by a number of factors including the affordances and constraints of different photographic media, our willingness to reveal personal images to others, and our desire to construct and control the narratives about our own images and memories. Very often, these photographs are vernacular photographs, which curator and art historian Geoffrey Batchen describes as “ordinary photographs, the ones made or bought (or sometimes bought and then made over) by everyday folk from 1839 until now, the photographs that preoccupy the home and the heart but rarely the museum or the academy” (2001, p. 57). In Batchen’s definition, he names particular spaces – the home and the museum – when discussing where we might expect (and not expect) to find vernacular photographs. However, vernacular photographs often circulate through a variety of spaces and are exhibited in a wide variety of ways. The archive is noticeably absent from Batchen’s discussion of where ordinary photographs may or may not be found. Archival research and archival scholarship on vernacular photography provides important insights into the circulation and preservation of photographs that can fall under that very broad umbrella of vernacular images (see for example, Tagg, 1988; Bolton, 1993).

American psychologist James J. Gibson (1979) is credited with developing the concept of affordances to describe how certain conditions shape the range of possible actions in a particular situation or environment. For example, moving a soccer ball from one place to another may be accomplished by kicking or carrying the ball depending on one’s capabilities while moving a piano affords a different set of actions and limitations necessary to transport the instrument from one place to another. The notion of affordances also provides for a consideration of cognitive and affective possibilities and constraints. In short, affordances influence how we think, feel, and act in particular ways.
However, in this dissertation, my focus is on socio-mnemonic practices associated with the display and circulation of vernacular photographs. While archives can and do participate in exhibitions and share their collections with institutional networks (increasingly through digital tools and digital media), their primary goal is often to ensure the safe-keeping of material records and information. Vernacular photographs travel through a variety of spaces and places. In this research I turn my attention to how people engage in meaning-making with vernacular photographs as they travel through different spaces of exhibition.

On their journeys, vernacular photographs travel along and through networks of relationships and are shared among friends and family and strangers. As I write this, I look up at my bulletin board pinned with images of friends and family and golden retrievers. Some were tucked in Christmas cards; others were taken at weddings and birthdays. A few images are reproductions of earlier print photos that I have reproduced with my camera and developed by hand in a darkroom. Some images are those that I have scanned and printed with the originals kept safe in acid-free photo albums. Others are prints of digital images made with personal cameras and mobile phones. I display these photographs to remind myself of important events in my own past and to reflect on my connections to other histories. The photograph of my great-grandmother, for example, one that I have reproduced and enlarged, comes from an image that was made over a century ago. The journey this image has made from a photographer’s studio in the early twentieth century to bulletin board in the early twenty-first century is a lengthy and complex one involving a number of technologies, media, and individuals – non-human and human actors – who have influenced the way this single image can be used to convey memory. As this dissertation developed, I had a number of opportunities to observe, reflect on, and participate in important meaning-making practices where memories were shared in the exhibition of vernacular photographs. These experiences, some of which I describe later in this chapter, prompted me to consider how vernacular photographs may be repurposed in ways that the makers of the images or those depicted in the images could not have possibly imagined.

Many different types of images may be considered vernacular photographs. In their book, *In the Vernacular: Photography of the Everyday*, Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw
and Ross Barrett (2008) describe how family albums, mug shots, x-rays, wedding photographs, police images, travel photographs, souvenirs, erotica, advertising, school yearbook images, and military photographs can all be considered vernacular photographs because they are photographs that are embedded in and encountered in the wide range of daily human experience. However, this broad umbrella of ‘daily human experience’ as determining the ‘vernacular’ in ‘vernacular photography’ can overwhelm important discussions about classification systems based on a photograph’s form and materiality, its content, its maker, and its use. Form and materiality matter: a photograph may be a 4x6” print processed at a drugstore photo lab or a silver-gelatin print handcrafted in a darkroom. Content matters: a photograph may illustrate an ‘average’ family celebrating a child’s birthday or it may show celebrities or monuments. Makers matter: a photograph may be captured by someone with no technical or compositional training via a point and shoot camera or it may be carefully staged by a professional in a studio. Use matters: a photograph may be affixed to a refrigerator door with a magnet and become part of a domestic environment or a photograph may be framed and displayed in a museum. While each of these elements plays an important role in how meaning is made with photographs, my emphasis on vernacular photography in this dissertation is two-fold. I focus on 1) how photographs are used as part of daily experience and 2) how photographs may pass through different categories of use over time. Regardless of their materiality, their content, or their origins, vernacular photographs are always at the intersection of complex meaning-making practices and processes involving media, technologies, and people. These practices and processes are critical in helping us make sense of the past in and for the present.

Scholars interested in the intersection of memory and media have sometimes focused on how changes in media formats and technologies may be understood as disruptive or threatening to the ways memory is communicated from generation to generation (Nora, 1989; Huyssen, 2003; Zylinska, 2010). With respect to vernacular photographs, the shift to images that are ‘born digital’ and shared digitally complicates existing practices of displaying vernacular photographs. Both in the development of

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2 Librarian and information specialist, Ricky Erway offers a broad, if useful definition of ‘born digital,’ as “items created and managed in digital form” (2010, p. 1).
images and in the manner people use those images, photography may first appear as a type of “media with certain distinctive and stable characteristics;” however, as literary scholars Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney note, “a closer look shows [photography] to be constantly evolving in reaction to new technologies for recording information, but also to developments in the media landscape at large and to the ever-changing repertoire of sense-making tools available to us” (2009, p. 3). The emphasis on photography, and by way of inclusion, vernacular photography, as a series of “complex and dynamic systems rather than a line-up of discrete and stable technologies” (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 3) encourages us to think about changing influences and complex relationships. Rather than perceiving the move to digital forms of documentation and expression as a disconnecting rupture3 from past practices for preserving and communicating memory, examining how memory practices associated with vernacular photography have drawn on existing and past practices of exhibition suggests that displays of vernacular photographs have the potential to offer opportunities for dynamic and creative engagements with memory.

In this dissertation, I explore how practices of sharing memory through the exhibition of vernacular photographs draw on and adapt existing media to evolving meaning-making practices. One of the key theoretical influences that informs my work is Actor-network Theory (ANT). In the 1980s, sociologists Michael Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law began to articulate an approach to examining social interactions that stressed the notion that social life consists of networks of influence where humans and non-humans (for example, tools, technologies, and architecture) are mediators in meaning-making practices (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). These humans and non-humans are ‘actors’ in networks of association. In this dissertation, vernacular photographs, people, and the mediated exhibition spaces in the physical and online realms are all actors that influence how memory may be communicated. Latour (2005) notes, “a good ANT account is a narrative… where all the actors do something and don’t just sit there. Instead of simply transporting effects without transforming them, each of the points in the

3 Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (2003) describes how historical and memory narratives have certain ‘shapes’ depending on how communities imagine the past. For example, communities may organize the past into “gradualist” narratives where events occur as a chain of connected events or they may stress distinct periods – organized into “episodic” narratives (2003, p. 82).
Rather than providing a theoretical framework that can be applied to different situations, ANT is a way of describing a phenomenon by focusing on associations made visible through actions and events (Latour, 2005, p. 143). Following the different actors involved meaning-making practices and tracing their mediating influences on one another allows researchers to appreciate social life as networks of possibilities where any action is “conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled” (Latour, 2005, p. 44). The actions involved in memory practices with respect to people, vernacular photographs, and exhibition spaces are very tangled indeed. This dissertation seeks to untangle some of the associations between people, media, and spaces that have developed over time. Through this untangling, I hope to show that contemporary practices of using vernacular photographs to communicate understandings of the past reflect ongoing desires to organize memory in ways that will best serve the present.

In this introduction, I reflect on some of the interactions and associations that have shaped my research. These influences helped me to develop and pursue questions I explore in this dissertation and led me to two specific projects, Collected Visions and Dear Photograph, where vernacular photographs have been remade, repurposed, and exhibited in both physical and digital spaces.

Associations and Interactions

“People have relationships with photographs but they’re not simple,” noted scholar and art historian Martha Langford during a research interview conducted for this dissertation (personal communication June 10, 2013). Langford’s comment came during a short digression in the interview when she shared a framed photograph of her late golden retriever – Dr. Dog – with me. Our conversation had turned briefly to the merits of the breed and the golden retrievers in our lives before circling back to focus on vernacular photography. I mention this digression that took place in a research interview because I think that it illustrates how displaying photographs creates opportunities for unexpected, but meaningful, interactions. As I reflect on the preparation of this dissertation, there were a number of unexpected associations and interactions that influenced my ideas. I relate some of these associations and interactions in upcoming
sections of this introduction as a way of framing my research story presented in the later chapters. Communication scholars Thomas Lindlof and Bryan Taylor offer the reminder that relating one’s research involves reflecting on “the best way to tell the stories in [a particular study] as well as the story of [the] study” (2002, p. 68). This dissertation is a collection of stories on how people have remade and refashioned vernacular photographs to share their memories with others by calling on and repurposing media tools and techniques. This dissertation also considers how different types of exhibition spaces shape the way people interact with vernacular photographs and with one another to share memories of the past in and for the present.

Revisiting Everyday Images – Re-presenting Vernacular Photographs in and out of the Museum

For several years during my undergraduate degree and my first graduate degree, I worked and attended classes held at the University of British Columbia’s Museum of Anthropology. One of my favourite pieces to visit was by Marianne Nicolson – “Waxemedlagin xusbandayu’ (Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count)” (see Figure 1). Represented in each panel is a black and white photographic image – one is a picture of Nicolson’s aunts and uncles as children, the other picture shows Nicolson’s mother holding her youngest sister, Emily Willie. At 19 years old, Nicolson’s mother took on responsibilities of caring for her 15 siblings following the death of her own mother who passed away giving birth to Emily. These images are consecutively bordered by landscape and nature photographs of Nicolson’s community, multiple images of a contemporary Musgamagw Dzawada’enuxw bumblebee mask dance that in some ways resembles a filmstrip, button blankets, Nicolson’s writing in Kwakwaka’wala, and finally a painted border that includes sisutls, wolves, and parent bees in Northwest Coast style – and more specifically - Kwakwaka’waw style. This piece is sometimes exhibited with

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I sought permission to use all of the images that are included in this dissertation. Where express permission was granted by an individual or institution I have included the information requested by the individual or institution when reproducing their images. Despite my repeated requests via email, telephone, and social media to use particular images, some individuals did not respond to my inquiries. In consultation with Simon Fraser University’s copyright officer with respect to how images are used in this dissertation, where express permission to reproduce images was not obtained, images are considered as part of fair dealing under Canada’s Copyright Act.
Marianne Nicolson, *Waxemedlagin xusbandayu*’ (Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count), 2000, mixed media, part a: 151.5 x 110 x 6 cm, part b: 151 x 110.5 x 6.5 cm. Collection of Museum of Anthropology, Nb3. 1494 a-b. Photograph by Jessica Bushey. Courtesy UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Canada. Used with Permission

bumblebee masks also housed at the museum, masks that were acquired from Nicolson’s grandfather in the early 1960s (Clavir, 2002).

Reproducing and enlarging family photographs as Nicolson does here is a type of remediation. While remediation has a number of definitions, as will be discussed in chapter two, literary scholars Paul Prior and Julie Hengst suggest that remediation “implies taking up some previously existing form but deploying it in a new move, with a new purpose (2010, p. 236). In the case of “*Waxemedlagin xusbandayu*’ (Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count),” historical photographs with particular meanings for Nicolson and her family are taken up and shared in a new way. Exhibited at the Museum of Anthropology, “*Waxemedlagin xusbandayu*’ (Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count) re-presents photographs that may reside in family albums and situates them in a new series of relationships, including connections with other objects on display at the
museum. In the layering of images, Nicolson reveals and conceals information in the photographs she has selected. Recalling the many times I passed by Nicolson’s piece, the size of the work, each over a 1.5m high and over 1m wide, and the different media used – black and white photography, buttons that frame the photographs and echo a Northwest Coast button blanket, the hand-lettering and painting that is included in the in the piece and on the frame – always seemed to capture my attention. I remember marvelling at how all of the different elements included in the piece came together, for the purpose of publicly communicating an understanding of how the past continues to influence the present. Some of the photographs that Nicolson selected for “Waxemedlagin xusbandayu’ (Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count)” have travelled far from their original making as images to be cherished and shared among family members. As I began to think about how photographs make their way out of family photo albums and into museums, I became interested in how artists (and others) used photographs to share information about the past as a way of creating connections with others in the present.

The museum was a familiar place for me to begin my reflections on how photographs have been used to share memories. Drawing on my experience volunteering for, working in, and visiting different museums where vernacular photographs have been displayed has helped me to appreciate some of the conventions associated with how photographs are exhibited. These conventions though are far from static and, as will be discussed in chapter three, concerns about whether photography should be considered art and how different types of photographs should be used has long been contested and is far from certain. Museums too are far from static. In chapter

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5 At the Museum of Anthropology, as with many ethnographic and historical collections at institutions around the world, many of the objects on display were never intended to be displayed in gallery exhibitions. Some museums, including the Museum of Anthropology, have recognized the need to respect the use, care, and display of objects according to the conventions of originating communities (Clavir, 2002; Peers & Brown, 2003; Smith L., 2006). Nicolson’s piece, however, as with a number of contemporary works created by indigenous artists for public or private sale, was made with display in mind. The media and format Nicolson selected for “Waxemedlagin xusbandayu’ (Even Though I am the Last One, I Still Count)” – mixed media, framed and under glass – reference conventions associated with contemporary photography, photographic arts, and gallery display. Thus, Nicolson’s piece, unlike an object made for daily use or a specific activity or ceremony that is subsequently acquired by a museum, was intended to be shown in an exhibition space.
three, I describe how practices of photograph exhibition have evolved from the medium’s origins to the contemporary period. As scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992) points out, contemporary museums are spaces where there is rich potential for ongoing reinterpretations and reconsideration of relationships with the past. Hooper-Greenhill notes that museum visitors engage in meaning-making practices “through a mix of experience, activity, and pleasure, in an environment where” subjects (visitors, curators, and artists, for example) share information (p. 214). Rather than dictating monolithic interpretations of the past, museums today consistently invite reflection and reconsideration. It can be difficult, though, for museum visitors to share their stories and histories that are prompted when reviewing objects and photographs on display. Visitors may pass through a gallery space and engage in deeply meaningful recollection, but opportunities to document and share these recollections are limited in traditional physical exhibition spaces.

Museums have increasingly turned to websites and online exhibitions to offer opportunities for people to engage with collections, objects, and information at a distance. One of the initial questions I had when beginning my dissertation research related to the parallels and variations between how museums present material in physical gallery exhibitions and in online exhibitions. As I explored museum websites and visited exhibitions in person to consider how photographs made to document both everyday and extraordinary events make their way into museum collections, my path of inquiry shifted. I began to focus on how gallery exhibitions and online exhibitions offer opportunities for engagement with vernacular photographs that are influenced by the affordances and constraints that affect the potential of diverse actors to contribute to the meaning of the works in different spaces. More specifically, if gallery exhibitions allow certain types of engagement and reflection, how might online spaces, with possibilities for user-contributed content allow people to share their own images and stories?

Museums have an important role to play in displaying vernacular photographs. If we consider museums as actors in communicative exchanges, it is then possible to think about how museums might influence and be influenced by other actors, media, and technologies. Tracing how photographs have travelled into and out of museums reveals complex relationships and connections as people select media and tools to organize and
make sense of the past in the present. However, the majority of vernacular photographs made and circulated today exist and are shared as digital images across a variety of computer platforms. Digital imaging technologies that rely on computer-processing and software applications are different from analog photography technologies that rely on mechanically exposing light-sensitive material and then processing film, plates, and/or prints through a series of chemical treatments. As forms of communication, the former can be viewed as an extension of, rather than a rupture, with the latter. The tools and technologies have changed, but the intent and desire to use photography to document, share, and preserve events and experiences persist (as will be discussed in later chapters). The shift to digital photography and computer-mediated-communication also opens new possibilities for sharing memories and experiences:

Photo-sharing and social networking sites now provide a platform for photographers to deliver their images to locations where millions can view them simultaneously. [...] Snapshots now appear not only in web-based family albums and diaries but also literally cover the face of the Earth: augmented by geographic coordinates they are superimposed onto screen-based online maps of the world.

(Rubinstein & Sluis 2008, p. 10)

Looking beyond websites hosted by or associated with museums, galleries, and cultural institutions, the online spaces where vernacular photographs are displayed are legion. As Rubenstein and Sluis point out, computer-mediated-communication (CMC) means that snapshots and other vernacular photographs from around the world are available at the click of a button. Rather than focus broadly on the affordances and limitations of social media sites such as Facebook, Flickr, and Instagram, I wanted to look closely at particular examples of how people or groups of people have used online spaces to view, share, and engage with vernacular photographs.

However, I was not content to focus solely on the online world as an entity unto itself. CMC in our contemporary world influences and is influenced by other forms of communication. When Bruno Latour reflects on ‘modernity,’ he argues that too often critical inquiry in the twentieth century has relied on singular approaches that stress “naturalization, socialization, [or] deconstruction” (1993, p. 5). For example, a focus on
“power” as it affects social activities means that “science, technology, texts, and the contents of the activities disappear” (1993, p. 6). Latour suggests scholarly inquiry must attend to the hybrids and interwoven networks of sociality where human and non-human actors (like media and technologies) influence one another. With this in mind, what happens in online spaces with respect to how vernacular photographs are shared is not divorced from what happens in gallery exhibitions (or in displays of vernacular photographs in domestic spaces, for that matter). When selecting projects to examine for this dissertation, I was interested in how online spaces might borrow from and adapt practices from exhibitions in museums to offer hybrid spaces of engagement and exchange. On the way to selecting the projects that would become the eventual case studies for this dissertation, I spent time researching and reflecting on two multi-media projects – the documentary film Liberia ’77 and the interactive web-based documentary and memoir Welcome to Pine Point – that helped me to refine my thinking about how online spaces draw on existing forms of communication to share memories through vernacular photographs. This work ultimately led to selecting Collected Visions and Dear Photograph as the case studies that will be explored in later chapters. However, sharing the stories of how Liberia ’77 and Welcome to Pine Point have influenced my thinking provides insight into how my research questions and understanding of key concepts developed. I begin with a description of Liberia ’77.

“Just by the sake of the story”

In 2010, as I was finishing my first year of coursework in my doctoral studies, my brother – knowing my interest in vernacular photographs and memory – suggested I speak with two friends of his, Jeff and Andrew Topham. The brothers had recently returned from a trip to Liberia, where they had spent time as children in the 1970s when their father worked in the West African nation. The Tophams’ father John took a keen interest in photography and when the family returned to Canada, Jeff recalled sharing albums and envelopes of photographs made of their time in Liberia with friends (personal communication, June 24, 2010). The Tophams’ photographs have literally and figuratively travelled far from their original making and have been included in publications, films, and exhibitions. For Jeff and Andrew, memories of their happy
childhood in Liberia were both prompted and shaped by photographs that depict different aspects of daily life. Figure 2 shows one such image – Andrew and Evelyn, a chimp from a nearby biomedical facility that was adopted by the Tophams. Andrew has commented that, “I have all these photos and I have all these memories and they have all sort of bled into each other, and they're all good. Knowing what has happened to this country in between, I was worried that those memories would be changed” (emphasis in original, Topham, 2010). Not long after the Topham family returned to Canada, Liberia descended into decades of civil conflict and war. From the 1980s to the early part of the, twenty-first-century, photographic depictions of life in Liberia, made by journalists regularly focused on atrocities and suffering. When Liberia was occasionally mentioned in Western news reports, the images that the Tophams saw were irreconcilable with the life they knew.

Photography has played a key role in both Jeff and Andrew’s lives. As a filmmaker and photographer, Jeff has travelled across Canada and around the world documenting and sharing stories. Andrew too has made and exhibited portraits that depict daily life in communities that include mining operations in Canada’s Yukon and
maternal health clinics in East Africa. The envelope of photographs from Liberia loomed large in the brothers’ decisions to take up photography and their desire to share their photographs with others. In 2010, the Tophams returned to Liberia with the intention “to revisit and re-shoot the influential and iconic photos of [their] childhood” (Earnshaw, 2012). An example of this is shown in Figure 3, where Andrew, Jeff, with the help of Mickey Watkins, are seen in a street in Liberia’s capital trying to ascertain where one of their father’s photographs from the 1970s was made. Rephotography, returning to the site of an earlier photograph and attempting to capture a contemporary scene from the same perspective, offers opportunities to resituate the past from the ‘there and then’ to the ‘here and now.’

Bridging the distance of time, even if one physically returns to a familiar place, is fraught with potential complications. Resituating the past threatens to change our contemporary perspective of it. For example, Andrew’s concerns about the idyllic past he remembered being jeopardized by a return to Liberia illustrates one of

Figure 3. Jeff Topham, Andrew and Jeff Topham rephotographing in Monrovia with help from Mickey Watkins, 2010, DVD still. Used with permission

6 Rephotography is discussed in more detail in chapter six.
these potential complications. However, in Andrew’s case, this concern was tempered by his reflection that his memories and experiences of childhood were “mediated by all kinds of people” and a variety of different media, “not just the photos” made by his father (personal communication, June 24, 2010). For both Andrew and Jeff, the return to Liberia represented a possible end to the malleability of their own stories about childhood – the experience of growing up in West Africa in the 1970s could be selectively shaped and deployed depending on how the Tophams imagined themselves today and when and with whom they decided to share their stories of Liberia. By documenting the return, and selecting which family photographs to use in his film, Jeff’s work as a filmmaker had the potential to crystallize a single representation as a definitive account of experience of the past.

Revisiting the Liberia photographs as adults and returning to where they were made allowed the brothers to reflect on their shared past. They also discovered that the photographs that had shaped their own memories of childhood held important meanings for contemporary Liberians. When Jeff and Andrew returned to Liberia in 2010, they brought copies of their family photographs and the images made by their father. Speaking with Liberians, the Tophams found that few people had family photographs from their past or any type of historical photographs. During the civil wars, possession of photographs could signify potential wealth or social or political connections and make individuals targets. Destroying personal photographs may have provided some protection. National collections of photographs and historical material also suffered. When Jeff and Andrew returned, they had copies of old photographs, film making and photography equipment, but they were uncertain of what they might actually find. When asked about the preparations and contacts they had made in advance, Jeff commented, there wasn’t much. We just kind of showed up [...] we showed up with a story. [We] could have made it up, had a few pictures to go with it, but mostly people bought our story and wanted to be a part of it. [...] All we did was just talk. [We told people]
who we were and all this stuff happened. Just by the sake of the story.\textsuperscript{7}

(personal communication, June 24, 2010)

Sharing their story of growing up in Liberia and sharing their photographs led to exchanges with a diverse range of people including: Jefferson Morris, the son of James Morris, the domestic worker who cared for Jeff and Andrew when they were children; prominent Liberian photojournalist Sando Moore whose personal and professional collections of photographs were destroyed during the civil wars; and even the president of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

The story of the Tophams’ return to West Africa and the connections they made has taken on a variety of forms: the documentary \textit{Liberia ’77} was released in May 2011; an exhibition of Andrew, Jeff, and John Topham’s photographs was shown in Vancouver in September 2011; and a crowd-sourced collection of historical Liberian photographs made prior to 1990 has garnered contributions by people from around the world and is accessible through the film’s website (liberia77.com). In November 2012, Andrew and Jeff returned to Liberia to share historical and contemporary photographs in an exhibition at the National Museum in Monrovia.

The \textit{Liberia ’77} project helped to shape my initial interests when preparing for this dissertation because it allowed me to reflect on how photographs can travel across space and time and how they move in and out of different types of exhibitions. Family photographs and images of everyday life in Liberia accompanied the Tophams when they returned to Canada and those photographs have been remade (digitally scanned) and reproduced for the documentary film and multiple exhibitions. Interviewing Jeff and Andrew provided valuable insight into the complex contemporary motivations and sense of responsibility that can influence how people work with historical vernacular photographs. I also saw how the same photographs in different types of spaces – as part

\textsuperscript{7} The formatting of block quotes of personal communication is presented in accordance with Simon Fraser University’s thesis template instructions that recommend interview quotations of 40 words or more be “displayed with a font that is different from the written body text” (Simon Fraser University (SFU) Library, 2014, p. 19).
of a documentary film, in a gallery as part of an exhibition in Canada or Liberia, on Jeff’s coffee table in his Vancouver home – could elicit important, resonant, and deeply meaningful responses. Regularly consulting the project website and following social media updates for news about the Liberia ’77 project also prompted me to think about how computer-mediated-communication (CMC) can connect people and information through different types of media and technologies. The Liberia ’77 project also encouraged me to think about how photographs, and the media that make it possible to share those photographs, can lead to unexpected connections.

“So often a memory depends on who we need to be at the moment of remembrance”

During the summer of 2011, as I was completing my comprehensive exams and considering the next stage of my doctoral work, I came across the interactive online multimedia documentary called Welcome to Pine Point. Developed by Michael Simons and Paul Shoebridge, Welcome to Pine Point begins with Simons’ recollections about a childhood visit to Pine Point for a hockey tournament. Simons’ personal memories of Pine Point are an entry to explore a place that no longer exists. Pine Point was a mining community in Canada’s Northwest Territories from 1964 to 1988. When the ore deposits were exhausted in the 1980s, the town was dismantled, buildings torn down or moved to other communities, and the population dispersed. In many ways, Pine Point was an artificial community. It was not based on shared values or traditional ties to territory. Rather, it was created for the sole purpose of housing workers for the mining operation. However, the memories of the community live on through the mediated recollections made possible in part through the remembrances of those who lived there and in the photographs, films, and scrapbooks of an earlier time.

The Welcome to Pine Point website reflectively references a number of existing media forms. For example: the website is divided into chapters like a book; an introductory section is based on photo albums that were popular through the 1970s and 1980s; and a high school year book aesthetic provides the framework for oral histories. Simons and Shoebridge also incorporate video footage taken by Pine Point residents as well as contemporary documentary audio and video components that allow former residents to speak directly to the audience. The interactive website also has a
soundtrack that moves from a thematic instrumental accompaniment that varies by chapter to close with a rather haunting cover of the 1980s Canadian rock band Trooper’s “Here for a Good Time (Not a Long Time).” The narrative of the website is punctuated with sound effects including the whine of a mosquito, raucous party shouts and the clink of bottles, and mechanical and engine sounds associated with mining. All of this adds up to a multi-media experience that offers many different opportunities for a visitor to engage with the audio-visual narrative of Pine Point via the interactive website.

The notion of multiple points of engagement was one of the reasons that I kept returning to Welcome to Pine Point. During my first visit, as I clicked my way through pages and video and followed the story of a town that once existed, I experienced a moment of what Martha Langford describes as “seeing through, a new mode of perception that is fictionally direct” (2007, p. 102, emphasis in original). Seeing through relies on memory and imagination: even if we have no personal connection to an image, it is possible to consider the ‘there and then’ depicted in a particular image as connected with the ‘here and now.’ “Given enough time,” reviewing a particular photograph, or in the case of Welcome to Pine Point enough time reviewing the pages of photographs and videos “memory teams up with imagination” in creative and meaningful ways (Langford, 2007, p. 102). This ‘teaming-up’ happened for me about half way through Welcome to Pine Point and was prompted by two things: 1) the credits for a video made to commemorate the town’s closing roll across the screen, and 2) the page that features a collection of pins and badges associated with Pine Point. Across these two pages the word “Cominco” appears in a number of different ways. The Cominco Public Relations

8 The chorus of this song includes the lyrics:

We’re here for a good time
Not a long time
So have a good time
The sun can’t shine everyday

(McGuire, 1977)

9 Langford is one of several scholars (including Hirsch (1997), Schwartz (2000), Pinney and Peterson (2003), Edwards and Hart (2004), and Edwards (2012)) who describe how photographs provide opportunities to bridge time and space in such a way that the past is made present and viewers are able to reflect on recent and not so recent histories.
and Advertising Department created the commemorative video, and several of the badges feature the Cominco name and logo (see Figure 4). Members of my family have worked for Cominco for generations.\textsuperscript{10} Seeing the name and the familiar orange and black logo offered me an unexpected entry point into the memories that were being shared. The memories that Simons and Shoebridge presented in mediated collages of images, text, film, and sound were suddenly more than an intriguing story – they were memories that I could imagine having a direct impact on my own life. Experiencing this moment of ‘fictional directness,’ the phrase that Langford (2007) uses to describe how one can make connections to memories outside one’s personal experience, was made

\textbf{Figure 4.} Michael Shoebridge and Paul Simons, pins and badges associated with Pine Point from \textit{Welcome to Pine Point}, 2011, interactive webpage

\textsuperscript{10} The Cominco ‘name’ waned following the exhaustion of the Sullivan Mine in Kimberley, British Columbia, at the end of the twentieth century. Teck, an Ontario-based mining operation, merged with Cominco in 2001 creating Teck-Cominco, but in 2008 the company rebranded itself as Teck Resources Limited. Seeing “Cominco” as part of “Welcome to Pine Point” made the interactive documentary’s reflection on how memories endure highly personal for me.
possible in a large part owing to the affordances of the particular media used in *Welcome to Pine Point*.

Following the success of *Welcome to Pine Point*, Simons and Shoebridge reflected on how their project developed in an article called “Things We Did That People Liked That Might Benefit You” (2012). In the article, Simons and Shoebridge describe what they saw as opportunities and limitations when working with new media forms such as digital and online spaces. They write, “The beauty of a digital space is that you can adopt whatever technique suits the material best, even techniques you’ve never had the opportunity to employ” (2012, p. 5). Digital tools and technologies offer multiple options for presenting information (and memories) in online spaces: text, photographs, images, videos, and sound recordings can be combined in a single website. However, the seemingly unlimited possibilities of communicating memories in a digital space also come with challenges. Simons and Shoebridge note that “Constructing a digital world offers up a whole host of problems. Since there are no established forms, as there are in every other media, most projects offer up one-off interactive spaces and ways to navigate them” (2012, p. 7). These two reflections provide insight into how Simons and Shoebridge imagine digital space as a type of uncharted territory – conventions of working in this space are not yet well established. Yet to claim that digital space may be unmapped and unbounded discounts the fact that media forms, regardless of their perceived novelty, regularly borrow from and adapt existing practices and methods. Media scholars Jay Bolter and David Grusin address this in their book, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). Bolter and Grusin contend:

> Digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honor, rival, and revise linear-perspective painting, photography, film, television, and print. [...] What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of the new media.

(Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 15)

While Simons and Shoebridge emphasize the potential freedom to experiment in a digital space, with *Welcome to Pine Point* they acknowledge that their project actually
borrows heavily from existing media conventions. Drawing on their “years constructing magazines and books,” content for “Welcome to Pine Point” is organized “page-by-page” (Simons & Shoebridge, 2012, p. 7). Additionally, Simons and Shoebridge point out the aesthetic importance of illustrations that appear hand-drawn in for “Welcome to Pine Point” (see Figure 5). In “Welcome to Pine Point,” digital media are used to recreate the effect of hand-drawn images. This is just one type of media that Simons and Shoebridge refashion when sharing memories about Pine Point. In order to remember, but also imagine a place that no longer exists: the videos, illustrations, and photographs that are part of “Welcome to Pine Point” help to bring a sense of how the everyday and extraordinary events that happened in a small community in the Northwest Territories are recalled today.

Simons and Shoebridge comment that they wanted to avoid an “intensely digital” design, noting that:

The default aesthetic for digital design is slick. Straight. Clean. When you make a box, or draw a line on a computer, by default, it’s straight, perfect.
It is tough to get across the sense that a human actually created it. Add this to the fact you’re consuming it on a machine that is equally hermetically sealed, and you’ve moved your content several steps away from a human-to-human connection.

(Simons & Shoebridge, 2012, p. 8)

Creating opportunities for human-to-human connection in the digital realm has its challenges. But any attempt at human-to-human connection faces challenges. Acknowledging the affordances and limitations of the media they are working with helped Simons and Shoebridge make decisions about how to communicate and share memories about Pine Point. Part of the affective appeal of Welcome to Pine Point, and the fact that the project offers the possibility for deep connection and meaning-making, may be due to the unexpected refashioning of older media in a new media space. The digitization of familiar media – including, vernacular photographs, home videos, and newspaper clippings – in Welcome to Pine Point helps to re-present the past in the present. However, Welcome to Pine Point is more than just scanned images or an online scrapbook. The refashioning of existing media helps to make the memories communicated in Welcome to Pine Point contemporarily relevant because the interactive online documentary addresses larger issues about how memories are distributed across space and time and how individuals make sense of the past today.

Reflecting on “Welcome to Pine Point” helped me to think about how digital spaces offer opportunities for connection through memory. The photographs and memories that are shared in “Welcome to Pine Point” resonated with me in powerful ways and encouraged me to consider how that sense of ‘seeing through’ can happen while reviewing images on a computer screen. The spaces where vernacular photographs are used to communicate memory are not limited to physical locations or print images. The creative remaking of vernacular photographs in the digital realm may not be an entirely new frontier. Human-to-human exchange is possible and can be achieved in part through referencing familiar media forms. When these familiar media forms, like vernacular photographs, appear in new spaces, there are new opportunities for connection and meaning-making.
Research Questions

The discussions of *Liberia '77* and *Welcome to Pine Point* provided above offer insight into the preliminary ideas that helped to shape the eventual course of my research for this dissertation. Vernacular photographs travel through space and time acquiring and accruing meaning, as they become actors in different relationships with people, with media, and with technologies. People continue to use vernacular photographs to help make sense of the past in and for the present, and they do this work in a variety of spaces, including in museum exhibitions and online. While the spaces where we encounter vernacular photographs are important in shaping how we make meaning with and through particular images, the space itself is only one location in a complex series of connections. Bruno Latour describes how meetings between actors may relay interactions that occur “elsewhere in time and space” and bring them “to bear on [particular] scene[s]” through a variety of actors (2005, p.194). A vernacular photograph that sits framed on a desk is, of course, materially different from an image that is included in a computer's screen saver images, but both can bring other times and other spaces into the present and creates the opportunity for new connections. Joel Smith describes this in his reflection on a hypothetical vernacular photograph, a snapshot, in a workplace:

A snapshot’s intended viewers are typically the photographer’s close associates. Relationships are certified, and sometimes even created, by the snapshot itself, as when a coworker’s portrait of a pet, taped to the side of her computer, invites conversation. Each snapshot’s implicit referent, and at the same time its distinctive discursive space, is the network of human relations that gave rise to it.

(Smith, 2001, para. 28)

The network that takes shape is not solely discursive though; it is supported by and made up of human and non-human relationships, including connections between media, technologies, and people. The photograph of a pet on a coworker’s computer refers to other times and other spaces. It is brought into the workplace through particular actions and provides the possibility for the action of sharing memories. As workplaces change and interaction between colleagues may be increasingly mediated by technologies
and/or take place at a distance, these casual connections that may be made through photographs change as well. Online profile images may make use of vernacular photographs that suggest connections to other times and other places. These connections make it possible for ‘seeing through,’ as described by Martha Langford, to take place. Actors and spaces may change, but the possibility for connection through vernacular photographs remains.

Using photographs to organize information and make sense of the past is not a new practice. The particular qualities of photography as a medium make it well suited to communicative sharing. As early as 1857, art historian Lady Elizabeth Eastlake commented that photography offers “a new form of communication between man and man – neither letter, message, nor picture – which now happily fills up the space between them” (as quoted in Newhall, 1937/2009, p.85).11 In the first part of my dissertation, I explore and reflect on histories of photography and how photography has performed as a medium of communication. To understand how contemporary practices of displaying vernacular photographs borrow from and adapt existing practices of exhibition, I wanted to know more about how vernacular photographs have been publicly shared and how this sharing has changed (or not changed) over time. The way people view vernacular photographs today and the places where they view them have undoubtedly changed since Lady Eastlake marvelled at the possibilities of photography in the mid-nineteenth century. The connections between memory, photographs, and spaces where photographs are displayed create complex networks of relationships that link people, media, and technologies. With this in mind, the overall question explored in this dissertation is: how do different actors (people, media, and technologies) afford opportunities to share memory through the (re)presentation of vernacular photographs by drawing on or adapting existing practices of exhibition?

In chapters two and three, I explore this question by examining how particular ways of imagining, describing, and displaying photographs have changed over time. Photography’s relationship to other media and forms of expression has been a key point

11 In this dissertation, I include the date of the publication consulted and the original date of publication if the work has been reprinted. The original publication date also appears in the references section.
of discussion for artists, scholars, and critics for nearly two centuries (see, for example, work by: Cross & Peck, 2010; Marien, 2002/2010; Mayor, 1979; Morgan W. D., 1944; Newhall, 1937/2009; Rosenfeld, 2004; Trachtenberg, 1980). While these discussions have influenced my thinking on photography, my goal is not to classify photography as a set of particular objects or definitive practices. Photography is an ‘action;’ it is “borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, translated" according to the different agencies of actors – including, but not limited to: cameras, film, memory cards, enlargers, printers, software programs, and computer screens – that meet at a particular time and in a particular space (Latour, 2005, p. 46). When photographs are exhibited in galleries or in online spaces – these too are actions. In the examples discussed above, Marianne Nicolson’s work, Jeff Topham’s documentary, and Michael Simons and Paul Shoebridge’s interactive website allow viewers and visitors opportunities to engage in deeply meaningful interpretations and memory work. However, these projects do not necessarily offer opportunities for viewers and visitors to engage with media in creative ways. While the three projects greatly provoked affective responses for me in different ways, I am not sure how they may have influenced others. To examine how actors may interact to afford opportunities for repurposing and remaking everyday photographs, I found myself drawn to projects that bridged both the world of museum exhibition and the online realm.

Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are two projects that have been exhibited in gallery spaces and online spaces. Rather than creating a typology of exhibitions that have been shown in both gallery and online spaces, I wanted to select a limited number of projects and examine them closely to consider how the different spaces and different media actors could influence how people engaged with and contributed to the projects. Having identified the two projects, discussed further below, I had particular questions in mind: how did actions associated with gallery exhibitions influence online exhibitions? Conversely, how did online exhibitions contribute to gallery display? What vernacular photographs were people willing to share in online spaces and how did they use them to share personal memories with others? And, particularly in the online spaces, how did people use media and technologies to respond to these shared memories and vernacular photographs? In chapters five, six, and seven I address some of these questions as I share my examination of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph.
Exhibitions in physical spaces and online spaces are of course different from one another. But these two types of spaces can be used to share vernacular photographs to similar effect, namely, to share memory and engage others in meaning-making practices that make sense of the past in the present. In this dissertation, I focus on two examples where vernacular photographs have been shared in both gallery exhibitions and in online exhibitions: *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*. *Collected Visions* developed from artist Lorie Novak’s interest in archival family photographs and experimenting with early digital information sharing platforms in the 1990s and early 2000s. *Dear Photograph* began with Taylor Jones posting photographs from his family albums on a Tumblr weblog in 2011. These two projects have appeared in gallery exhibitions and in online spaces. As such, they may be thought of as ‘hybrid’ projects that exist in both online and physical spaces. *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* both allow visitors and viewers to submit and comment on material that will be added to exhibitions. This type of exchange means that moments of ‘seeing through’ can extend beyond individual reflection and prompt creative action when people are able to share their own stories and vernacular photographs. The types of photographs included in *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* include family snapshots, tourist photographs, and professionally produced portraits and range from images made in the early twentieth century to those made today.

*Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are more than digitized family albums or online scrapbooks. Each project encourages creative refashioning and remediation of existing vernacular photographs. In *Collected Visions*, visitors to the website are able to select and arrange images from an accumulating archive to reflect on and imagine pasts that resonate with their own experiences. In *Dear Photograph*, contributors submit re-photography where a historical image is returned to the site where the image was originally made and included in the production of a new image. Both projects have travelled into and out of exhibition spaces in museums and galleries. Different iterations of *Collected Visions* have been displayed in the United States and in Europe, and a display of *Dear Photograph* images was included in a photography exhibition in Switzerland and at an arts festival in Sudbury, Ontario. Selecting a project such as
Collected Visions, which was at the vanguard of online crowd-sourcing and creative remediation of vernacular photography in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, provides a valuable contrast to the more recent Dear Photograph. The different time periods offer insight into how new media and technologies continue to draw on and adapt existing forms of communication.

Structure of the Dissertation

In order to explore how practices of sharing memory through the exhibition of vernacular photographs draw on and adapt existing media to serve evolving meaning-making practices, this dissertation includes a number of different components leading to the examination of two specific cases, Collected Visions and Dear Photograph, where vernacular photographs have been exhibited in gallery spaces and online spaces. In chapter two, I offer a review of scholarly literatures concerned with vernacular photography, memory practices, remediation, and what I have termed ‘spaces of exchange’ – those physical and virtual spaces where people are able to ‘see through’ photographs, engage with them, and add to memory interactions. The title of chapter two, “Travelling Concepts in Action,” references Mieke Bal’s (2002) work, Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide. Bal suggests that when conducting research, concepts are “the sites of debate, awareness of difference, and tentative exchange” (p. 13). In chapter two, I discuss how vernacular photography, memory practices, remediation, and ‘spaces of exchange’ are dynamic concepts that travel across disciplinary boundaries. I have followed these concepts through certain veins in scholarly literatures such as anthropology, communication studies, literary studies, and visual studies to inform my research on how vernacular photographs are used as part of communication and exhibition practices.

In chapter three, I provide a history of exhibition practices that have shaped how people have engaged with vernacular photographs over time from the nineteenth century to the present day. Historian and archivist Joan Schwartz suggests that photography may be imagined “as a constellation of technologically, culturally, and socially constructed practices” (2000, p.1). To build on Schwartz’s metaphor, there are innumerable stars in the universe of people, media, and technologies that have
influenced how photography and exhibitions of photography have developed. In chapter three, I focus on a number of different constellations, including: nascent photography in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, the production and circulation of *cartes-de-visite*, exhibitions of photography at the 1851 Great Exhibition, exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art in the first half of the twentieth-century, and online exhibitions involving vernacular photography like Esther Parada’s *Transplant*. Rather than seeking to link different examples into a seamless continuum, my goal in chapter three is to examine how each example of making and sharing photographs involves interaction of people, media, and technologies. The history of photography presented in chapter three also helps to situate contemporary practices of exhibiting and circulating vernacular photography, not as an abrupt departure owing to a change in media and technologies, but as an illustration of how the history of photography is a contested history of interacting people, media, and technologies.

In chapter four, I discuss the research activities conducted for this dissertation, including visits to museums and museum archives and interviews with scholars and curators who work with vernacular photographs. These interviews were a rich source of insight into how following the actors involved in the intersection of vernacular photographs, memory practices, and remediation can lead to unexpected outcomes. In chapter four, I also discuss approaches for conducting analysis of the *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* webpages. Online content can sometimes provide the illusion of permanence; if material is shared online, it can be accessed anytime and anywhere one has an Internet connection. In reality, though, websites are far from stable. Changes may be subtle and go largely unnoticed or they may be overt and reconfigure all of the content on a particular website. In chapter four, I describe my systematic review of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* and reflect on some of the challenges of researching online material.

Detailed narratives about *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are included in chapters five and six – ‘origin stories’ of the respective projects based on information obtained from the websites, existing popular and scholarly discussions about the cases,
and interviews conducted with Lorie Novak and Taylor Jones.  These origin stories are presented at the start of the chapters, following the method of case study research suggested by social scientists Alexander George and Andrew Bennett where a “résumé of the case at the beginning of the analysis [is provided to give] readers the essential facts about the development and outcome of the case. The ensuing write-up can blend additional historical detail with analysis” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 94). Analytical explanation then follows from the detailed narrative. In this case the analytical explanation offers an investigation into the respective elements in each case, how vernacular photographs are used, remediated, and displayed in ways that allow for the possibility of an online space of exchange. In reviewing the content of the websites, my goal, in part, is to reflect on the type of content displayed and how this content and the way it is displayed may change over time.

In chapter seven, I present ‘microstories’ that trace encounters with specific images and texts in Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. These microstories document memory work processes that emerged during the course of my research. The microstories focus on detailed examinations of encounters (my own, as well as encounters between visitors who have left comments and offered reactions by contributing their own vernacular photographs and narratives inspired by vernacular photographs). The repurposing of vernacular photographs affords opportunities for memory and meaning-making. These microstories illustrate the different ways in which people, media, and technologies come together in the interactive practices made possible through the gallery and online exhibitions of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. These microstories also recount my engagement in meaning-making practices with specific contributions to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph in order to reflect on particular uses of vernacular photographs through a close examination of certain images while also situating that examination as part of the larger and ongoing projects of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph.

12 A semi-structured interview was conducted with Lorie Novak in her studio space in Brooklyn, New York. Repeated attempts to set up an interview with Taylor Jones were not replied to and data in this case is from interviews between Jones and Susan Stamberg for a National Public Radio (NPR) story and an interview of Jones produced for the Shuterfly website.
Chapter eight concludes with a summary of research activities and insights about the potential and challenges that new forms of interaction bring to the study of vernacular traditions and emergent socio-mnemonic practices in contemporary life. People, media, and technologies interact and influence one another in important evolving and ongoing ways when vernacular photographs are used to make sense of the past in and for the present.
Chapter 2.

Travelling Concepts in Action

*We look for meanings, not behind our vernacular artifacts and interactions, but in them.*

(Abraham, 2006, p. 1)

This chapter examines intersecting concepts that came into focus in my study of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*. My research on the notion of ‘vernacular’ in the context of photography examined the wide range of objects, practices, and events that influence everyday photographic practices. The work of tracking different uses of vernacular photography in creative memory practices inspired a reflection on three concepts: 1) remediation, 2) mnemonic practices, and 3) spaces of exchange. Cultural theorist Mieke Bal (2002) uses the term ‘travelling concepts’ in her discussion of how hermeneutic approaches can transcend disciplinary boundaries. Bal suggests that these hermeneutic approaches – close ‘readings’ – of specific case studies provide opportunities to “explore the possible relations between concept[s] and object[s]” (2002, p. 10). This work does not rely on a fixed set of methodological approaches; instead, it requires that the researcher “conduct a meeting between several [methodological tools], a meeting in which the [research] object participates, so that together object and method can become a new, not firmly delineated field” (2002, p. 4). Cultural analysis, with Bal’s description in mind, encourages the researcher to investigate how a particular object, “a text, a piece of music, a film, a painting,” for example, might be thought of as a “living creature, embedded in all the questions and considerations that the mud of [researcher’s] travel[s] [have] spattered onto it” (2002, p. 4). In seemingly contradictory fashion, the more ‘mud’ that a research object acquires during a researcher’s travels, the more both the object and the questions about the object acquire the capacity to take on a sharper focus. Concepts, though, Bal notes, are “dynamic in [and of] themselves”
(2002, p. 11). On the uneven terrain of cultural analysis where objects are revealed as embedded in different situations and circumstances, the value of travelling concepts that accompany the researcher on his or her journey is that in “defin[ing], provisionally and partly, what a particular concept may mean, we gain insight into what it can do” (2002, p. 11, emphasis in original). Concepts, then, are flexible tools that can be used to examine research objects more clearly. Remediation, mnemonic practices, and spaces of exchange have helped to shape the examinations of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*. These three concepts are tools that aid in doing the work of ‘close reading’ for two specific cases. They are also concepts that have helped me to organize the histories of exhibiting vernacular photographs in chapter three. Reflecting on these concepts and their possible meanings provides insight into how remediation, mnemonic practices, and spaces of exchange have been and are involved in the use (and reuse) of vernacular photographs to communicate memory and to share the past with others.

This chapter also introduces theoretical influences that have shaped my thinking on how spaces of exchange, where memory is communicated with vernacular photographs, exist as possibilities rather than guaranteed outcomes. The vernacular photographs that we consult, preserve, and share provide us with opportunities to reflect on the recent and not so recent past. How we choose to consult, preserve, and share these photographs though is influenced by a series of affordances and constraints that may not be fully recognized as we flip through the pages of a photo album or click through images online. The flip of a page or the click of a mouse may be thought of as actions resulting from the complex network of interactions among actors – people, media, and technology. Vernacular photographs, remediation, and mnemonic practices are parts of networks of influence that shape how information and memories may be communicated in spaces of exchange. By examining how media, technologies, and people – each a different type of actor – influence one another, the possibilities and constraints for communicating our understandings of the past can be imagined as a network of connections. Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholar Bruno Latour (2005) uses the terms action and actors when he discusses how sociology may be thought of as the ‘tracing of associations’ between human and non-human actors, each
with different agencies. Agency in Latour’s work on actor-network theory (ANT) refers to how collections of actors meet and influence one another in diverse ways.¹³ These meetings, these associations, are where action takes place. Action begets the possibility of further action in a cascading network of associations that are constantly forming and reforming. Studying action is the examination of how meaning and information is transported, transformed, distorted and modified by different types of actors (Latour, 2005, p.39). Studying action is the close investigation and description of “a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled” (p. 44).

An approach informed by ANT, as Latour reminds us, has “no established component that can be used as an incontrovertible starting point” (2005, p. 29). However, mapping the intersections of remediation, mnemonic practices, and spaces of exchange as travelling concepts and reflecting on how they meet in Collected Visions and Dear Photograph does require some kind of starting point. In this chapter, that starting point is a reflection on passages from Maurice Halbwachs’ works, On Collective Memory (1925/1992) and The Collective Memory (1950/1980). This discussion highlights how memory is communicated in the connections between actors – media, technologies, and people – to meet the needs of the present. Actors never exist on their own. Meaning making and the sharing of memory with and through vernacular photographs is possible, not because vernacular photographs are ‘free’ to associate with multiple actors; rather they are “well-attached” (Latour 2005, p. 218) in communicative networks of remediation and mnemonic practices that can foster spaces of exchange.

¹³ Latour notes that “ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all fully explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for a lack of a better term, we would call non-humans’ (2005, p.72). Participating in an action is not viewed as a willful choice reserved for humans with the capacity to choose, rather, action is the intersection of actors where the combination of different agencies presents the possibility for both expected and unexpected outcomes.
Transporting and Transforming Memory: Tracing Connections between People and Media

In the early twentieth century, French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1992; 1950/1980) outlined what he terms 'collective memory.' Rather than people holding an individual storehouse of images in their heads to draw from,14 Halbwachs suggests that we remember based on our associations with others. He writes: “Our memories… are recalled to us through others even though we were the only participants in the events[…] […] In reality, we are never alone” (Halbwachs, 1950/1980, p. 24). For Halbwachs, memory is an action where the past is recalled according to the connections one has with other people. These people are actors – intermediaries and mediators – who transport, transform, and modify the meaning of memory (Latour, 2005, p. 39) at a particular moment in time. Halbwachs uses a description of walking through London’s streets to illustrate how different actors contribute to this transportation and transformation of memory. When walking with an architect, a historian, or a businessman, one is attuned to the city in particular ways; the influence of these actors emphasizes certain aspects of memory and downplays others. Actors need not be physically present to influence an action. When walking London’s streets alone and recalling his reading of Dickens as a child, Halbwachs suggests that this text helps him “have remembrances in common” with people who may have walked the same streets years earlier (1950/1980, p. 25). The walk through the city anchors the example of how collective memory relies on multiple actors, illustrating how “We [carry] with us, in effect, feelings and ideas originating in other real or imaginary groups; we [converse] inwardly with other people” (p. 31). Memory is an action, but not necessarily one that can be empirically observed with predictable outcomes. Halbwachs though does suggest that

14 Frances A. Yates’ work, The Art of Memory (1966), offers an extensive history on theories of memory and mnemonic practices that illustrates how the roots of Western scholarly approaches to memory studies are rooted in a concern for how precise training and personal effort can enhance one’s ability to develop an individual ‘storehouse’ of information, centered around the importance of building one’s rhetorical prowess for engaging in discussion and debate.
there might be particular types of associations that encourage certain ways of remembering.\textsuperscript{15}

Halbwachs (1925/1992) focuses on three specific social frameworks, three types of social groups that influence collective memory: family, religion, and class. As a sociologist in the first half of the 1900s, Halbwachs is particularly interested in identifying how certain patterns of behaviour emerge and how those behaviours reflect underlying structuring principles of a society. The institutions that Halbwachs names as responsible for influencing collective memory are imbricated in everyday activities associated with how people live together, their shared worldviews, and the work and leisure activities people participate in outside of the home. These three entities may be considered vernacular institutions. Rather than prescribing an unchanging model of how one should act and engage with others and the world, Halbwachs emphasizes that collective memory is always concerned with the present; that is, how one participates in family life, religious life, and within a certain social class as influenced by how members of those groups conceive of and recreate the past in order to meet contemporary needs. Halbwachs acknowledges that there are other social groups and other types of social memory than the three frameworks of family, religion, and social class that are the focus of his study (1925/1992, p. 40). However, the three frameworks that Halbwachs discusses encompass a diverse and broad range of social interactions and influences that affect people on a daily basis. Rather than memory being dictated to individuals from an hierarchical authority, or alternatively, welling up from the bottom of a social order in response to hierarchical pressures, Halbwachs suggests that memory develops

\textsuperscript{15} Halbwachs and Latour have distinctly different ideas about sociology. As a later twentieth century and early twenty-first century scholar who can look back on disciplinary trends that include poststructuralism and postmodernism, Latour reflects on disciplinary assumptions that are often taken for granted: primarily that sociology relates to the study of social groups. Latour challenges these assumptions in his work and argues for a ‘sociology of associations,’ which, rather than selecting a group and seeking to identify the social forces that influence the organization and behaviour of people within that group, focuses instead on the confluence of actors and their connections in different types of actions. Working in the early twentieth century, Halbwachs’ approach reflects the influences of a different time. It is not my intention to pit Halbwachs and Latour against each other or do a disservice to either. Both scholars account for influence and change in their description of social actions – to be in the world is to be constantly creating connections. Halbwachs identifies these connections according to the people who make up the different social groups we travel through. Latour identifies these connections as differing influences, actors with agency that are in constant interaction.
and circulates in a variety of directions according to the social groups with which one interacts. As will be discussed in the sections on vernacular photography and ‘vernacularity,’ drawing boundaries around what is included and what is excluded when discussing the limits of the vernacular fails to account for the diversity of influences, practices, events, and experiences that actually make up social life. When Halbwachs names family, religion, and social class, these frameworks, while establishing certain boundaries, include the major social groups that we spend the majority of our time with: those with whom we live with (family and friends), those with whom we share common beliefs (religion, though this can also relate to a shared worldview), and those with whom we work (social class).

One of the limitations of this structural model is it can imply that people within social frameworks operate unaware of how their actions and interactions are influenced by those social frameworks. However, Halbwachs’ discussions of collective memory suggest that the individual plays a key role in organizing his or her own personal experiences and understandings of the past depending on different social groups of which he or she is a part at different times. Here, there are key differences between Latour’s ANT notion of agencies and Halbwachs’ understanding of an individual’s ability to exercise conscious control over the creation and recollection of memory; the two are not directly comparable. However, Halbwachs does comment that certain objects, certain types of media and communication, are vital to how people in particular social groups commemorate the past.

While Halbwachs does distinguish between ‘autobiographical memory,’ what we remember about our lives and our first-hand experiences, and ‘historical memory,’ the

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16 Andrew Martin adeptly summarizes Latour’s account of ‘agencies’ when he writes that humans give objects agency: “Like a door closer that acts for a groom or a speed camera that acts for a policeman and a photographer, information from the social and physical world is translated into objects to give them agency to act in the place of people” and influence the possible actions that may result from an interaction (Martin, 2005, p.284). With respect to vernacular photography, Barbara Harrison emphasizes that any research that includes a consideration of photographic technologies must keep in mind that “it is not cameras but people who take pictures” (Harrison, 2002, p. 92). Cameras and photographs have particular agencies, but those agencies are shaped by people.
much longer expanse of time that precedes our existence, he describes how lived autobiographical memory intersects with historical memory according to how we are socialized in particular groups that often rely on informal commemorative practices. For Halbwachs, these informal practices include how he learned about the exploits of the Second French Empire from an elderly woman’s tales and rumours and the resonance he feels for the stories of his grandparents that connect him to the late 1700s. For Halbwachs, the role of the family is particularly important in shaping collective memory and connecting lived history with learned history. Sometimes these powerful connections are based on the use and reuse of media. Halbwachs writes of how “books, engravings, and paintings” can be used to (re)create environments that foster recollection; however this recollection is not a reproduction of the experiences and emotions of an earlier time:

Our primary concern is not with the great poets [of past ages] and their works. In fact, their writing affects us in ways quite different from those in which they affected contemporaries. We have made many discoveries about them. Rather, this mentality, which permeated everything and showed itself in multifarious ways, is locked up as it were in the magazines and “family literature” of the time. As we page through such publications, we seem to see the old folks once again, with the gestures, expressions, poses, and dress of period engravings; we seem to hear their voices and recognize the very expressions they used. Of course, these “family museums” and popular magazines are accidental leftovers to which we might never have had access. Nonetheless, if I do reopen these books, or if I do rediscover these engravings, pictures, and portraits, I am not driven by scholarly curiosity and love of what is old to consult them in a library or view them in a museum. I discover them in my own home, in my parents’ and friends’ homes, on the wharves, and in the windows of antique shops.

(Halbwachs, 1925/1992, p. 65-66)

Writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, the ‘popular’ and ‘accidental’ discoveries of pictures and portraits Halbwachs describes above were, as he notes, found largely in domestic spaces and in impromptu public displays. Halbwachs emphasizes the distinction between scholarly engagement with mediated representations of the past that he associates with libraries and museums and the everyday interactions one might have with images. As we will see in the next chapter, how and where vernacular photographs have been displayed affords different types of
communicative engagement. While vernacular photographs are powerful actors in the transportation and transformation of memory, their specific travels and various associations with other actors have evolved and changed over time. Before exploring this history of how vernacular photographs have been exhibited and how they have been used to communicate memory, I return to the concepts that will help frame the history to be provided and provide background for an examination of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph.

Vernacular Photography and Muddy Definitions

The photographs that are exhibited in Collected Visions and Dear Photograph depict a wide range of subjects in a variety of settings including, but not limited to: family portraits, street photography, people on vacation, weddings, birthdays, and Christmas celebrations. In Collected Visions and Dear Photograph we see photographs that people have carefully preserved, sometimes for years, sometimes for generations that are remade as digital objects. These photographs, broadly speaking, are vernacular photographs. Here I return to the quotation from Geoffrey Batchen used in the opening of this dissertation to describe vernacular photographs as those images that have “always been excluded from photography’s history: ordinary photographs, the ones made or bought (or sometimes bought and then made over) by everyday folk from 1839 until now, the photographs that preoccupy the home and the heart but rarely the museum or the academy” (Batchen, 2001, p. 57). Batchen’s definition is exclusive in its own way, ignoring, for example, the relationship between vernacular photography and the archives, but it does provide a valuable opening for a discussion of vernacular photography. The brief but detailed definition addresses the production and acquisition of these images (without drawing a distinction between those that are made and those that are purchased), within a specific historical period (nearly two centuries), with attention to where these images are used and preserved (the home, but generally not the museum or the academy), and with some concern for how (as objects of the heart) people have used them. These basic elements provide us with a preliminary field for considering the range of actors involved in the making and circulation of vernacular photographs.
Batchen’s description is certainly wide enough to account for the diverse range of photographs that we can consult and consider on an everyday basis: for example, the pictures of our family and friends that we may have on our desks or carry with us on our smartphones as well as those photographs we know are safely tucked away in albums and scrapbooks. However, his definition also points to a common theme in discussions of vernacular photography as being that which is excluded, or an alternative, to ‘official’ histories of the medium of photography. In fact, Batchen goes so far as to claim that vernacular photography is repressed, denied, and ignored by institutional authorities – like museums and academic institutions – to the point that “vernacular photography is the absent presence that decides what proper photography is not” (Batchen, 2001, p. 59). Keeping in mind the notion of travelling concepts and the need to agree on some basic rules of this conceptual game, I appreciate how Batchen marshals evidence in support of his definition by pointing to what he identifies as gaps and occlusions in the histories of photography as constructed by curators and art historians.

Batchen’s work provides a starting point for walking what might be considered a middle ground between two of the key themes in recent critical scholarship on photography that examines the role of medium “in the lives of individuals and within institutional settings,” and “how photography operates as a discursive system linked in historically constructed ways to other discourses on perception, cognition, memory, and meaning” (Keenan, 2011, p. 69). Photography is both object – printed image or digital file situated in a specific network of individuals and influences at a particular time – and idea – representing an experience or connecting us to a past that we may or may not have been a part of. Vernacular photography further complicates this object/image duality because to refer to something as ‘vernacular’ connotes that it must accommodate both the mundane and the exceptional in everyday. As we will see, “vernacularity” draws attention to how objects and ideas travel between these supposed polarities of the quotidian ordinary and extraordinary to reflect the complexity of social practices and social interactions (Abrahams, 2006, p. 12). In this project, thinking about how to define and describe vernacular photography has meant travelling amongst a variety of evolving meanings that have changed over time depending on both where (within domestic spaces as well as more public spaces like the museum) and when vernacular photographs are used and displayed. Batchen’s assertion that vernacular photography
has been actively repressed and ignored in some artworlds associated with museums and academia perhaps oversimplifies the classification of certain images and practices as vernacular photography and ‘proper’ photography. Rather than seeking gaps in the history of photography and photographic exhibitions where vernacular photography has been excluded, I sought out areas of intersection, areas of overlap, between institutions and the everyday, between public and private spaces, and between collective and personal memories, motivations, and desires. Some of these intersections are described in the next chapter.

Scholars and practitioners continue to debate and discuss how vernacular photography should be defined. These debates and discussions tend to tread repeatedly through concerns about who is creating photographic images, the original intent of the maker, and how photographs circulate beyond the circumstances of their production. Photography historian Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw and art historian Ross Barrett describe vernacular photography as the “kind of photographic production that permeates daily existence. It not only includes private things such as family snapshots and photograph albums, but also includes public photographs that we might possess or encounter, such as news, advertising, or souvenir images” (2008, p.7). Cutshaw and Barrett also suggest four categories of “value and function” when examining vernacular photography: Archive, Proof, Surrogate, and Yardstick (2008, p. 8). These categories, which overlap, include space for a wide variety of images: family albums, mug shots, identification photographs, souvenirs, school yearbooks and x-rays. The typology that Cutshaw and Barrett outline encompasses historical and contemporary social uses of vernacular photography in its broadest sense and also anticipates how future vernacular photography might be categorized according to the four groups. For Cutshaw and Barrett, the study of vernacular photography reveals the “traces of the hopes, desires, anxieties, and frustrations that everyday people have brought to bear on photographs and photographic activities,” noting that by “connecting these traces across temporal, geographical, and media borders, we can begin to account both for the ‘marvel’ of photography and its ever-expanding ubiquity” (2008, p. 25). Rather than delineating strict boundaries between types of vernacular photography, Cutshaw and Barrett’s discussion emphasizes how vernacular photography may be viewed as a field of intersecting influences and possibilities.
This notion of intersecting influences and possibilities is also reflected in Geoffrey Batchen’s 2000 survey of curators, gallery directors, art historians, and scholars of photography who were asked the question, ‘what is vernacular photography?’ In their answers, individuals reflected on the juxtaposition of vernacular photography and vernacular style – how, for example, a commercial advertisement may have a vernacular aesthetic, but not be categorized as vernacular photography. They also commented on how vernacular photography may best be thought of as a “non-category” that is “defined not by what it is, but what it isn’t” (Batchen, 2000, p. 229). Batchen’s participants drew attention to assumptions about vernacular photography as standing in opposition to art and artistic ambition with vernacular photography being associated with amateur makers concerned with the communicative aspects of photography rather than the expressive opportunities offered by the medium. However, as respondents went back and forth in their musings, areas where definitions overlapped or extended into other types of photography like travel photography, devotional images, and cartes-de-visite, for example, suggest that those seemingly strict distinctions between art and vernacular are artificial and that any discussion of photography definitions takes place on an expansive “continuum of visual culture” (Batchen, 2000, p. 231). While the question posed by Batchen resulted in a rich discussion rather than definitive answers, holding conversations with people who work with and reflect on vernacular photographs illustrates how vernacular photography as a travelling concept accrues layers of ‘muddy’ speculation and consideration as an object of study.

As I ventured through the various fields where vernacular photography is discussed in search of a suitable definition for this research project, I found that interviews with individuals who work with vernacular photographs provided valuable opportunities to engage with people who have travelled across a variety of fields in their roles as artists, curators, and scholars. When asked about how he defines vernacular photography and where the boundaries might lie then-chief curator of the International Center of Photography (ICP), Brian Wallis, suggested that vernacular photography is “boundary-less” and that rich understandings of the historical and cultural meanings of any photography may best be explored by focusing on the “uses of photographs, how they circulate and how they serve particular individuals or general audiences” (personal communication, June 17, 2013). Hélène Samson, curator at the McCord Museum,
stressed the fact that regardless of when and how it might have been produced and how it might have circulated, vernacular photography always has links to contemporary contexts and contemporary practices (personal communication, June 10, 2013). Samson also noted that present-day vernacular photography – the kind of work that is shared on Facebook or captured and stored on mobile phones, for example – challenges some of the existing documentation and preservation strategies that museums turn to when collecting vernacular photographs. For Samson, these challenges provide opportunities for creative interpretations and collaborations that cross disciplines and types of media and bring together different actors.

Martha Langford, professor of art history, curator, and author commented that some definitions of vernacular photography that seek to be all-encompassing do not necessarily accurately account for what people do with photographs and how they share them. Langford noted, “what I’m really interested in is a kind of relationship with the medium that is experiential so that people have various modes of engagement with it that they talk about very freely, they narrate, they describe. Vernacular photography can create that, obviously, in an ideal world” (personal communication, June 10, 2013). Langford continued by reflecting on how people share photography as part of everyday activities – like a visit to the dog park that includes showing mobile phone pictures of one’s dog to other dog owners – to show their abilities with a camera and their aptitude at capturing a particular moment. Although Langford’s scholarly interests differ from the STS approaches with which Latour’s work has been associated, Langford’s description of how fellow dog owners were keen to share photographs on mobile phones points to how these vernacular photographs are made and circulate by actors – people, technology, and media – acting in concert with one another. Musing on her interactions with people at the dog park and the communicative exchanges that take place when viewing those mobile phone photographs, Langford reflected, “Vernacular photography, I think has to have something to do with storytelling” that goes beyond simple narration to offer a rich description of experience that can then be shared with others (personal communication, June 10, 2013). In her experience with photography first as a photographer, then in roles with the Still Photography Division of the National Film Board, and later as director of the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, Langford reiterated how her interest in what might be thought of as vernacular
photography is linked to the relationships people have with photographs and how photographs can be used to trace the relationships between people.

During my interview with Lorie Novak, as in all of the interviews I conducted,17 I asked her to reflect on a definition of vernacular photography. Novak expressed her dislike of how the term ‘vernacular photography’ was used to describe found photographs18 or broadly to describe everyday photographs made by non-professionals (personal communication, June 19, 2013). In the discussion that followed, Novak explained that for her, the emphasis on the non-professional aspect of vernacular photography overshadowed the importance of the everyday aspects associated with the production and use of certain types of images. For Novak, vernacular photography is also related to a desire to mark a particular moment in time. During the interview we discussed how studio photography might also fit as part of vernacular photography and returned to the desire to mark a moment in time. Whether or not the photograph was made by someone classified as a ‘professional’ who is, for example, credentialed in a particular field or derives income from making photographs, a photograph can be thought of as a vernacular photograph if it becomes part of everyday activities – consulted on a daily basis when it is displayed as a studio portrait on a family’s mantle, a school photograph stuck to a refrigerator with a magnet, or the lock screen of a mobile phone. These photographs also circulate beyond domestic and personal spheres and may be publicly exhibited in a variety of ways, including in museums (as will be discussed in the next chapter).

There are ongoing debates about where the boundaries of vernacular photography lie. Settling on a definitive understanding of what is, and what is not, vernacular photography remains a challenge. The debates and conversations about what vernacular photography is, and indeed photography itself, vary depending on who

17 An example of an interview guide used when interviewing participants for this research is included in the appendix: Interview Guide Example – Lorie Novak

18 Images that are referred to as ‘found photographs’ can include those photographs that have been separated from their makers and owners and subsequently ‘discovered’ in places like garage and estate sales or flea markets. Mark Godfrey (2005) discusses found photography with a focus on how contemporary artists have used, or purported to use, found images in their practices in a variety of ways.
is involved in the discussion, their personal and professional backgrounds, the type of images being considered, the media that supports the images, as well as the real and imagined motivations of the photographer and any people represented in the images (Cutshaw & Barrett, 2008; Batchen, 2001; Batchen, 1997; Bourdieu, 1990; Chalfen, 1987; Dickens, 1862; Edwards, 2002; Langford, 2007; Langford; 2001; Newhall, 1937/2009; Marien, 2002/2010; Sontag, 1977; Rose, 2010). In reviewing a variety of these debates and conversations, ‘vernacular photography’ has acquired a ‘muddy’ complexity as a travelling concept. This complexity raises questions as to the appropriateness of seeking to develop a definitive succinct and simplified definition of vernacular photography, since as Latour (1993) asserts, definitions often have a way of endorsing assumptions that segment social life into distinct eras and categories. For Latour, definitions can discount the richness and complexity of our world that “in the same breath,” is influenced by “the nature of things, technologies, sciences, fictional beings, religions large and small, politics, jurisdictions, economies and unconsciousnesses” (1993, p. 129). With respect to vernacular photography, there are many definitions used by different actors involved with studying, making, and vernacular photographic images and objects.

My research suggests that there is no consensus on a definitive description of what constitutes ‘vernacular photography.’ The parameters I have adopted for my research thus rely on a necessarily incomplete description of the full range of potential insights offered by all forms of vernacular photography. In the context of this dissertation, vernacular photography does include those images, primarily made for the head and the heart. Vernacular photography also includes photography that captures everyday moments and photography that is consulted on a daily basis. Regardless of who makes a particular image (whether that individual is categorized as amateur, professional, or artist) and the intent of the maker and the subjects at the time of production, an image may be viewed as vernacular photography depending on the circumstances of its viewing at a particular moment.

This description of vernacular photography offers a starting point to explore the related concepts under study in this research project. First, I turn to a more detailed
reflection of how the vernacular can be studied with ANT approaches that focus on relationships that may often be overlooked.

Vernacularity in Context(s)

Discussions of what vernacular photography is, and more generally what the vernacular is, tend to focus on boundary setting. This desire to create categories about what fits and what does not fit within the vernacular does not necessarily account for how the vernacular is constantly changing. What is classified as vernacular today, may not be vernacular in the future and, likewise, what was understood as vernacular in the past does not always persist as such. In this section, I reflect on the term ‘vernacularity’ as an inclusive field that accommodates both the ordinary and extraordinary, the mundane and the exceptional in everyday life.

The etymological origins of the word vernacular draw on the Latin word (verna) for a slave born within a master's house, a native of a particular place (Vernacular, 2013). Over time though, the word has come to be associated with national languages (as opposed to classical languages like Greek or Latin) and is used to denote particular discernable expressive styles, particularly in architecture. Following the Second World War, researchers – in particular those in anthropology and sociology – increasingly turned their interests to studying contemporary phenomena such as the bus station, the baseball park, or the nightclub as sites of social and cultural practices and interactions (Lantis, 1960, p. 210). In a 1960 article in which she defines and argues for a study of “vernacular culture,” anthropologist Margaret Lantis reflects on the root of the word vernacular and suggests that “the Latin does not seem to suggest traditional, or primitive, but rather ‘of one’s house,’ of the place. This is the connotation we want: the

19 In his mid-nineteenth century publication on architectural styles, George Gilbert Scott outlines the differences between several types of buildings in different European cities. Scott’s (1857) work weighs the aesthetic values of uniformity and flexibility of building styles when considering the preservation, construction, and reconstruction of different streets and neighbourhoods. Scott’s two areas of discussion – secular and domestic architecture – illustrate a desire to categorize within the vernacular as well. Describing national and regional styles in order to create typologies of the vernacular was a key focus of architectural studies from the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. The interest in the built world and its supposed permanence evolves, though, to consider the practices involved in building construction and other social practices that involved in both material and immaterial culture.
culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well-defined places and situations” (1960, p. 203). Rather than identifying a typology of the vernacular, however, Lantis argues that the vernacular (as with any expression of culture) includes a number of different components: individuals’ goals and values, a particular time and place, common knowledge, patterns of relations, and communication (1960, p. 206). When these different elements assemble in particular ways there are rarely firmly established and pre-existing rules that guide interaction; instead, individuals work through conflicts and compromises to agree upon the conventions that will frame their specific practices within a particular time and place.

Categorizing an object or a practice, for example, as vernacular also offers a type of status that can be read as positive or negative depending on the connotation. Again, noting the Latin origins of the term, literary scholars Fiona Somerset and Nicholas Watson comment that because “the term describes a subaltern or local language or style, one accessible to a particular, generally nonelite [sic] group,” discussions about the vernacular are “often associated (negatively or positively) with the vulgar, the provincial, the rustic, the rudimentary, the natural, or the carnal, and sometimes more specifically with the social underclass, or with women” (p.ix). When researchers use the term vernacular they often do so to draw attention to aspects of life that go intentionally or inadvertently unnoticed. For example, in John Brinckerhoff Jackson’s 1984 work, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, one of his goals is to draw attention to the everyday aspects of our environments as a way of thinking about our pasts, “about ourselves and how we relate to the world” (p. x). For Jackson investigating the vernacular is about “learning to how to see” (p. x). In this sense, a concern for the vernacular is not about identifying a particular stylistic type that conforms to a set of established characteristics, but about an appreciation of the everyday that encourages us to be open to the possible connections we have to others at particular times and places.

In the second half of the twentieth century, inquiries into the vernacular and vernacular culture provided anthropologists, linguists, media and literary scholars, as well as interdisciplinary scholars interested in practices and expressions of everyday life, ways of drawing attention to aspects or meanings that are often taken for granted or
ignored. Somerset and Watson (2003) point out “One of the useful things about the term [vernacular] is, indeed, its capacity for suggesting links that might otherwise be hard to see” (p. ix). The vernacular can be easily overlooked in a number of ways because it can be omnipresent and therefore largely ignored as part of the background of daily routine. Drawing attention to the vernacular means examining that which may go largely unnoticed. While Somerset and Watson’s focus is on use and growth of vernacular languages in Europe from the medieval period to the twentieth century, the suggestion of ‘links’ being a key concern when investigating the vernacular resonates with ANT approaches. ANT scholars such as Latour and others (including Michel Callon and John Law) are concerned with the “messy practices of relationality and materiality of the world” (Law, 2009, p. 142). Studying vernacular practices or objects with ANT approaches in mind necessitates engaging with a certain messiness. Law reminds us “An actor is always a network of elements that it does not fully recognize or know” (2009, p. 147). We can never trace all of the relationships that connect an actor to a variety of networks or perceive of all of the links that contribute to a particular action. Determining the boundaries of a study where vernacular elements play a key role remains a challenge as ultimately some links will remain unnoticed; however, the appeal of ANT is that it allows for a description of the various links and relations that a researcher is able to trace in the course of a particular project.

The vernacular might best be imagined as a flexible assembly of practices, objects, expressions, and associations of a particular time and a particular space that both influence and are shaped by our everyday activities. Yesterday’s vernacular is slightly different from today’s, tomorrow’s vernacular is different again from what we know and participate in in the here and now. Subtle (and not so subtle) shifts over time change what is considered vernacular, but if we pre-emptively exclude certain sites (such as a museum, for example) or practices (such as portrait photography) as not being a part of the vernacular, we can miss out on how the vernacular actually shifts to accommodate evolving meanings and evolving understandings. The concept of the vernacular must be broad enough to accommodate the diversity of our everyday experiences that include both the routine and the remarkable. Roger D. Abrahams suggests that we consider multiple registers of meaning when thinking about the vernacular as:
the process by which the lowest and the highest memorable voicings and revoicings are drawn upon, residing just below the surface of consciousness, containing the most recent slang and the most ancient and archaic turns of phrase that draw attention to themselves. Used in this sense, vernacularity is capacious enough to encompass the traditional and the innovative, the highbrow and the popular, and to enable us to trace the movement between these registers that occur in various social interactions.

(Abrahams, 2006, p. 12)

Studying the vernacular in any form requires us to reflect on this movement between registers, and to reflect on the meaning making that happens between the supposedly binary pairings of traditional and innovative, sacred and profane, uncommon and everyday. The vernacular is the inclusive repertoire of social expressions and interactions that occur in a specific time in a specific space.

Online exchanges are a relatively new type of vernacular communication and some scholars have taken up the study of the ‘vernacular web.’ However, efforts to theorize the ‘vernacular web’ can sometimes result in viewing the online realm as a contested site where individuals endorse or challenge particular worldviews. In his discussion of a ‘vernacular web’ supported by the Internet, communication scholar Robert Glenn Howard describes how commercial and policy influences in the early 1990s transformed the Internet from a community of hobbyists – mostly computer engineers – who used their professional connections to build “web pages in their spare time,” to a space where social, economic, and corporate institutions could promote and endorse particular perspectives (2008, p. 501). For Howard, the ‘vernacular web’ only begins to emerge in the mid-1990s in response to corporate interests. The ‘vernacular web,’ as described by Howard, is a discursive dialectic that responds to institutional websites by offering alternatives to perceived social and economic norms. In the cases Howard examines, he describes examples of how bloggers have critiqued ideas, copying content from institutional ideas and refashioning it on their own websites and using comments on posts to challenge information and the people who share information.
on behalf of institutions. Howard’s notion of a ‘vernacular web’ though, like other definitions of the vernacular, relies on positioning the vernacular as an oppositional force – something other – rather than viewing the capacity of vernacularity to account for difference and disagreement within the varied registers of understanding and experience. In his conclusion, Howard comments that the “vernacular web is not just a set of technologies,” but a cluster of vectors that “originate from and return to the lives of real individuals” (2008, p. 509). While this assertion is used to situate ‘real individuals’ in opposition to institutions, Howard’s discussion does not account for the fact that ‘real individuals’ are actually part of institutions. Yes, the vernacular does originate from and return to the lives of real individuals. However, these real individuals include everyone from car company executives, Internet commenters, and the computer science hobbyists who created some of the initial webpages in the early 1990s. The everyday activities of these different types of real individuals may differ widely from one another, but they all have a place within the diverse registers of vernacularity.

Contemporary scholarly interest in the vernacular is also driven in part by a concern for issues of identity, belonging, and voice in the contemporary world. With respect to art and the vernacular, recent examinations in this area have focused on notions of popular culture, translation, and everyday expressions of creativity (Carlano, 2003; Burgess, 2007; Mackey, 2010; Mercer, 2007). For Mackey (2010), an entry point into investigations of the vernacular is identifying that middle, and often overlooked space, between definitions of high art and mass or folk or popular culture. The notion of in-betweenness perhaps provides a valuable way of imagining the vernacular – it is ordinary and everyday, ubiquitous and legion, yet in the same instance, it is difficult to classify and name because it resists being set apart. When one expression or representation of the vernacular is set apart or decontextualized from the everyday, as when one object or image is singled out as a typical or representative type, the complexity of the interactions, influences, and decisions that make up our everyday

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20 One of the websites that Howard discusses is the GM Fastlane Blog where in 2006 General Motors Chairman Bob Lutz posted complaints about potential legislation that would apply to GM vehicles. Howard argues that in comments to this post where a user facetiously endorses Lutz’s position by invoking references to environmental destruction, national security, and terrorism, vernacularity is at work through the hybridized discourse of an online commenter who answers back to an institution through the institution’s own communication platform (p. 505).
actions and interactions can be impoverished. Engaging with the vernacular almost necessitates the development of artificial boundaries: to describe and investigate the everyday, one must delineate a coherent path through those countless interactions, influences, and decisions that shape our everyday experiences. These boundaries are often defined in the negative: the vernacular is not the monumental, not the universal, not the exception. However, attempts at defining the vernacular by negation can fail to account for the rich complexity of how we creatively negotiate our place in the world and in relation to others. The vernacular is bound by evolving but shared understanding of conventions between people and their everyday interactions with one another and the world. Rather than seeking boundaries, approaching the vernacular with an appreciation of how the vernacular itself is bound by evolving but shared understanding of conventions (and reactions to those conventions) that plays out between people and in their everyday interactions with one another and the world can lead to a greater understanding of how the vernacular is both consistently present and highly variable.

The above discussion of ‘vernacularity’ that travels through different disciplinary fields adds additional ‘mud’ to the broad definition of vernacular photography described earlier. By conceiving of the vernacular as expansive and inclusive, it can accommodate the wide variety of experiences, practices, and events that are a part of our daily lives. When those experiences, practices, and events change, either subtly or dramatically according to the different meetings of people, media, and technologies, what is viewed as vernacular one day, may look very different from what was viewed as vernacular in the past and how vernacular may look in the future. With contemporary media and technologies, the way that people engage with and use vernacular photographs to make sense of the past and communicate their memories in the present is an ongoing process and one that I turn to in the next section on remediation.

**Remediation – Encounters with Photographs**

At end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, issues of how media shape our understanding of the world, how media transmit and translate information across technological platforms, and our ability to make meaning with and through these mediated objects as part of our daily lives were and remain
critical scholarly areas of investigation. Though the term ‘remediation’ has origins that relate to correcting or amending a deficiency (Remediation, n.d.), more recently, ‘remediation,’ as articulated by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (1999) refers to the processes by which one type of media borrows from earlier media forms. This borrowing draws on our past expertise of viewing, interacting, and engaging with older media to inform the way that we view, interact, and engage with material supported by new media with properties that differ from those used in the past. While Bolter and Grusin focus their study of remediation on the implications of new media in the digital age, they suggest that the interest in using technologies of representation is not limited to recent developments that allow, for example, for the creation of immersive digital environments, but instead reflects a much longer history of a “desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real” (1999, p. 53). However, this “striving for the real” is not done in “any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined in terms of the viewer’s experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 53). Examining acts of remediation then, requires more than evaluating the suitability of a particular media form to depict an object or experience. With Bolter and Grusin’s discussion in mind, studying remediation includes a reflection on how media are situated within a series of connections between technologies, cultural conventions, and social and aesthetic practices that evoke emotional responses. ‘Remediation’ operates as a valuable travelling concept in the journey of tracing vernacular photography in relation to mnemonic practices and spaces of exchange because it draws attention to the lengthy and diverse history of how media formats borrow from one another and are remade. It also allows for a consideration of how interactive engagements have been and are made possible through the use of remediated photographs from the nineteenth century to the present day.

In this dissertation I use the term ‘photography’ to refer broadly to the practice of producing images using a camera, a device with a lens that focuses an image onto a light sensitive recording surface. Information may be stored on chemically treated plates, paper, or plastics, or registered in binary code as a digital file. While the technology and techniques involved in developing the camera as an image-making tool evolved from such fifteenth and sixteenth century devices, like the camera obscura, designed to assist illustrators, painters, and draughtsmen in reproducing scenes, portraits, and structures in
realistic proportion and perspective (Newhall, 1937/2009), my focus is less on the camera itself and more on the products that the camera makes possible. Photographs, as Bolter and Grusin remind us, are “real – not just as pieces of paper that result from the photographic process, but as a network of artifacts, images, and cultural agreements about what these special images do” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 59). The different types of images that result from different photographic processes – whether heliograph, daguerreotype, calotype, tintype, photograph, or digital file are embedded in complex histories, and while it is beyond the scope of this work to address and account for each process, these processes build and draw upon each other, not only in technical and methodological ways, but in ways that influence the realities of viewing and engaging with the images. ‘Photography’ then is synonymous with the borrowing or mediating practices of actions that capture, produce, and reproduce visual representations of people, objects, and events. In their making and re-making, made possible by media that afford the opportunity for multiple copies and almost endless ways of manipulating images, photographs provide particular ways of bridging time and space that allow the past to be brought forward and continually refashioned in the present.

This bridging between the past and present may occur through alternating mediated processes, what Bolter and Grusin refer to as an oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy (1999, p. 19). When encountering a photographic print on paper or a digital photograph on an electronic device, we can switch our focus back and forth between the content – who or what is depicted – and the media – the metal plate, paper, card, computer screen, or smart phone supporting that content. “The logic of immediacy,” Bolter and Grusin write, “dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented” (1999, p. 5-6). Hypermediacy, on the other hand, is a “style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium” (p. 272). Hypermediacy first calls attention to the supporting medium, reminding the viewer of the mediated nature of the information being presented. Immediacy and hypermediacy, and our ability to shift between the two, occur in a world where “the events of our mediated culture are constituted by combinations of subject, media, and objects, which do not exist in their segregated forms. Thus, there is nothing prior to or outside the act of mediation” (p. 58). Mediated culture is a series of networked relationships where memory, media, and technology have important roles to play. With
access to different media and different technologies – each with their own affordances – people have reconfigured photographic images in a variety of ways to serve their needs. These diverse networked relationships make possible different practices that range, for example, from the Mexican tradition of artistically layering portraits to make *fotoescultura*\(^{21}\) to scanning and uploading images from family albums to social media websites such as Facebook. What these practices have in common is the fact that media and technologies are used to highlight and communicate particular representations of the past that people choose to remember and share.

In outlining immediacy, hypermediacy, and mediation, Bolter and Grusin suggest that while remediation allows for a bridging between past and present and between a focus on content and a focus on the supporting medium, the goal of remediation ultimately leans towards “ignoring or denying the presence of the medium” and putting “the viewer in the same space as the objects viewed” (1999, p.11). This understanding of remediation though seems to discount that work of oscillation that is possible when encountering a photograph. *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*, the two case studies examined in this dissertation, are examples of how remediation can draw on and draw attention to existing media forms and formats and allow for the creative communication of memory in the present. This is not a new process. As we will see in the next chapter, people have used photographic technologies to present and re-present unique insights into lived experiences for nearly two centuries. These remediations encouraged that oscillation between perceiving the object, person, or event depicted and perceiving the material support (or technology or technique) that allowed them to be depicted in the present. The increasingly durability and eventual reproducibility of photographs from their nascent iterations as physically and chemically unstable papers in the early nineteenth century to more robust and more easily transportable formats meant that people could interact with these media forms in variety of ways, both publicly and privately.

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\(^{21}\) Most popular in Mexico between the 1930s and 1950s, *fotoescultura* are three-dimensional representations of individuals based on photographs that are reproduced, painted, and sculpted. While popularity of this particular form of remediation has declined, Maria Garza (2002) notes that *fotoescultura*, normally commissioned to celebrate special occasions or commemorate a deceased loved one, may be given pride of place in a family home.
The objects and practices associated with vernacular photography are made and taken up in a variety of ways by different people and different groups as part of complex meaning-making processes. The technologies and practices that make photographic images possible influence and are influenced by how people use them and the possibilities for use that arise from the relationships between people and technologies. As one media form borrows from previous media and provides the possibility of engaging with the real, remediation is also about the relationships people have with media and the meaning-making possibilities that are afforded in these relationships. These affordances, though, are provided for and constrained not only by the material and technical realities involved in the production of photographic images, but also within the social frameworks where these realities reside. Judith Irvine addresses this with her suggestion that

Remediations, as relations among events of semiosis [symbolic meaning-making], must be located in regimes of value – in ideational (and ideological) systems through which relevant aspects of semiotic form become identifiable for the social agents who draw upon them. Semiotic forms are not simply prior to the social purposes they serve. Instead, semiosis and social purpose are mutually embedded.

(Irvine, 2010, p. 238)

In this discussion, remediation is an ongoing and relational process. As media, technology, and memory influence one another, how people make meaning with and through vernacular photographs does change over time. However these processes of meaning making where remediation is involved do tend to borrow from and reconfigure existing practices of representation and communication.

Descriptions and definitions of remediation are also reconfigured as scholars reflect on how changes in media have influenced their own lives as well as the social impact of these changes. In 2004, Richard Grusin revisited the notion of remediation that he and Jay Bolter outlined five years earlier. Grusin’s essay, “Premediation,” suggests that in the ‘double logic of remediation’ he and Bolter describe, they did not consider how interactions with particular media allow for an engagement with an anticipated future. Writing and reflecting on the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City, Washington DC, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, Grusin argues that premediation
ensures that people will be able to rely on familiar relationships with media in order to manage potential future threats. The ability for television and Internet-based communication platforms to offer non-stop news coverage with contributions from experts and stakeholders inserted into a carefully choreographed and familiar framework that can be deployed in the event of variety of possible scenarios helps people to manage their responses to troubling events – normalizing perceived and actual dangers as part of a manageable everyday experience (Grusin, 2004). While not specifically referring to photography, Grusin’s work here reminds us that people use media in a variety of ways to prepare for and respond to a future that can be filled with uncertainty. This concern for the Janus-like qualities of contemporary media, media that borrow from historical and existing media while they simultaneously promise to shape and mediate the future, resonates with other earlier twenty-first century media scholars as it relates to memory. Joanne Garde-Hansen, for example, stresses the fact that there is a reciprocal relationship with media wherein “Individuals do things to and with media so as to remember, not simply for the sake of personal memory or to contribute to a community’s history, but rather to project the multiple and multiplying layers of complex connections between people, places, pasts and possibilities” (2011, p. 42-43, emphasis added). Garde-Hansen’s comments here are a reminder that the combination of media, memory, and people is an active process. Individuals choose amongst a range of options when selecting media and technologies to preserve and share their memories, and they may select different media at different times for different purposes. These choices, influenced, in part, by the affordances of different media, in turn influence how memories are perceived and engaged with in the future.

22 Grusin is certainly not the only scholar to comment on how media affords frameworks for understanding and response in the wake of disasters. Marita Sturken’s work, Tourists of History (2007), for example, examines, in part, how commercial media seeks to provide ready-made reassurances that life (and consumer patterns) can continue without disruption in the event of terrorist attacks and war.
Mnemonic Practices: Memory, Media, and the Vernacular

Vernacular photographs have been and are used in relation to memory in a variety of ways: they can be used to document events that individuals and groups want to preserve, images can be used to recall the past, to elicit memory, and to organize personal and collective histories in ways that help people situate themselves in the present. Memory though, as a number of scholars note, is not embedded in objects laying in wait for activation; memory is accessed, developed, circulated (as well as repressed, silenced, and forgotten) according to the communicative, affective, material, and immaterial practices in which individuals and groups take part (Connerton, 1989; Halbwachs, 1925/1992; Sturken, 1997; Tota, 2001). “Memory,” as Karen Cross and Julia Peck describe in their work on photography, archives, and memory, is mediation. It is the set of practices through which the past comes to us, but not just the uninterrupted transit of the past to the present. Memory is, in a sense, designed and shaped by the laws and practices of the present, which provide the structure for remembrance to take place.

(Cross & Peck, 2010, p. 127)

While Cross and Peck use the term ‘structure’ here, ‘network’ is easily substituted as the emphasis here is not on the notion of a structure as an overarching and deterministic system of meaning-making, but the possibilities afforded by a series of connections between objects, technologies, people, and practices. To focus on this series of connections, I use the term ‘mnemonic practices’ to draw attention to what people do with vernacular photography – the activities in which people participate and the tools they use to remember with everyday photographs.

‘Mnemonic practices’ also alludes to how people use vernacular photographs as part of established and evolving patterns of communication. Reflecting on the networks that support and have supported the creation and circulation of everyday images provides insight into how different motivations related to memory intersect and influence what gets remembered about the past, who holds the authority to remember, and how media are used in these practices. While the notion of ‘memory studies’ as a distinct
area of academic study is a relatively recent phenomenon, reflecting on and investigating how people remember and the tools and methods they use to recall the past have occurred for millennia. Critical ideas about what memory is and how people should use it have evolved from conceptions of memory that emerged during Classical Antiquity in the Greco-Roman world, where memory was viewed as a tool to enhance rhetorical exchanges to contemporary understandings of memory as an integral element of identity formation and expression. Selecting and interpreting images to aid and develop memory have played an integral part in this lengthy history of how people formally (and informally) recall and communicate information. The emergence of different media forms, including photography and its various iterations, affords individuals opportunities to adapt existing mnemonic practices and to develop new practices to suit their contemporary needs. In this section, I review 1) mnemonic practices and how they have developed within and across certain communicative networks; 2) existing scholarly approaches that examine the relationship between memory and photography; and 3) how new media and technologies may be thought of, not as threats to memory but as the ongoing creation of new networks where memory may be shared.

In the fourth century Before the Common Era (BCE) in the Gregorian calendar, Plato describes one the first theories of memory by relating Socrates’ discussion of how an individual’s mind is akin to a wax tablet where perceptions and ideas leave an impression “as if making marks with signet rings,” so that one might “remember and know anything imprinted as long as the impression remains in the block” (Draaisma, 2000, p. 24). Memory, for Plato, is linked to perceptive understandings of the experiential world and the astute learner can build a valuable store of knowledge. Later, Aristotle builds on the notion of the mind being a store of knowledge, but unlike Plato’s work

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23 The existence of a distinct field of memory studies is also debated. Susannah Radstone (2008), for example, details the advantages, disadvantages, and difficulties of delineating a particular field as memory studies that may lead to theoretical, philosophical, and methodological limitations owing to the desire to codify particular authors and approaches as foundational within the field. Instead, Radstone argues that there is great benefit in encouraging scholars to pursue the study of memory in a variety of existing disciplines – such as history, sociology, and anthropology – that can allow for enriched interdisciplinary understandings of how the past influences the present.
where recollection is the "soul in and by itself, apart from [the] body, recapturing what [the] soul has" previously experienced and differs from memory (Lang, 1980, p. 382). Aristotle suggests that memory and recollection are based in individual experience rather than being influenced by an a priori soul where all memory is preserved to be 'imprinted' with various degrees of sharpness and durability on the wax tablet of the individual's mind (Lang, 1980). Aristotle is focused on the present and how experience and learning shape the way that individuals organize and draw on the past for their contemporary needs. If, as Aristotle suggests, memory is about one’s own capacity to effectively catalogue and access experiences and information, it is possible to develop and implement strategies to carry out this work of organizing and recollecting memory.

As Frances Yates outlines in her 1966 work, The Art of Memory, that details mnemonic practices from antiquity to the Enlightenment, for much of history, the study of memory built on and adapted the basic premise that Aristotle outlined. Studies of memory were focused on individual improvement in order to best communicate one’s position on a particular issue or to demonstrate one’s knowledge of the world. Everyday experiences did not figure in the prescribed memory practices of the rhetorical tradition because they fell outside the realm of structured public communication. In the first century BCE, Cicero notes that what “we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal” and really are not worth remembering because, if “the mind is not stirred by anything novel or marvellous,” it is not inclined to take note of them (as cited in Yates, 1966, p. 25). Cicero uses the example of a sunset: recalling one sunset from the rest is of little importance; what happens everyday and what seems certain to happen in the future without fail, is of little consequence. Mnemonic practices were to be reserved for important matters. Cicero discounted the petty, ordinary, and banal and showed little concern for moments of wonder that take place everyday.

The division of memory into natural and artificial categories leaves no place for vernacular experiences that resonate with us. Literary scholar Philip Fisher explains this in his reflection on Cicero’s presumptions, writing “The sun, the stars at night, snow, a blazing fire and all of the most visually striking experiences of our world are part of the common furniture of everyday life. They are not rare experiences” (1998, pp. 17-18). This appreciation of the everyday is a much more recent phenomenon in memory.
The arts of memory in the Classical tradition favour intellectual engagement that is removed from everyday life. The well-trained mind could participate in appropriate debate about abstractions like moral principles and appreciate the merits of political opinions.

Cicero's *De Oratore*, where he outlines the *loci* method of plotting information on a mental blueprint of a familiar or imagined place, is in some ways an attempt to rise above the persistent concerns of the author's everyday life. At the time of his writing, Cicero had navigated political conspiracies, the ordering of unlawful executions, and exile to Thessalonica (Fantham, 2004). In *De Oratore*, Cicero uses a historical setting and historical figures at a country villa to argue for a return to the rhetorical structures that he attributed to sustaining the now-passed glory of the Roman Empire, rather than commenting directly on the contemporary political, military, and civil discontent in Rome and abroad that had, in his opinion, led to the decline of public life (Fantham, 2004). By critically outlining the virtues of rhetoric, virtues that focused on an individual's ability to properly store and recall communicative tools to debate and persuade, Cicero's work can be understood, in part, as an effort to return to a previous way of life. At the time of writing the *De Oratore*, the idealized Rome that Cicero longed for was gone. *De Oratore*, is not, however, a lament for a lost world; instead, it is an argument for and explanation of how the careful study and practice of mnemonic skills can contribute to the betterment of individuals and society. Memory in this sense was not something that could be 'lost;' with proper training and personal effort the artificial memory that Cicero is concerned with can be appropriately developed and exhibited in the present.

This theme of personal betterment through the study and development of mnemonic skills continues into the early Christian era where it is adopted and adapted from a focus on the rules for civic discourse to a guide for future personal and collective salvation. Students in the Classical tradition of rhetoric would confer with their teachers and consult the rules for rhetoric that were outlined in writing, and this pattern of scholarly teaching and learning leant itself well to religious study and reflection. The *loci* method advocated by Cicero proved useful in committing the virtues and vices as expressed in scriptures to memory from the early centuries of the Common Era through to the Middle Ages. By the 1300s though, the work of sharing and promoting the arts of
memory also occurred through the circulation of material media – texts written in Latin, a *lingua franca* – that allowed individuals who may not share a native language to communicate and share information (largely for the purposes of religious instruction). The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Yates points out, were an age “in which knowledge increased. It was also an age of Memory, and in the ages of Memory new imagery has to be created for remembering new knowledge” (Yates, 1966, p. 84). Those who took up the task of acquiring this new knowledge and new imagery “had more to imprint on memory than in earlier simpler times” (Yates, 1966, p. 84). As the scope and extent of knowledge worth communicating and therefore worth remembering increased, the mnemonic practices associated with remembering and the media that could be used to facilitate mnemonic practices become more complex.

*Memory and the Vernacular*

The arts of memory that Yates outlines in her work stretch from Roman rhetoricians through medieval religious scholars along a common thread of Latin. The use of Latin as the language for communication and scholarship connects the work of Dominican theologians in the fourteenth century to the writings of the first century Before the Common Era. The beginnings of reformation in the organization of Western knowledge and religion that start to emerge in the 1400s comes in part due to the growth and encouragement of vernacular practices of communication and remembrance notably through increased acceptance of the use of the *lingua franca* or native languages and dialects. Yates comments that Bartolomeo da San Concordio's writings of the mid-1300s, the *Ammaestramenti degli antichi*, are among the first descriptions of the arts of memory recorded in a vernacular language, in this case Italian, rather than Latin. At this time, with mnemonic practices being primarily for the recollection of virtues and vices and the degrees of associated salvation or damnation, communicating a method of using images to remember precise information in a vernacular language “suggests that artificial memory was coming out into the world [and it] was being recommend to laymen” (Yates, 1966, p. 92). People outside the relatively closed scholarly and religious communities had somewhat greater access to learning and practising methods of remembering when texts designed to aid the improvement of memory were made available in their vernacular languages. However, these types of manuscript books,
owing to the significant time, resources, and expertise needed to make them, would have a limited ability to influence a wider public because of their limitations as a form of reproducible and circulating media and the relatively low levels of literacy.

For many of the scholars that Yates’ discusses in her history of memory studies, the everyday, often repeated experiences that one might participate in on a regular basis were not worth cluttering up one’s valuable mental space. Neither were they worthy of devoting ink and paper (or parchment or vellum) to describe or document them. Vernacular forms of expression, as communication scholar Harold Innis (1951) points out, draw particular attention to how shifts in media complicate monopolies of knowledge and disrupt the controlled circulation of information. Latin may have been the language of institutions and of certified knowledge for centuries – as that knowledge was managed and disseminated according to religious and political bodies – but it was not the language of the everyday. Innis turns to a meditation by fourteenth-century scholar and author Dante Aligheri that emphasizes the potential of the vernacular languages and the desire of those who reside outside the structures and networks dominated by Latin to express and share their ideas and experiences:

a man’s proper vernacular is nearest unto him as much as it is more closely united to him, for it is singly and alone in his mind before any other. We see that this tongue is highly necessary for all, inasmuch as not only men, but even women and children strive… to acquire it … we will endeavor by the aid of Wisdom which breathes from Heaven to be of service to the speech of the common people.

(Aligheri, as cited in Innis, 1951, p. 22)

Dante’s assertion here suggests that the vernacular – that which is nearest to us when processing information, the voice inside our head, if you will – is a sort of instinctual mode of expression. With this view, we organize our interactions with the world, not by relying on a storehouse of images that provide guidelines for how to respond to situations and experiences, but by drawing (both consciously and unconsciously) on the communication patterns and languages that influence us on a daily basis. We move amongst registers of communication to create and share meaning with others.
Though Innis does not comment specifically on memory or the prescribed arts of mnemonic practices as outlined by Yates, he does suggest that the way a message travels (or does not travel) along networks is influenced by the durability and accessibility of the media used to transmit the message. In one example, Innis describes how the emergence of the printing press challenged the dominance of the manuscript as a key media for transmitting information. The efficiency of the printing press, being able to produce multiple copies of a single page, and the transition to paper and rag-based pages meant that more information could be circulated more quickly and more cheaply than it had been during the manuscript era. This shift did not entirely eliminate manuscript production, but it did shift power and knowledge structures associated with manuscript production from relying on historically legitimated, centrally controlled institutions with tightly monitored networks of communication to more diffuse, though not necessarily as long-lasting networks of information production and circulation. The emergence of a new type of media or media production, such as the printing press, does not entirely supplant or erase existing patterns of media circulation. Manuscripts did not disappear, but remained limited to an exclusive type of circulation –

24 Though Innis does not use the term ‘network,’ his analysis of the endurance and portability of different types of media provides insight into how the ‘bias’ of media (whether it be ‘time-based,’ intending to impart the same message over a lengthy period of time in a specific location, for example, monuments, or ‘space-based,’ designed to communicate information relatively rapidly to a population that is dispersed over a wide, an example here being newspaper or radio) is never fixed. Instead, the temporal and spatial characteristics of different types of media are in a constant tension with one another reflecting competing values of a) privileging particular types of communication in an effort to consolidate and maintain political power and b) making innovative use of (new) media to expand access to channels of communication and information.

While ‘time-based’ media has a particular meaning in communication and media studies, ‘time-based’ media carries a very different media in the art and cultural heritage conservation worlds. The Guggenheim Museum describes ‘time-based media’ as "contemporary artworks that include video, film, slide, audio, or computer technologies" that “have duration as a dimension and unfold to the viewer over time. […] Instability and change are inherent to these artworks, since artist-selected equipment and technologies fail and become obsolete” (“Time-Based Media,” n.d.). Additionally, some ‘time-based’ media in art and museum collections are made anew with each exhibition: “rather than being composed of a unique original, they exist only when they are installed, so every iteration can be considered a different representation of the artwork” (“Time-Based Media,” n.d.).

The two different meanings of ‘time-based’ reflect different values related to communicating information across space and time. For Innis, ‘time-based’ media denotes material perseverance. In artworld discussions, ‘time-based’ describes the limiting, rather than enduring, material qualities of media.
produced by highly trained individuals for a select group who could appreciate both the skill of the artisan and the message communicated by the media. This media shift from manuscript to print production also emphasizes the fact that remediation – borrowing characteristics from existing media practices and remaking them with new technologies and new approaches – has a long history.

Media shifts owing to the introduction of new technologies play a critical role in photography’s appearance in the early nineteenth century. As we will see in the next chapter, the technological shifts involved in the history of photography evolve and expand from a fascination of ‘drawing with light’ that demanded a particular knowledge of complex technical and chemical practices through to the ubiquitous production of images of a variety of digital devices. These developments reflect how the circulation of knowledge required to produce photographs moved rapidly from being a technology associated scientific experimentation to a more accessible practice used in more common everyday practices of increasingly wider social institutions and social groups. Individuals associated with early experimentation with photography, for example, Louis Daguerre and Henry Fox Talbot, shared their findings according to the communicative patterns of their respective national, professional, and social associations. Photography connected Daguerre and Talbot to people with similar values, with similar backgrounds, who shared common interests and ways of communicating. The rapid interest in and growth of photography across different social groups also brought together different types of people who shared their practices with one another. This exchange of information also led to some challenging values or ideas about photography so that what photography was and what it could be used for increasingly varied amongst these groups. The way people use media plays out across a wide range of different registers with differing values, practices, and technical knowledge.

Before turning to a history of photography though, reflecting on the intersection of vernacularity and memory helps to provide an overview of more recent scholarly examinations of mnemonic practices. In the Classical traditions of rhetoric, as discussed earlier in this chapter, vernacular experiences were not particularly valued as worthy of study. However, common or vernacular knowledge that includes, for example, how to make favourite recipes, insight into growing vegetables in a particular region, or the most
effective way to encourage a baby to go to sleep is passed from generation to
generation without necessarily standardized mnemonic practices that prescribe what
should be remembered and how one should do the remembering. Recalling that
‘vernacular’ emerged historically as a descriptor of the native language or dialect used
by specific people during a specific period and is used by contemporary scholars to refer
to other shared practices associated with living in specific places and spaces, mnemonic
practices also vary according to both time and place. Mnemonic practices vary too with
respect to different types of media are used to facilitate the sharing of memory. A
number of memory scholars, however, perceive the historical transmission of vernacular
memory as occurring in a somewhat idealized past – one that is described in sharp
contrast to our technologically influenced, mediatized, and globalized (and often
traumatized) world. Pierre Nora, for example, suggests that

We have seen the end of societies that had long assured the
transmission and conservation of collectively remembered values, 
whether through churches or schools, the family or the state; the end too
of ideologies that prepared a smooth passage from the past to the future.

(Nora, 1989, p. 7)

For Nora, pillars of social order – church, school, family, and state – ensured that what
was worth remembering, both ordinary and extraordinary, was consistently
communicated by organizations that supposedly changed little over time.

Sociologically informed approaches to studying memory and mnemonic practices
tend to focus less on specific templates that people use to remember, for example, the
loco method advocated by Cicero, and more on how people remember the past
collectively and in relation to others. In the early twentieth century, Maurice Halbwachs
(1950/1980) suggested that while individuals have personal recollections of past events
and experiences based on their own understandings, these recollections are
strengthened and supported when individuals make contact with one another through
affective communities. The most easily recognizable actors in affective communities and
the people who endorse our individual understandings of the past tend to be those
people with whom we spend time on a regular basis – family, for example – and those
people who assemble for or are influenced by a notable event –those who gather to
celebrate a royal wedding or a major sporting competition. However, the ability to gather and reflect as affective communities can be challenged by aspects of modern life. Migration of people (whether elective or forced), conflict, industrial development, and ecological degradation can all influence the ability of people to assemble into communities where individuals’ memories can be shared and endorsed in geographically contiguous socio-mnemonic communities. For contemporary scholars interested in how communities support memory, themes of loss and dissociation repeatedly emerge. Jan Assmann (2010) comments that in the twenty-first century, people and communities are caught in an untenable dialectic of individual difference and global identity where the circulation of a shared media contributes to an ongoing tension between opposing forces. While Andreas Huyssen notes that the forces of modernism that compress time and space (including media that allows for the rapid transmission of information between people) have effectively resulted in clashes, over-writings, and erasures between competing geographic, political, and social groups (2003, p. 4). What these and other authors point to is a sense of disconnection from a shared past – a shared past where the perpetuation of memory, being able to recall important information to be used on a daily basis, was integrated into everyday life through prevailing social structures.

However, the notion that there was a time when mnemonic practices ensured the seamless continuation of memory from one generation to the next oversimplifies the realities that influence how actors – human and non-humans – communicate about and recall the past. Memory is fluid and changing. The practices and media associated with memory are similarly flexible and evolving based on the needs of the present. Issues associated with globalization, as Jan Assmann (2010) points out, have resulted in changes to how memory is shared in communities. However, Assmann also notes that memory is not static, but constantly in motion, expanding and contracting based on how people and communities imagine themselves in relation to one another. He writes that cultural memory is an externalization and objectivation of memory, which is individual and communicative and evident in symbols such as texts, images, rituals, landmarks and other ‘lieux de mémoire’; political memory ... shares its externalized, symbolical character with cultural memory, but is a top-down institution which depends on the political organization that institutes it, whereas cultural memory grows over centuries as an interaction between uncontrolled, self-organizing bottom-up accretion and
controlled top-down institutions more or less independent of any particular political organization.

(Assman, 2010, p. 122)

In this quote, Assmann comments on the competing hierarchies of memory, ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up,’ and their ties to power and political control. While political memory, like the endorsement of certain narratives about the past, may draw on the same texts, rituals, and landmarks that are a part of cultural memory practices, Assmann seems to suggest that political memory and cultural memory are at cross purposes with one another. This view of memory can suggest that there is a competition where there are two distinct ‘sides,’ fails to account for the borrowing and re-making that individuals, communities, and institutions undertake when seeking to communicate about the past.

Rather than viewing different types of memory as being at odds with one another, socio-mnemonic practices and the various uses of memory in communication may be better understood as being “entangled” (Sturken, 1997, p.5). The network of actors that participate in any mnemonic practice are constantly assembling in different nodes, knots, and entanglements (Latour, 2005, p. 44). Examining how remediated vernacular photographs are part of mnemonic practices that people use to recall and communicate the past with others benefits from an approach that seeks to trace relationships. People work with one another and with different media forms to negotiate meanings about memory. Marita Sturken, drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of technologies of the self, suggests the term “technologies of memory” to draw attention to the way that certain objects, photographs, monuments, and memorials, are not passive containers of memory but “objects through which memories are shared, produced, and given meaning” (Sturken, 1997, p. 9). For photography scholars Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, the notion of entanglement provides a way of considering the intersection of photography’s “material trajectories” and “discourses of knowledge and power” (2004, p. 5). The format of a photograph and its presentation, “even in the digital world,” are “integral to the social saliency of … photograph[y]” and remind us that photographs are “active and reciprocal rather than simply implications of authority, control and passive consumption on the one hand, or of aesthetic discourses and the supremacy of
individual vision on the other” (Edwards & Hart, 2004, p. 15). This emphasis on interaction and reciprocity that take place in the sharing and production of photographs echoes of notions of mnemonic practices being active and evolving processes based in and influenced by relationships between people and between people and media.

Vernacular photographs in memory practices and memory networks

Vernacular photography in particular reveals networks of connections where memory may be communicated when we consider how these photographs function as image-objects. Susan Sontag reminds us that unlike film or television where images move across a screen and disappear from us, with print photography, “the image is also an object, lightweight, cheap to produce, easy to carry about, accumulate, store” (1977, p. 2). The notion of the image-object helps us to reflect on the multiple registers in which a photograph may operate with respect to representation and the construction of meaning. On the level of the image, the photograph depicts a two-dimensional scene that captures people, objects, landscape, or an event in a particular way. A viewer accesses this information through visually engaging with the image – when we look at the subject and content of a photograph we are provided insight into a time and place that differs from the moment of our current looking. On the level of the object, until very recently with digital cameras and digital photographs becoming widely available in the early 2000s, engaging with a photograph has meant holding a piece of chemically processed paper, turning the pages of an album, or drawing close to a framed print. This type of engagement is shaped by the material conditions of the photograph; when we draw close to the photograph, we may be reminded of the materiality of the object. Whether carefully preserved in an acid-free folder or marked with creases and fingerprints, photographs reveal their histories of use and can provide insight into how we should interact with them, by bringing them close to us to see, touch, and smell or keeping our distance for fear of marring a fragile print.

With print photography, image and object are inseparable. Image and object operate simultaneously and in conjunction with each another, as technologies of memories. However, meanings and memories do not latently reside in the photograph as an image-object. It is important to remember that meaning and memories may be
influenced by and “mediated through the material nature and material performances in the formats and presentations of visual images” (Edwards, 2002, p. 67). Visual studies scholar Annette Kuhn suggests that when people critically investigate and reflect on the nature of photographs and their presentation, in particular vernacular photographs, they engage in a type of ‘memory work,’ the “active practice of remembering that takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory” (2010, p. 303). Kuhn (1995) describes a series of steps that individuals and groups take when they participate in memory work with photographs to consider the subjects depicted in a particular image, the historical and technical context of a photograph’s production, and the contexts in which a photograph is preserved and reviewed. Kuhn’s investigations into memory work have focused primarily on a particular type of vernacular photography – family photographs.

Memory work that draws on vernacular photography has long been associated with the private and domestic spheres and plays a key role in how families emphasize particular relationships and downplay others. Scholars note that the family “performs” its history and defines itself through the selective display and interpretation of family photographs (Chalfen, 1987; Langford, 2001; Chambers, 2006). Actors – people and objects – influence one another and contribute to practices of meaning-making that determine who is included in the network of family and who remains outside. The selective display of these photographs points to the powerful role that images play in developing and sustaining a stable family identity through communicative acts about the expectations of family membership, responsibilities, and relationships to one another (Chalfen, 1987; Rose, 2010; Morris-Suzuki, 2005; Kuhn, 1995). Photographic albums and photographs displayed in the home normally function for a limited and select audience of family and close friends who are invited into the spaces where these vernacular photographs are kept.

Existing studies of family photographs have provided insight into conventions of display in the family home. In particular, David Halle’s study of if, where, and how family photographs are displayed in homes of differing socio-economic standing reveals that “houses without family pictures, or even with just a few, are on the wrong side of history” (1992, p. 94). Halle’s work sheds light on how people use particular spaces to exhibit, or
not exhibit, their family photographs according to who uses those spaces. For example, Halle concludes that family photographs displayed in living rooms or spaces shared with larger networks of family, friends, and visitors open these images to more public viewing, while family photographs displayed in more private places like personal studies or bedrooms may be thought of as appropriate only for more personal contemplation and are not to be shared openly. Halle’s discussion of public and private spaces in the family home shows contrasts between different socio-economic groups where families with higher incomes and social status preferred to display photographs in more private areas of the home and those with lower incomes exhibiting their family photographs more openly. Despite these differences, Halle identifies particular trends in the exhibition of family photographs: 1) an increasing preference for depicting informal situations and leisure activities, rather than special events of ceremonial occasions (1992, p. 96); 2) a narrowly concentrated focus on family members as subjects in photographs, rather than “friends, colleagues, peers, or strangers” (1992, p. 104) and few ‘ancestral’ photographs of family members; 3) an emphasis on ‘clustering’ when displaying images so that photographs are grouped together; 4) a preference for family photographs to be movable and free-standing, rather than hung on a wall in a seemingly more permanent fashion, and; 5) a desire for multiple photographs that depict the family engaged in informal ‘good times’ (1992, p. 115). These insights illustrate how family photographs are viewed as important actors in flexible networks of meaning-making – networks that assemble and reassemble as photographs are grouped and regrouped to inform and relate ideas about how family members imagine themselves in relation to their past and in relation to one another.

The grouping and regrouping of family photographs, one type of vernacular photography, is the result of action that draws together people and objects in the process of meaning-making, the performance of identity, and in the process of memory work. In many cases, visual representations of the family and the family’s history are

25 In Halle’s 1987 article on family photographs (a precursor of sorts to the 1992 book publication), he describes this clustering by describing how family photographs “are more likely to stand free on tables, dressers, and other flat surfaces than to hang on walls,” they are rarely displayed on their own and instead “jostle, crowd, and huddle [together] – a metaphor for the family closeness that, in life, is hard to attain and harder to sustain” (Halle, 1987, p. 222)
tightly moderated and mediated. When we encounter another individual’s family photography, that individual may act as a guide to provide insight into connections that may not be apparent to us as outsiders. This work of guiding can often occur through the telling or retelling of particular stories. Martha Langford notes that

Viewing [family photographs] in company must be considered the normal spectatorial experience… This is not because a private album is so openly accessible, but precisely because it is not. Its personal nature and intended restrictions to a circle of intimates…. licenses singular arrangements of situational images that need explanation and are enhanced by a tale.

(Langford, 2001, p. 5)

Storytelling can draw attention to actors who may go unnoticed when viewing a photograph. Storytelling is an action that results when particular actors come together. When family photographs become disconnected from these tales and contextualizations, they perform, or function, in different ways that are open to different types of interpretative engagement. When these photographs are divorced from their vernacular contexts – in the album, grouped with other family pictures, as part of a slideshow documenting an experience – through inadvertent or calculated means (the envelope of photos left behind during a move or the scrapbook of images that is donated to an archive), they can become part of larger discussions about the technical and aesthetic merits of photography. They can also be linked to mnemonic practices that draw in actors outside the family unit.

More and more vernacular photographs – including family photographs – are produced (or remediated) as digital files and circulate online. New media and technologies increasingly blur supposed boundaries between what photographs are and what we think they should do. Contemporary scholars who investigate vernacular photography and memory disagree about how new media and new technologies have changed the way people use photography in mnemonic practices. Some argue that the seeming intangibility of digital files and the speed at which they can be shared is a threat
to how people have used (and reused) photographs to remember the past. For example, in her reflection on how digital technologies have changed the way that people share photographs, Nancy Van House at first suggests that the use of new media creates

shifts in the assemblages of objects, practices and meanings [related to photography], some of which may be more welcome than others. In particular, personal photographs may be becoming more public and transitory, less private and durable and more effective as objects of communication than of memory.

(Van House, 2011, p. 125)

As she explores ‘personal photography,’ defining it as “that which is done by non-professionals for themselves and their friends and intimates” (2011, p. 125), which shares much in common with vernacular photography as defined in this project, Van House draws on Latour’s discussion of networks and meaning-making to illustrate the interplay of influences between people, objects, and technologies. Van House summarizes how photographs can be understood as part of actions, where meaning may be created through the interplay of different actors:

Photographs are clear examples of immutable, combinable mobiles. They are among the agents across which action is distributed. In particular, they often ‘take the relay’ of action and relationships across space and time, including, for example, as objects of memory and of relationship. Furthermore, they are mediators, not intermediaries. They often transform the meaning they are supposedly carrying. Photographs have always had the ability to convey a meaning other than the owner intended. Their meanings may change over time, for different viewers, in different contexts, in different associations with text and other images.

(Van House, 2011, p. 132)

Scholars in a variety of fields have repeated the notion that digital technologies have irreparably impaired the way people use photographs to preserve and communicate memory, including: Don Slater’s (1995) sociologically informed examination of digital media and family photographs and Barbara Harrison’s (2002) work that takes a narrative approach to investigating how people use photography to communicate memory in the early twenty-first century.
In her study, Van House points to a number of specific ways that new media have transformed the way people use and think about photographs (including the ability to produce high quality images quickly and inexpensively, the widespread public display of personal images on social media websites, and the ease with which images can be enhanced or altered with software programs). While it is true that photography is changing, the issues that Van House identifies are not necessarily new. In the above quote, Van House comments that photographic meanings can change based on contexts and associations. When photographic meanings change, memories that are associated with those photographic meanings can change too. This potential for change is not one that Van House takes lightly when it comes to memory. She perceives memory as “obviously threatened” by the potential for contextual misalignment and therefore personal and vernacular photographs in the digital age are less effective as objects of memory (p. 133).

As discussed earlier, the notion of ‘memory under threat’ is a common trope in twenty-first scholarly work on memory studies. Mnemonic practices and memory work, though, are constantly shifting to meet contemporary needs. Yes, the media used to facilitate and communicate memory have changed. Scholars, Van House and others, who trace the decline of vernacular photography in one media type, for example, photographic albums, and then offer comparisons to the emergence of new media forms of display and exhibition to illustrate how memory work is supposedly lessened in the digital age, are effectively highlighting how different actors produce different outcomes in networked relationships. Swapping out print images for digital files is not a simple replacement of actors within a stable network; a new network results. This new network is informed by existing knowledge of what photography is, of course, but it is a new network nonetheless. José van Dijck (2008) reflects on the fact that while identifying how digital technologies have influenced vernacular photography and memory practices is valuable, “it is simply not true that digital photography has eradicated [photography’s] function as a tool for memory. Instead the function of memory reappears in the network, distributed nature of digital photographs as most images are sent over the wires and end up somewhere in virtual space” (p. 59). Memory is not located in objects. It is negotiated through communication across space and time in networked relationships between a
variety of actors. Mnemonic practices create connections between people, between objects, and between people and objects.

**Spaces of Exchange**

Remediated vernacular photographs are used in mnemonic practices in both physical and virtual spaces. These spaces can be public or private and include family living rooms, museum galleries, social media websites, and online exhibitions. In this dissertation ‘spaces of exchange’ refers to the mediated spaces – either physical or virtual – where communicative reflection and interaction is possible. The origin point for spaces of exchange begins with a concept that Martha Langford (2007) describes as “exchange places” in her work *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*. Langford’s book opens with a series of reflective questions:

> To stand before a photograph in the early twenty-first century is no longer simply to ask, What is this? What message is intended by this picture? First we ask, or ought to ask, Why am I here, standing before this picture? What do I expect from photographic experience and what part should I expect to play?

(Langford, 2007, p.4)

With these questions Langford: a) reminds the reader that simple transmission models of communication where a message is conveyed in a more or less direct line from a sender to a receiver with the aid of a particular medium fail to account for the complex experience of actually engaging with media, and b) when encountering media, and specifically photography, the receiver of a communicated message may be compelled to respond in particular ways. Sharing vernacular photographs is in some ways a risk.

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27 American communication scholar Harold Lasswell outlined this basic and linear model of communication in 1948. While Lasswell’s model provides a basis for studying media effects and considering the different components involved in the communication process, subsequent models reflect the more realistic and complex interactional nature of communication that is influenced by, among other things, both individual and cultural expectations as well as media affordances and limitations. Arthur Berger (1995) offers descriptive summaries of a number of different communication models (including Lasswell’s) in his work, *Essentials of Mass Communication Theory*. 
Opening up entry points for viewers to engage with images in places such as museum galleries and online exhibitions means that vernacular photographs can circulate beyond what might be established narratives in places like the family living room. Sharing vernacular photographs with strangers opens up the possibility for new interpretations of the past – something that Roland Barthes (1981), for example, is hesitant to do with his own photographs. Allowing for gaps and exit points in displaying vernacular photography opens possibilities for creative (re)imaginings in ongoing mnemonic practices. Exhibition spaces, both physical gallery spaces and in online spaces can be examined as nodes of action where different actors meet in surprising and (potentially) deeply meaningful ways. These actions are uncertain and always possibilities rather than prescribed outcomes. In this section I trace the journey from ‘exchange places’ to ‘spaces of exchange’ to illustrate how the spaces where people encounter remediated vernacular photographs influence the possibilities for the successive sharing of memories in those spaces.

Martha Langford’s discussion of exchange places reflects on how people make meaning with photographs in public spaces, in particular the exhibition space of museums and galleries. When we stand before a photograph, possibilities for meaning-making across a variety of registers begin to emerge. Langford (2007) writes that the familiarity of photography affords “a new mode of perception” (p. 102) where our “familiar[ity] with the act of beholding” intersects with imagination to “[refresh our] view [of] a photographic [image] as though we were there, to assume the experience along with the view. Photography cultivates this kind of day tripping, from which we return with imagistic experience that we process through memory” (p. 101). In other words, viewing a photograph affords possibilities that extend beyond simply looking; photographs offer the possibility of creatively imagining one’s self in other places and at other times. Langford terms this type of imagining as a “seeing through [that] allows us to traverse time and space” (emphasis in original, p. 103). While seeing through provides the possibility that a viewer may merge imagination and memory, this possibility is facilitated by artists and media that “make room for [the viewer] by incorporating gaps and exit points into [a] work, by creating ‘Exchange Places’” (p. 103). For Langford, exchange places are present in photographic artworks as opportunities, “anticipated by artists and
felt by others” where the presentation of a mediated (and sometimes remediated) image prompts the “activation of memory” in imaginative and deeply meaningful ways (p. 8).

Explorations of memory and imagination in relation to photography are not necessarily new discussions. Roland Barthes, in particular, addresses affective reactions to photography when he describes *studium* and *punctum* in his work, *Camera Lucida* (1981). Barthes notes his “enthusiastic commitment” to the “thousands of photographs” that he perceives as part of his overall knowledge of and interaction with the world is “*studium*,” that is, the general interest he finds in viewing and participating in cultural representations (Barthes, 1981, p. 26). The *punctum* is that element, “that accident which” Barthes describes as “prick[ing] me (but also bruis[ing] me, is poignant to me)” (p. 27). While Barthes discusses a *punctum* as that which jolts the viewer and prompts a deeply personal reaction to a photograph, he is more or less dismissive of *studium* as the “very wide field of unconcerned desire” and “inconsequential taste” associated with the “vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds ‘all right’” (p. 27). A wide variety of everyday images falls within the realm of *studium*; we may look at these photographs, but Barthes would resist the notion that these photographs could prompt meaningful personal reflections on memory. While Barthes claims that photography resists classification (p. 4), he allows for distinctions to be made in the description of the *punctum* and the *studium* as aligning with the difference, for example, between reviewing one’s own personal photographs and the wide expanse of ‘other peoples’” photographs that one can review with a supposedly impassionate eye. The division between *studium* and *punctum* in some ways prescribes suitable reactions to types of photographs. Barthes’ discussion, though, also reveals fears about sharing photographs with others.

When Barthes discusses the *punctum* he describes his reaction to reviewing photographs in the wake of his mother’s death, in particular a photograph of his mother as a child. Barthes guards this photograph against the prying eyes of his reader – he describes the scene of his mother as a young girl standing next to her brother “at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory” (Barthes, 1981, p. 67) – but he does not reproduce it for the viewer in his text. The reader can imagine the photograph yet is given no opportunity to ‘see through’ or even look at the image.
Barthes denies his reader a visual entry point into the memory of his mother. The passage describing Barthes’ mother raises questions: what does this little girl really look like? Do the two children hold hands? Do they appear to have a close relationship? Are the siblings in the foreground of the image or do they stand farther back in the conservatory? Posed by the reader, these questions seek context to build that imaginative engagement with memory and connect with the occasion of two children having their picture made in a garden. In withholding the photograph, Barthes can protect his personal memories – the story he tells himself based on this one vernacular photograph is his alone to imagine and remember. Kept safe from viewers, there is no opportunity to ask the types of questions that Langford (2007) views as essential to the photographic experience. The photograph – unseen – asks no questions of the reader.28 There is no part for the reader to play, no gap or entry point into Barthes’ remembrance of his mother, no successive creatively imagined past for the reader to share because the reader is never provided with the opportunity to visually engage with the photograph.

When Langford describes the “gaps and exit points” where viewers may participate in exchange places, the language she uses emphasizes uncertainty, possibility, and opportunity. Gaps and exit points invite engagement precisely because they are already embedded in our vernacular practices and experiences. They are “part of everyday conversation, and they frame many things: experiences too ordinary to elaborate; experiences too embarrassing to relate; things we don’t understand. They are spaces of intuition and unfounded speculation” (Langford, 2007, p. 107). Rather than trying to predict or categorize a viewer’s response in advance of looking at a photograph – that, for example, the viewer will experience a sensation of punctum or studium –

28 Barthes’ concern for protecting this particular photograph resonates with ongoing discussions of affect, memory, and photography. Langford (2007) draws on the work of Edward Casey (1987) and Kendall L. Walton (1984) in particular to describe how a viewer may enter into exchange places that are made possible with particular photographs and particular photographic works. The entry point into an exchange place lies at the intersection of experience, perception, and photography when a viewer takes in an image and “memory creeps in by comparison and reconsideration. Imagination says, Could you not see this picture another way?” (Langford, 2007, p. 98). Rather than boundaries, exchange places allow for multiple registers of meaning and memory to coexist. Imagination troubles the supposed binary between punctum and studium because we can ‘see through’ photographs and be profoundly affected by them, even if we have no personal connection to the photograph.
Langford points to the fact that exchange places are nodes of potential action where different influences intersect. The action that happens in exchange places is “purposive imagining” (Langford, 2007, p.105) where associations and re-associations occur and where memory can be transformed and translated in the present. Latour writes “Action should remain a surprise, a mediation, and event” (2005, p.45). Exchange places are exactly these sites where the intersection of memory and imagination can occur when actors – including images and individuals – meet in ways that can lead to surprising moments of connection between people and photographs, human and non-human actors.

Because we bring our individual memories and experiences to the act of looking at a photograph, our personal understanding of the past will play an important role in shaping whether and how we choose to move into those gaps that may exist in a photographic work. While highly individualized, this work of memory and imagination, these encounters, take place in specific locations. Existing studies of vernacular photography very often situate these encounters in domestic spaces (Chalfen, 1987; Halle, 1992; Harrison, 2002; Kuhn, 1995; Langford, 2001; Rose, 2010; Slater, 1995). The display of vernacular photographs in family homes and the circulation of vernacular photographs amongst family members and friends means that certain gaps and exit points can be clearly emphasized in discussion and highlighted repeatedly to allow for specific interpretations of the past that stress how the family imagines itself. When vernacular photographs are displayed outside the domestic realm, the possibilities for multiple and varied interpretations may increase. In some ways, it may be easier to ‘see through’ a photograph when it is made public in a gallery or exhibition space of a museum. Exhibitions of vernacular photographs in museum and gallery spaces invite individuals who may not be familiar with the people or places depicted in certain photographs to engage with images in creative and imaginative ways that spur reflections across multiple registers of memory. Reviewing a vernacular photograph may provoke a wide range of reactions: individuals’ varied interpretations of an image may prompt reflection, excitement, humour, or sadness. Conversely, a vernacular photograph may not prompt resonant reactions; instead, it may instill feelings of indifference or boredom. That being said, remediated vernacular photographs on display in a gallery offer distinct opportunities for ‘seeing through.’ An image that may be remediated many
times over from the circumstances of its original making may prompt a viewer to consider how the past influences the present in deeply meaningful and affective ways. The actors who contribute to the possibility of ‘seeing through’ in a gallery space, everyone from the people who select the images to the installer who affixes curatorial text and all of the media and technological entities including framing, lighting, and climate controls as well as all of the tools and appliances used to create the environment where vernacular photographs are displayed, contribute to the offering of what Latour calls “occasions, circumstances and precedents” (2005, p. 58). Rather than prescribing that an engagement with a photograph result in an experience of punctum or studium, the wide network of intermediaries and mediators involved when a person comes before a vernacular photograph in a gallery space can trigger other actors and other actions.

Museums often rely on exhibition strategies that encourage “resonance and wonder.” By organizing and exhibiting material in particular ways, museums may seek to produce a sense of resonance for visitors by displaying objects in such a way that they “reach out beyond [their] formal boundaries to the larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which [they] have emerged and for which [they] may be taken by a viewer to stand” (Greenblatt, 1991, p. 42). Wonder, on the other hand, is the “power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention” (Greenblatt, 1991, p. 42). While these descriptions echo some of what Barthes discusses in his explanation of punctum and studium, Stephen Greenblatt’s work does includes a reflection on how resonance and wonder are related. For Barthes, punctum and studium are a dichotomy; a photograph may deeply pierce an individual or it is part of that undifferentiated world of images that pass by the individual. Resonance and wonder, though, in Greenblatt’s discussion, are not entirely separate from one another. Resonance can give way to wonder and vice versa. Greenblatt’s writing on resonance and wonder in museum exhibitions reflects on how institutions have used their gallery spaces, juxtaposing permanent and temporary exhibitions, and called upon catalogues, text panels, and audio guides – ‘actors’ – to facilitate a visitor’s ability to engage with the material on display. These actors provide context for the material on the display (Greenblatt, 1991, p. 44). The same object, or image, on display in different venues can be contextualized to encourage a particularly resonant or wondrous reaction depending
on everything from gallery lighting to souvenirs in the gift shop. Greenblatt, though, points out that each individual recalls different aspects of an exhibition and conversations with fellow museum visitors after attending an exhibition can lead to ongoing reflection. What may be resonant for one visitor may be wondrous for another. However, a visitor may have neither of these responses. Resonance and wonder are possible actions in spaces of exchange but not pre-set outcomes.

Museum visitors work with and within particular spaces to create meaning when viewing exhibitions by drawing on their own personal experiences – individual as well as social knowledge. The creation of meaning that takes place in the gallery is subsequently recalled and refracted when visitors share their experience with others (Anderson, Storksdiek, & Spock, 2007; Falk & Dierking, 1992). Anderson, Storksdiek, and Spock note that making generalizations about visitor experiences is challenging “given the vast diversity of life experience that visitors encounter following their visits, and moreover, the subsequent life experiences that will be meaningful to the visitors and result in connections back to the museum experience” (2007, p. 204). Similarly, research conducted by John Falk (2007; 2012) suggests the museum-going experience is constantly reconfigured over time. These reconfigurations, though, take place almost exclusively outside the museum space. Individuals continue to reflect on and make meaning based on their museum visits well after they leave the museum. However, what people actually remember and describe about their experience visiting exhibitions is often connected to experiences or interactions that prompted feelings of resonance or wonder (Anderson & Gosselin, 2008; Anderson & Shimizu, 2007).

29 Greenblatt describes visiting a historical site while vacationing in Mexico. Striking up a conversation with a fellow tourist, Greenblatt is surprised to hear that the most memorable part of the visit for his peer was an example of entrepreneurial vernacular expression – a hand-made Coca-Cola stand. Returning to the site and eager to see the Coca-Cola stand that he had previously ignored, Greenblatt suggests that what resonated with his new acquaintance was an occasion of wonder at the juxtaposition of historical and contemporary architecture (1991, p. 44-45).

30 A visitor’s experience at a museum can be influenced by a variety of factors including the time of day the visit took place, the cost of admission, and the availability of washrooms. Despite a museum’s best efforts to develop resonant and wondrous exhibitions, the practicalities of how people move through a space and how comfortable people feel in a space influences how visitors respond to material on display.
Museum exhibitions encourage various levels of participation that can include everything from quiet and individual contemplation, noisy and exuberant play,\textsuperscript{31} or the literal consumption of the material on display.\textsuperscript{32} While visitors review the material on display, they are also aware of other visitors who may be in the space. In general though, conventions of visiting a museum expect that visitors move through gallery spaces, possibly chatting with a friend or family member, possibly attending to a docent’s interpretation of the work on display, but rarely if ever engaging with people they do not already know. The conditions of the gallery setting do not easily afford visitors the opportunities to point out moments of resonance and wonder to each other and to communicate their experience of ‘seeing through’ in ways that can be recognized by others who attend the exhibition during its run. Communication about exhibitions certainly occurs through the actions of critics’ reviews, curatorial documentation, artists’ statements, promotional materials, and word of mouth endorsements (or cautions). However, most of these communicative actions take place outside the space of the exhibition.

When viewers have opportunities to figuratively step into the gaps offered by vernacular photographs and share stories and photographs of their own, exhibition spaces may be illuminated as networks of social associations. However, opportunities to bring one’s stories and photographs to the museum and share them are rare. While resonance and wonder may strike a viewer and evoke a deeply meaningful reflection, there are few traceable associations between people and objects when this action occurs. In order to imagine how visitors might participate and contribute within the gaps offered by vernacular photographs, the exhibition space needs to be imagined, not just as a place where social association are displayed through the material included in an exhibition, but also as a place where associations between people, media, and

\textsuperscript{31} Children’s museums and science education centres, for example, may encourage visitors to enthusiastically engage and participate in exhibitions vocally and kinaesthetically.

\textsuperscript{32} Process artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ work for instance, includes installation pieces where viewers are invited “to take a piece of the work with them: [one series] allow[s] viewers to take packaged candies from a pile in the corner of an exhibition space, while another series consists of stacks of endless copies of printed sheets of paper” (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). As visitors take items, museum staff can replenish the installation so that the artwork is in an ongoing state of dissolution and recreation.
technologies are formed and reformed. When Latour discusses the meaning of ‘social’ in one example, he turns to the supermarket as a collection of different objects and classifications: “not any specific shelf or aisle, but the multiple modifications made throughout the whole place in the organization of all the goods—their packaging, their pricing, their labeling” (2005, p. 65). The shifting modifications “reveal to the observer which new combinations are explored and which paths will be taken” (p. 65). Museum exhibitions mirror this description of a supermarket – there are objects and classifications – but the organizational modifications that happen within an exhibition may not always be apparent for the visitor. Alterations and adjustments to exhibition spaces often occur outside visiting hours and, for the most part, little attention is drawn to the multiple actors involved in the development and execution of an exhibition. In museums, because the focus is often primarily on the objects on display, it can be easy to lose sight of the momentary associations that are constantly forming and reforming in an exhibition. If exhibition spaces are to be considered spaces of exchange, we need to consider how successive visitors to an exhibition have opportunities to acknowledge and build on the associations that others have recognized and shared.

So, how might vernacular photographs be brought into and shared with others in an exhibition space? There are incidents where individuals have sought to challenge the conventions and expectations of museum exhibitions by creatively intervening. British artist Banksy has furtively added his own paintings to exhibitions at major museums in New York, London, and Paris (Kennedy, 2005). In an interview with Michele Norris, Banksy when asked the purpose behind his acts, replied: “I thought some of [the paintings] were quite good. That's why I thought, you know, put them in a gallery. Otherwise, they would just sit at home and no one would see them” (Norris, 2005, n.p.). While Banksy’s comments reflect, in part, the artist’s tongue-in-cheek approach and

33 Increasingly, museums have begun to provide a type of ‘behind the scenes’ access to the processes and actors involved in preparing exhibitions by offering visual access to conservation labs where visitors may view staff, objects, and equipment. Museum websites may also offer insight into the organizational work that has gone into staging an exhibition, offering information from curators, artists, scholars critics and others that provides additional context for the material on display in a gallery space. When considering museum websites and online exhibitions, the actors who contribute to these spaces can also include information technicians, web designers, online content managers, to name but a few of those who may be involved with developing and presenting content online.
attitude towards art establishments, they reveal a desire to share creative work beyond the domestic realm. Banksy’s comments also simultaneously stress and criticize the role of the museum in determining what creative work is selected for display and how it is displayed. When curators, artists, and exhibition designers make space for visitor contributions in meaningful ways that can be incorporated into the exhibition, exhibitions can become spaces of exchange. This means that gaps are incorporated, not just in the moment of reflection on a photograph, but also in network of media, technologies, and actors that make up the exhibition.

Vernacular photographs are exhibited in both museum spaces and online digital spaces. The networks that contribute to both spaces are different with different types of actors – people, media, and technologies. However, as communication scholars stress, when new media or technologies are introduced into existing models of communication, entirely new relationships form and new communicative networks develop (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2003; Meyrowitz, 1985). For example, television does not simply duplicate radio’s communicative network with the addition of moving pictures; instead, a new network of relationships between people (the audience), media (television sets), and technology (recording and broadcasting tools) emerges. Similarly, online exhibitions do not duplicate what one may find in a physical gallery space. However, regardless of the form and format they take, exhibition spaces provide the possibility for spaces of exchange because they can host that “vast array of entities” (Latour, 2005, p. 46) that influence action between people, media, and technology. Sharing one’s vernacular photographs and stories is, in many ways, easier in online spaces than in gallery spaces. Visitors to online spaces can review and reflect on images, repurpose images, upload their own images, and comment on their experiences with media and memory for others in ways that can prompt others to reflect on and contribute their own images. Individuals who submit vernacular photographs and stories participate in these spaces of exchange in certain ways, but there are also other opportunities to participate – to search through images, to create their own stories, and to contribute comments on existing images. The different components of the websites afford these types of sharing (that include, for example, the ability to create photo essays and add comments using social media widgets) that allow people to leave a record of their reactions to and interactions with particular vernacular photographs.
For Lorie Novak’s work *Collected Visions*, galleries in New York and Washington, D.C. became spaces of exchange when visitors had the opportunity to share their vernacular photographs and stories about vernacular photographs by scanning them into a computer that was included in the gallery space and accessible online. These submitted images and stories were then incorporated into the exhibitions. New media affordances present possibilities for visitors to recognize and reconfigure associations that future visitors can then reflect on and add their own reconfigurations. Exhibitions become spaces of exchange when visitors have the opportunity to exercise agency. That is, visitors can “make a difference to the course of some other agent’s action” (Latour, 2005, p. 71). Tracing the associations that make up the actions is now possible because the actors are visible. In the case of *Collected Visions*, the contributions of vernacular photographs and their creative repurposings are observable in the physical space of the gallery and in the digital spaces of networked computers. In the case of *Dear Photograph*, the second case study examined in this dissertation, what began as an online exhibition led to creative repurposings and reflections in a physical gallery space. While physical and digital spaces have distinct affordances and limitations, they can both be spaces of exchange when it comes to the exhibition and sharing of vernacular photographs.

Exhibitions that bridge in person and online spaces of exchange, as the two case studies in this project do, provide unique opportunities to trace the associations that make action possible when it comes to communicating and sharing memory through vernacular photographs. Remediation and memory practices are actions that take place in both types of spaces and both of these actions contribute to the possibilities of action in spaces of exchange. Rather than compare and contrast how exhibitions differ in physical and online spaces, tracing actions of remediation and memory practices through different exhibition spaces reveals that, while media and technologies change, vernacular photography in a variety of forms continues to play an important role in how people imagine the past and how they understand the influence of the past on the present.

In this dissertation, I trace associations between actors in the display of vernacular photographs in museums and online spaces in order to reflect on how two
particular projects, *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*, make use of both digital and gallery spaces in creative ways to prompt reflection and communication about memory. Museum exhibitions, and digital exhibitions too, are designed with pathways in mind. However, the routes that people follow through an exhibition are not always those imagined by the artist, curator, exhibit designer, or website developer. In the case of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*, the projects are also spaces of exchange where visitors can contribute their own vernacular photographs and their own memories to the exhibition. Visitors also have the opportunity to reflect on and communicate their experiences of viewing the images. Not everyone who visits *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* decides to share a story or an image. Spaces of exchange offer possibilities rather than guarantees. Vernacular photographs are actors in a flexible network of people, media, and memory practices. Investigating how memory is translated and transformed at different times through vernacular photographs in different types of media in particular spaces requires further disentanglement. To work through some of the actions and associations, the next chapter offers a history of vernacular photography in exhibition at different times and in different places.
Chapter 3.

Evolving Histories: Understandings and Exhibitions of Vernacular Photography

This chapter focuses on different moments of action where photography, and more specifically, vernacular photography is an important mediator in shaping how people communicate information and share memories about the past. While this chapter offers a selective chronology of actions involving photography and vernacularity from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day, my goal is to illustrate how particular moments in any history of photography may be examined as nodes of action – moments where new communicative formations come into view, but outcomes and next steps are far from certain. Media scholars Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree remind us, “all media were once ‘new media’” (2003, p. xi), and that “analysis of specific media cases can offer” important information on “how interpretive communities are built, or destroyed, [and] how normative epistemologies emerge. No medium new or old exists as a static form” (2003, p. xv). With this in mind, this chapter navigates particular cases where photography may have been viewed as new or novel. Photography, as we will see, has long been considered a ‘new’ medium that plays an important role in “transform[ing] our sense of time and space” (Gitelman & Pingree, 2003, p. xxi).

Choosing amongst histories of photography that extend back nearly two centuries provides a wealth of information from which to select. As with any discussion that seeks to account for the evolution of media, both the format itself and the attitudes and expectations people have related to the format, “the challenge, then, is to attend to where and why a particular moment or form of remediation is consequential – to be able to show explicitly what was at stake and why and how that moment, or those actions were important” (Irvine, 2010, p. 240-241). When Latour explains how ANT may be imagined as a way to describe social action, he offers a “metaphor from cartography”
noting “ANT has tried to render the social world as flat as possible in order to ensure that the establishment of any new link is clearly visible” (emphasis in original 2005, p.15). In the process of researching and reflecting on existing literature, conducting interviews and archival research, and closely examining Collected Visions and Dear Photograph I have travelled a particular route. The concepts presented in the previous chapter, vernacular photography, remediation, mnemonic practices, and spaces of exchange appear in this chapter and help to illuminate the path I have taken. Doubtless, other researchers who trace actions through histories of photography will take different paths. By focusing on particular nodes of action where there have been uncertainties about the nature of photography, who should make it and how it should be made, how it should be displayed, and how it should be viewed, vernacularity, remediation, mnemonic practices, and spaces of exchange begin to appear as connections in key moments of action.

There are many histories of photography. Authors and scholars have taken on the task of creating these histories from a variety of perspectives. Some of the texts, which seek to situate photography as part of social and/or artistic processes, offer expansive accounts (in terms of time and scope). For example, Beaumont Newhall’s The History of Photography, first published in 1937 and now in its fifth edition, developed from Newhall’s curation of the exhibition Photography, 1839-1937 at the New York Museum of Modern Art. Mary Warner Marien’s Photography: a Cultural History (2010) (now in third edition) offers more than 600 images in a discussion of the medium from eighteenth-century experiments with light sensitive materials to contemporary issues of image making and globalization. Similarly, Robert Hirsch’s Seizing the Light: A Social History of Photography (2008) runs nearly 500 pages in an attempt to survey close to two centuries of photography. Hirsch reviews contributions from some of the individuals that Newhall discusses in his work, such as Ansel Adams, Walker Evans, Alfred Stieglitz, and Paul Strand. Hirsch also comments on the work of later twentieth-century photographers, including Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin, and Sally Mann, as well as individuals who use digital manipulation when creating their images, such as Nancy
Burson and her use of ‘morphing’ technologies.\textsuperscript{34} These types of histories offer valuable context for the development of photography, as an artistic medium and as a medium of social communication. However, the place of vernacular photography in these works – and in histories of photography in general – is minimal at best. Geoffrey Batchen who has researched and written extensively about vernacular photography argues that canonical histories of photography (or histories with canonical aspirations) have excluded those images that have been “made in vast numbers by anonymous, amateur, working-class, and sometimes even collective hands, or worse, by crass commercial profiteers” because they threaten to “muck up the familiar story of great masters and transcendent aesthetic achievements, and disrupt [a] smooth European-American prejudice” (2001, p. 57-58).

Batchen’s own histories of photography, including \textit{Burning with Desire: the Conception of Photography} (1997) and \textit{Each Wild Idea: Writing, Photography, History} (2001), have influenced the way I have constructed the history of photography presented in this chapter. In particular, his emphasis on the multiplicity of photography and the inability to identify precise origins of the medium provides reassurance that any history of photography, by definition, cannot be entirely comprehensive. Nor can a history make claims about inarguable truths in photography’s past. Batchen emphasizes areas that have been overlooked by confronting what he views as existing and somewhat repetitive linear narratives that describe photography as a particular type of ‘art’ that reflects social (and to a lesser extent, technological influences) of its time. In championing what he argues has for so long been excluded from histories of photography, Batchen writes that “by reminding us of the differences within photography, vernaculars insist that there are many photographies, not just one” and if we are to acknowledge the multiplicity of photographies, so too must we allow for multiple histories (2001, p. 59). Just as there

\textsuperscript{34} Burson’s work often involves blending multiple images with computer software to create composite images that challenge conceptions of race and age and emphasize shared human characteristics. Burson’s projects have included \textit{The Human Race Machine}, computer consoles that create an image of a visitor and then show the visitor what they might look like with facial features and skin tones associated with different races, and \textit{The Age Machine}, which shows visitors what they may look like as they grow older (Hirsch, 2008, p. 419-420).
are many histories, there are also many entry points into those histories. In endorsing the notion of multiple histories, Batchen notes:

A singular point of origin, a definitive meaning, a linear narrative: all of these traditional historical props are henceforth displaced from photography’s provenance. In their place we have discovered something far more provocative – a way of rethinking photography that persuasively accords with the medium’s undeniable conceptual, political, and historical complexity.

(Batchen, 1997, p.202)

Batchen’s comments here complement ANT approaches that seek to identify moments of action and connection between actors. With ANT-informed investigations, the concern is for multiple formations and dismantlings and there is “no established component that can be used as an incontrovertible starting point” (Latour, 2005, p. 29).

This chapter is a history of photography. More specifically, this chapter is a social history of photography where ‘social’ is a series of relationships between actors. Vernacular photography is a perpetually emergent and evolving form. In the history that follows, rather than presenting a codified chronology of key moments where the vernacular intersects with photography from the earliest uses of the medium, my goal is to trace a history that passes through different moments of action where vernacular photography has been involved in particular ways that illustrate a dynamic series of relationships between people, media, and technology. In selecting different moments, I seek occasions where photographic images that communicate about and reflect the vernacular – first, as it refers to a particular group at a particular moment in time and then as it reflects the treasures of one’s heart and one’s home – are used (and reused) according to evolving understandings of what photography is and how it should be viewed.

**What Photography Should Be: Early Photographic Actions**

Photography’s beginnings lie in a series of actions that include experiments with different media and technology and recognition from different groups that endorsed or legitimated certain practices. The first decades of the nineteenth century saw more than
two dozen individuals hailing from England, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Norway, Switzerland, as well as individuals in America and Brazil claim to be the first discoverer or inventor of photography; however, the majority of these claims have been shown to be influenced by or based on the work of Louis Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot (Batchen, 2001, p. 5). In 1839, Daguerre in France and Talbot in England, independently of each other, presented the results of their experiments with camera obscura\textsuperscript{35} and photo-sensitive plates and papers to the French Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Fine Arts, and the Royal Society, respectively. Publicly sharing the results of their experiments with learned audiences in formal scholarly settings solidified the positions of Daguerre and Talbot as seemingly individual masterminds responsible for developing a scientifically and technologically powerful way of representing the natural world. However, this positioning of Daguerre and Talbot as unique geniuses is a largely romanticized (and often repeated) account of photography’s history that overlooks what, at the time, were more widespread concerns of scientific communities, inventors, and entrepreneurs about how emerging technologies might be used to represent and document the natural world (Batchen, 2001; Mulligan & Wooters, 2011; Wickliff, 2006). Situating Daguerre and Talbot as independent actors free of influence denies the realities of the multiple actors actually involved in the actions of early photography. Daguerre, Talbot, and other early practitioners of photography were part of complex information sharing and communication networks.

More than a century before Daguerre and Talbot made their work known, European natural philosophers were experimenting with light sensitive properties of different chemicals and conducting optical experiments (Mulligan & Wooters, 2011, p. 36-39). By the beginning of the nineteenth-century, “proto-photographers,” Batchen’s (1997) term for those individuals working on and experimenting with photographic technologies before 1839, included Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, his son Isidore, and Hippolyte Bayard in France as well as a number of others on the continent and in Britain. Rather than being something that emerges almost simultaneously from the workshops of Daguerre and Talbot as a fully formed practice, the development of photography and the

\textsuperscript{35} The term camera obscura refers to different types of darkened boxes with a small hole that allows light to pass into the device. When light enters, it reproduces the scene outside of the camera obscura and inverting it in on the inside of the device.
ability to produce stable and recognizable images (as opposed to paper and plates where the chemical process of image development could not yet be halted or fixed) coincides with a much more complicated, though still not entirely well-defined, widespread interest in photographic technologies and representations. While proto-photographers Niépce, Bayard, and others make reference to ongoing experiments that pre-date the 1839 announcements of Daguerre and Talbot, records of these trials and collaborations between a variety of individuals with different types of specialized knowledge are rarely well-documented or researched (Batchen, 1997; Marien, 1997; Marien, 2002/2010; Schaaf, 1992; Wickliff, 2006). What seems clear by the late 1700s and the early 1800s is an increasingly widespread and insistent desire to photograph despite an inability to actually bring it to fruition. It suggests that desiring coincided with scientific discovery rather than flowed directly from it. Photography’s origins lie therefore not in a single causal chain or movement of individual genius but in a complex knot of historical and cultural forces that can be glimpsed from afar but may never be fully unravelled. 

(Schaaf, 1992, pp. 24-25)

Photography’s origins are a tangle of mediators, rather than intermediaries, where meaning is constantly being (re)created. Acknowledging the complexity and the obscurity of photography’s origins perhaps provides some insight into how we might approach any history or study of photography as being necessarily incomplete and an ongoing site of debate. While Daguerre and Talbot are only two individuals in intricate and overlapping networks of actors, the well-documented histories of these two men shed light on the early actions that influenced ideas about what photography should be used for and who should use it. 

In the month following the presentation of Daguerre’s method to the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Fine Arts in August 1839, knowledge of this preliminary photographic process spread throughout Europe thanks to the publication and circulation of the process by newspapers both within France and abroad (Harmant, 1977, p. 79). Interest in the possibilities that photography offered – particularly related to representing the natural and built world as well as the opportunity to depict people in portraits – led to
the rapid dissemination of and experimentation with photographic technologies and techniques of both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Communication about photography in public media and private correspondence outpaced and travelled much farther than actual photographic images at this time. Daguerre and Talbot tried to assert their own positions as discoverers of photography through demonstrations, presentations, and publications using communication channels that were available to them. When Talbot presented his paper, “Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing, or the Process by Which Natural Objects May Be Made to Delineate Themselves without the Aid of the Artist's Pencil” to Britain’s Royal Society in early 1839, he outlined his process of fixing an image created by a *camera obscura* on chemically treated paper and suggested photography’s possible uses in copying or reproducing what he described as “natural objects,” concluding his presentation by offering the method “to the lovers of science and nature” (Talbot, 1839, p. 120-121). In his paper, Talbot emphasises that photography is for a particular type of person – the educated student of science who seeks to improve his learning. Individuals who lacked the proficiency or patience for illustrating the natural world by hand could imagine photography as a new medium for documenting and enhancing one’s studies.

Daguerre’s understanding of photography included room for novel experimentations with the medium by anyone with a minor interest in optics and chemistry who could then make photographic images. In a late twentieth century compilation of essays on photography, literary and American studies scholar Alan Trachtenberg includes an essay written by Daguerre in the mid-nineteenth century in which Daguerre writes:

Everyone, with the aid of the DAGUERREOTYPE, will make a view of his castle or country-house; people will form collections of all kinds, which will be the more precious because art cannot imitate their accuracy and perfection of detail; besides they are unalterable by light. Even portraits will be made, though the unsteadiness of the model presents, it is true, some difficulties in order to succeed completely.

(Daguerre, 1980, p. 12)
While Talbot’s early discussions of photography stress its use for an exclusive type of learned (or aspiring) scholars, Daguerre’s ideas about photography show a greater consideration for the everyday possibilities of the medium — granted, an everyday existence far from inclusive when considering his suggestion that people could easily make images of their castles or country houses. Daguerre imagined that his method of making photographs would be accessible to many who could choose what they wanted to make images of. Talbot, on the other hand, envisioned “training a team of artists in the calotype technique. These artists would photograph picturesque sites and monuments in the provinces. The negatives would be sent to an administrative centre, where positive copies would be made for sale and possible use in beautiful publications” (Keeler, 2002, p. 26). Talbot’s initial concerns for the scientific potential of photography expanded to include an interest in how photographs might be used as a type of remediation — bringing aesthetically valuable and highly realistic views of the natural and built world close to those who would otherwise have to travel (sometimes great distances) to see such sights in person.

Nascent photography in the mid-nineteenth century was taking shape at the same time that other technologies of representation were developing. Existing and evolving tools and practices for creating images influenced the potential uses for photography. Reflecting, briefly, on the rise and popularity of lithography illustrates how concerns for aesthetics and artistic expression quickly became a key point of concern for those interested in the opportunities available with photographic images. Making multiple prints of a single image was possible for centuries before Daguerre and Talbot conducted their photographic experiments: woodblock printing, whose origins extend back to the first centuries of the Common Era, and then later engraving, allowed for multiple copies of things like political and religious texts and images, depictions of historical events, artworks, all manner of books, maps, and items like playing cards (Mayor, 1979). In other words, multiple copies of the same image already had places

36 The daguerreotype process involves exposing a treated chemical plate (usually copper plate) to light and then developing the resulting image with a series of chemical treatments to create a single image. Talbot’s calotype process, rather than creating a metal plate with an image, captures an exposure on treated paper that can then be processed to create a translucent negative image from which multiple positive prints can be made (Marien, 2002/2010).
across the different registers of vernacularity and could be used in a variety of ways. The coalescing of actors in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (limestone plates, chemical compounds, grease, inks, presses, papers, and individuals like Alois Senefelder whose accidents and improvisations helped to develop a lithographic method) resulted in lithography that allowed for relatively inexpensive, highly detailed, and quickly available copies of texts and images (Ross, 1990). When Talbot imagined a centre of printmakers creating images from calotype images, lithographic studios were already working with similar models where teams of artists contributed to the production of thousands of images “with subjects of every description – shipwrecks, fires, folk tales, city views, portraits, and anything else that the public might buy” (Ross, 1990, p. 195). Critiques of lithographs, that they were sentimental, commercial, and associated with the banal (Ross, 1990, p. 195) would be the same type of critiques applied to photographic images as debates about how photographs might have meaning as works of art began to arise.

What Photography Should Be: Artistic Ambitions and Popular Desires

Daguerre claimed, quite paradoxically, that the daguerreotype drew nature while allowing her to draw herself. Talbot spoke in similar terms of an ‘art’ that somehow both is and is not a process of drawing. Not content with this designation, [Talbot] went on to describe photography as an effort to capture both eternity and transience in the same representation, such that time becomes space, and space, time.

(Batchen, 1997, p.177)

Both Daguerre and Talbot struggled to precisely articulate what photography might be and where it should fit in relation to other practices of representation. If the daguerreotype was an early standard of photograph practice, the labour and expense of
producing these images limited the types of individuals who could afford to make them. While early photographic images could be reproduced (mostly through making engravings and lithographs based on the images) advances in technology and methods significantly decreased the time and cost associated with making photographic images. The development of collodion processes, glass plate negatives, and experiments with different types of chemically treated plates and papers made it possible to quickly and cheaply produce multiple and durable copies of a single image (Newhall, 1937/2009). These types of advances led to what some promoters of artistic photography feared. Gustave Le Gray, one of the early innovators of photography and a proponent of establishing and protecting aesthetic values related to the medium, cautioned that if photography became something that everyone had access to, it would move away from the codified realms of art guided by established traditions and learned associations and towards crass commercialism that played on popular desires (as cited in Mulligan & Wooters, 2011, p.348). At the same time that individuals began to use photography to create what they understood to be works of art, the novelty of the medium and its increasing accessibility allowed for photography to both depict and enter more and more areas of everyday life.

Decreases in exposure times and the increasing stability of chemical plates and papers afforded photographers new opportunities to produce and creatively manipulate images of new subjects. At the same time that improvements in materials and methods were being made, new expectations about what was worth making pictures of also began to take shape. Preliminary experiments with photography and some of the earliest photographs surviving today depict highly vernacular scenes. Joseph Nicéphore

37 The daguerreotype method that produced individual positive images was popular, in part, because of Daguerre’s efforts to have the French government acquire the rights to his method and make it freely available (in return Daguerre received a life long pension from the state). While Talbot’s method, the calotype, produced a negative image that could subsequently be copied and used to make positive images, his attempts to protect his intellectual property and benefit financially from the patent system were not overly successful. While Daguerre was able to patent his method outside of France, the initial free access to his method resulted in the daguerreotype becoming somewhat of the default photographic process for a number of years following his 1839 announcement, but declined sharply in the 1860s and fell out of use all together as even less expensive and more efficient processes like the tintype developed (Gernsheim, 1986).
Niépce’s 1826 “View from the Window at Le Gras,” made with an exposure of several hours, shows a view of his family estate from his studio window. For Niépce, photography, in part, offered a way of realistically capturing the world that his lacklustre skills as a draughtsman could not (Hansel, n.d.). An urban street scene that shows what might be the first photograph of a person, Daguerre’s 1838 “Boulevard du Temple,” made with an exposure of just a few minutes, includes two discernable figures – a man having his boots cleaned by a shoeshine.\(^\text{38}\) Rather than the monumental or spectacular of the natural or built world, this image of a lower class Parisian neighbourhood is evidence of how photographers also made images of the everyday to provide people with new perspectives on the familiar.

In general though, photographic themes during what Mary Warner Marien (2002/2010) describes as the ‘second invention of photography,’ the decade following Daguerre’s and Talbot’s 1839 announcements,\(^\text{39}\) include two categories of particular interest for this research project: personal portraits and “sentimental and nostalgic subjects in the visual arts” (2002/2010 p. 28). Marien notes that the “rapid growth of cities facilitated the exchange of ideas among people interested in the medium of photography” (2002/2010 p. 28) and as ideas, people, technologies, and media moved between and within cities new actions involving photography and new meanings related to photography began to take shape. Sentimental and nostalgic subjects include subjects that people living in cities were unlikely to see on an everyday basis, things like “rural peoples, traditional occupations and unpolluted landscapes” (Marien, 2002/2010, p. 28). These scenes were not present in urban settings and offered viewers opportunities to imagine other places and other times. Imagining other times and other places was not limited to reflecting on rural life and the unspoiled natural world.

\(^\text{38}\) Ian Jeffrey (2014) notes that the Boulevard du Temple was home to lower class Parisian amusements – notably, horror plays.

\(^\text{39}\) During the mid-nineteenth century it seems unlikely that the different categories of photography that have been established, for example, anthropological and medical photography, expedition and travel photography, celebrity photography, and documentary photography, were distinct types. While Marien (2002/2010) uses these and other qualifications when discussing how and when certain images were made by particular photographers, the distinctions between where one category ends and another begins is far from certain. What Marien does emphasise is that, in the two decades after 1839, people actively embraced photography to capture the multiple registers of veranealularity that they encountered in the world and in their own lives.
Photographers also began composing scenes based on historical literature and fiction. The 1850s saw works like Oscar Rejlander’s “The Two Ways of Life,” modeled on Raphael’s “The School of Athens,” that was made using combination printing where multiple negatives were assembled and overlaid to create a single image (Marien, 2002/2010, p. 88). Henry Peach Robinson’s “Fading Away” also makes use of combination printing to depict a young woman on her deathbed surrounded by grieving attendants. Rejlander, Robinson, and others including Julia Margaret Cameron, Lewis Carroll, and William Lake Price made photographs that relied on costumed models positioned in tableaux vivants to echo elements of artistic composition found in prints and paintings (Newhall, 1937/2009, p. 71). Because there were no formal schools or a tradition of instruction in photographic arts as there was with other forms of expression like painting (Fride-Carrassat & Marcadé, 2005), the relationship between art and photography during the ‘second invention’ of the medium and the years following was highly contested.41

In the mid-nineteenth century as individuals worked through their differing understandings of what mattered to photographic practice and how photographs should be made and presented to the public, concerns about who could call themselves a photographer, appropriate subject material for photographs, and whether to evaluate photographs within existing artistic paradigms or to create new ones persisted. Gustave

40 The work of Robinson, Rejlander, and Cameron provide examples of some of the tensions surrounding how art photography should be practiced and received by both the public and art critics. While the images made by these three photographers are now lauded as the contributions of pioneers of nineteenth-century art photography, with Rejlander named as the titular figure of E.Y. Jones (1973) Father of Art Photography: O.G. Rejlander 1813-75, and all three featuring prominently in volumes devoted to the history and development of photography (Marien, 2002/2010; Mulligan & Wooters, 2011; Taylor, 2002;), at the time they were subject to a number of critiques. Cameron, for example, was dismissed by some owing to her gender, her lack of formal artistic training, and what was viewed as poor technique. Cameron’s ethereal portraits made with long exposure times captured the slight movement of subjects and resulted in blurring that was criticized as departing from an expected standard of sharp focus that the camera made possible (Mulligan & Wooters, 2011).

41 Marien (2010) notes: “While many painters in Europe and America collected, commissioned, and used photographs, they insisted that it was merely a recording instrument” (p. 85). In terms of networks, photographs may have been viewed as actors among many that participated in the action of painting.
Le Gray, who trained as a painter before turning to photography, argued for photography as an art form, noting that

The future of photography does not lie in the cheapness but in the quality of the picture. If a photograph is beautiful, complete, and durable, it acquires an intrinsic value before which its price disappears entirely. For my part, it is my wish that photography, rather than falling in to the domain of industry or commerce, might remain in that of art. That is its only true place.

(as cited in Mulligan & Wooters, 2011, p.348)

One of the challenges that Gray and others who advocated for art photography as separate from other type of photographic expression faced was the fact that industry and commerce made possible the reproduction of high quality, durable images that deemphasized the singularity of the image-object. While the establishment of photographic societies throughout the 1850s and 1860s did help practitioners of photography agree on particular conventions and methods to create and manipulate images, proponents of developing and presenting photography as high or fine art were rarely success at having their work viewed as comparable to the more established artistic practices.

National and civic associations formed quickly with the advent of photography, but members of these associations often had distinct and sometimes conflicting ideas about the values and uses of the new medium. Newhall notes that in the early years of the Photographic Society of London whose members were divided between those “who practiced photography as an avocation and a profession” and enthusiastic amateurs; it was often the later who dominated discussions about conventions and best practices embracing the suggestions of speakers who promoted the idea that photographs seek to imitate “acknowledged principles of Fine Art” (1937/2009, p. 71). Associations and
societies helped to legitimate photography as a type of art, holding exhibitions of photographs to promote and celebrate their members’ work (Taylor, 2002). While these actions helped to give meaning to photography as a type of art, at the same time, the growth of studio portrait photography meant that the same media and technologies being used to create what some wanted to defend as works of art made it possible for virtually anyone to bring photography into their home with personal portraits. With photography, having one’s portrait made no longer required the services of a painter who could capture an individual’s likeness. By the 1860s and 1870s studio photographers made it possible for anyone who walked in to their establishments to choose amongst poses, props, backdrops, and even borrow fine clothing to help create lasting records of themselves (Newhall, 1937/2009; Mulligan & Wooters, 2011; Taylor, 2002). Photography was accessible to individuals in ways that other established forms of representation were not. “By its very nature,” photography historian Roger Taylor points out, “photography… was a medium that did not distinguish between individuals possessing a high level of education and artistic training and other of more humble origin who sought to master its secrets” (2002, p. 12). As portrait studios became commonplace in cities around the world, more and more people had the opportunity to collect and exchange images of themselves and others – documenting, sharing and preserving memories that expressed who they were and who they imagined themselves to be.

Controversies about what photography is and if photography is an art can distract from tracing photographs as actors in networks where meaning is made and remade. While debates about the place of photography continue to this day, the goal of this project is not to determine if photography should be understood as an art form. Instead, tracing actors involved in photographic actions across different registers of vernacularity illustrates how meanings are constantly reforming to meet people’s need to remember

42 Prior to the establishment of the Photographic Society in London, the French Société Héliographique was founded in January 1851. Members of the Société Héliographique were commissioned by the French government’s Commission des Monuments Historiques to conduct “photographic surveys of the nation’s architectural patrimony” (Malcolm, 2000, para. 4). As in Great Britain and elsewhere, strict classificatory distinctions between art and technical photography were far from certain and the “photographs that admirably informed government officials[,] for example[,] as to the state of preservation of the walls of Carcassonne or the destruction caused by floodwaters were also exhibited, written about, and appreciated at the time as art” (Malcolm, 2000, para. 4).
and communicate what matters in the present. Art historian Michael Zell describes the value of ANT approaches when researching art and expressive forms because its focus is not on explaining “distinctive physical, formal, or iconographic features of art,” rather it emphasizes examining “the dynamics underlying the interdependencies” between makers, objects, and users (Zell, 2011, para. 9, para. 1). Objects and technologies mediate relationships. Commercially produced studio portraits challenged attempts to prescribe who should make photographs and for what purposes. Tracing actions related to widely available forms of studio portraiture, highlights how vernacular photographs move through space and time to help people remember in the present.

One of the most popular forms of vernacular photography in the 1860s and 1870s was the *carte-de-visite*. These small, economically produced studio images, normally measuring 4” by 2.5” were mounted on card stock and collected, exchanged, and preserved among family members and friends (Mulligan & Wooters, 2011, p. 733-734). Writing in 1862, Charles Dickens describes the process of having one’s portrait made at a photography studio noting that one of the key advantages of the *carte-de-visite* is “the opportunity of distributing yourself among your friends, and letting them see you in your favourite attitude, and with your favourite expression.” And then you get into those wonderful books which everybody possesses, and strangers see you there in good society, and ask who that very striking-looking person is?” (Dickens, p. 166). *Cartes-de-visite* were important mediators in establishing one’s place in relation to others. The *carte-de-visite* that was carefully pasted into a photo album connected the object to other similar objects and by extension the subject pictured in one photograph with the subjects of others. *Cartes-de-visite* also made it possible for people to bring images of influential political and religious leaders as well as artists, sportsmen, and celebrities into their homes.

43 The actuality of studio portraiture at this time makes Dickens’ claim about capturing one’s favourite expression questionable. In the mid-1800s, posing stands were often used to support, or clamp, people to hold a particular pose for the seconds-long exposure times required.

44 The desire for celebrity portraits also extended to members of Europe’s royal families. Following his death in 1861, seventy thousand portraits of Prince Albert were sold (Newhall, 1937/2009, p. 62). Clearly people viewed photographs as important mementoes of key events in popular culture and wanted to have images to mark such occasions.
startling new means of visualizing the replenishment and reshuffling of the social pack” (2001, p. 24). In carefully curated photo albums and used as advertisements in studio windows, images of people, both renowned and ordinary, were linked together. New connections between people, who would never meet or interact, were possible through the medium of photography as images were brought together and circulated in new ways and in new spaces.

In 1864, American Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that the wide-spread interest in card-portraits, as *cartes-de-visite* were known in the United States, situated them as a type of ‘social currency’ that reflected common interests in commemorating and communicating particular relationships. Yes, photographs made it possible for an American who would never visit the Louvre to review a detailed likeness of the *Venus de Milo*, but in reality, Holmes suggests, “Many care little for the wonders of the world brought before their eyes by [reproductions]; [yet] all love to see the faces of their friends” (Holmes, 1864, p. 255). Instead of decrying a lack of appreciation for established aesthetic conventions and exemplary examples of artistic representations, Holmes writes “So far from finding fault with him [the viewer], we rejoice rather that his affections and those of average mortality are better developed than their taste” (p.255-256). The value of photography in this instance is not that it brings the world to the viewer, but that it brings people the viewer knows and cares for closer to the viewer and provides a way to remember and imagine the person pictured. In his essay on photography, “Doings of the Sunbeam,” rather than adapting and applying existing conventions related to how one should appreciate photography in the same vein as one would examine a painting, for example, Holmes describes a way of looking at photographs that emphasizes how images might allow viewers to reflect on relationships – examining the expressions of family and friends in such a way that a photograph reveals new perspectives on each viewing so that the “mental and emotional shapes by which [our friend’s or family member’s] inner nature [have] made itself known to us” are recalled when looking at the image (1864, p. 259).

Another example of the social place of photography in the mid-1800s can be seen in the fondness for tintypes in the United States. The tintype, a positive photographic image on thin iron plate, overtook the paper-printed *carte-de-visite* in
popularity and “it seems that it was exclusively Americans in the 1860s through the 1890s who wanted masses of cheap, instant, durable portraits” owing to what Steven Kasher suggests was a national and individual preoccupation not bound by the historically strict class divisions that still influenced how people imagined themselves in some parts of Europe (Kasher, 2008, p. 82). Kasher’s discussion stresses how tintypes helped Americans, “multitudes of self-regarding – and anxious – personalities [to] step up to the camera to project their guises into the present and the future” (2008, p. 82). Kasher’s description suggests that those eager to have their likenesses recorded with a tintype were not overly concerned with the artistic merit of the form, but focused on how the image could be used to create and communicate meaning about identity. In describing the era when tintype popularity was at its height, Kasher writes that American society from the 1860s-1890s “was both more liberat[ed] and more nerve-rack[ed] than any other society, both more futuristic and more nostalgic” (2008, p. 82). While it is true that tintypes played an important role in how Americans imagined themselves and communicated these identities to others during periods of conflict and uncertainty, Kasher’s comments seem applicable to the present day as well. Having one’s picture made in a time when the possibilities of the future seem richer than ever and simultaneously daunting in the extreme, and the past romanticized as safer and somehow simpler, resonates with twenty-first-century concerns about meaning and memory.

This concern for creating an image for the present and the future was heightened during the American Civil War when thousands of soldiers in both the Union and Confederate armies had photographs – mostly tintypes – made that depicted them in their uniforms (that were sometimes rented from the photographers themselves). Family members of soldiers also made images of themselves that allowed soldiers to carry photographs of their parents, wives, children, siblings, and friends with them (Rosenheim, 2013). When returning home was far from certain, a photograph could help a soldier recall and imagine his loved ones with the aid of vivid likenesses that captured sitters at their best. Scholarship on and interest in photography during the American civil war has grown steadily from early twenty century publications and now includes the likes of Francis Trevelyan Miller’s (1911) The Photographic History of the Civil War to Alan Trachtenberg’s (1985) “Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs,” popular documentaries like Ken Burns’ (1990) The Civil War, and recent exhibitions marking the 150th anniversary of the conflict including the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s exhibition, “Photography and the American Civil War” (2013).
What Photography Should Be: Exhibition and Display Actions

Photography offered new ways of creating meaning and new opportunities to share information. As technologies developed and the medium became increasingly durable and accessible thanks to advances in and simplification of chemical processes, photographs could easily travel. In the nineteenth-century, people could encounter photographs in a variety of places. The different actors involved in the display and exhibition of images shaped how meaning was made. On view at fairs and exhibitions, collected and cared for as part of personal and family albums, and displayed in museum exhibitions, photographs began to appear in spaces where they could be used in acts of memory and imagination. In this section, I turn to an examination of how certain spaces have afforded and constrained the creation, transportation, and transformation of meaning through photographs in general and vernacular photography in particular.

A number of factors contributed to nineteenth-century uncertainties about how photography should be exhibited: photographs could produced as multiple originals, meaning the same image could be shown in multiple locations at the same time; growing numbers of amateur practitioners had access to cameras and photographic equipment, and there were differing opinions on whether photography simply produced mechanical representations or if it might be viewed as providing opportunities for artistic mediation and creativity. Proponents of establishing photography as a high art (including Henry Peach Robinson, Oscar Gustav Rejlander, and Julia Margaret Cameron (Mulligan & Wooters, 2011)) were dismissive of photographers with the primary goal of commercial and financial gain, rather than aesthetic expression. For the most part, though, the types of photographs that people might have had the most regular access to were commercially made. Tracing photographs across different registers of vernacularity and the different spaces they appeared seeks insights into how they might be viewed – at fairs and popular exhibitions as novelties and technical achievements, in domestic spaces as objects to be cherished and loved, and in museums and galleries as examples of artistic expression to appreciated and admired. As with many attempts to trace actors involved in the history of photography, the boundaries between these spaces and types of display are far from precise.
Early Exhibitions

Associations of photographers and artists played an important role in organizing photography exhibitions in the later half of the nineteenth-century. Exhibitions in this period could refer to a wide variety of demonstrations along a spectrum of perceived culture and value. At one end

Occupying the high moral ground were exhibitions of fine art, paintings, sculpture and engravings where the prerequisite for any visitor was an education and the refinement to apply it intelligently to the works displayed. At the other extreme, representing the popular end of the market, were “exhibitions” that we would now regard as voyeuristic, having their roots in the culture of the fairground

(Taylor, 2002, para. 3)

Photography could fit almost anywhere along the spectrum that Taylor describes, from the tableaux vivants that early art photographers created nearer the high moral ground and, for example, photographs of people who were viewed as ‘oddities’ at the other more voyeuristic end.46 Each display of photographs, each exhibition, though was (and is) a local site of action in its own time with particular meanings. However, a multitude of actors contribute to each and every local site with many of the actors linking what happens at a particular site to other times and spaces. For example, the portrait photograph on display at a national exhibition is linked to the creation of that photograph in a particular studio, the work of printing the photograph linked to another location. Latour addresses this notion of how actions reference other times and other places when he describes ‘local interactions.’ For Latour, a ‘local interaction’ refers to how “the assemblage of all the other local interactions distributed elsewhere in time and space… have been brought to bear on the scene through the relays of various non-human actors (emphasis in original, p. 194). In the nineteenth century, for a photograph to appear in an

46 Robert Bogdan includes a discussion of the role of photography in his book, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (1988). Bogdan describes how showmen, and in some cases, the performers with physical disabilities who presented themselves or were presented as ‘freaks’ at carnivals and fairs, were eager to use photography to highlight the unusual physical characteristics of performers.
exhibition of any type, a number of interactions had to take place between the moment of making an exposure on a plate or paper and the moment a visitor to a particular venue sees that photograph. Describing a touring exhibition of photographs in Great Britain in 1852-1853, Roger Taylor notes,

Inevitably, there were problems with delays, lost photographs and broken glass. Perhaps too much was expected of a railway system more experienced at handling milk, coal and gravel. One can picture the scene unloading the heavy crates of framed photographs at the railway siding where they would have been manhandled from truck to carrier’s wagon with nothing more sophisticated than brute strength and a trolley. Some venues dutifully replaced the glass and absorbed the cost, while others left the damage and exhibited the photographs behind cracked glass.

(2002, para. 11)

Some traces of actions are more visible than others. The cracked glass of a frame is a reminder of local interactions that have preceded the moment of a viewer encountering a photograph in a gallery. The moment of viewing and the work of meaning-making that the viewer participates in are influenced by a variety of actors who originate at other places and other times.

One of the first major exhibitions to include photography was the 1851 Great Exhibition at London’s Crystal Palace. During the exhibition’s six month run, over six million attendees (Auerbach, 1999, p. 137) had the opportunity to view objects and artifacts ranging from crafts and artworks, evidence of industrial progress in Great Britain and abroad as well as products, produce, and cultural material collected from colonial holdings. These types of displays “provided … opportunities to demonstrate [national] artistic, technical and scientific ingenuity” and “supported a broader civilising mission through their juxtaposition of world cultures, their encouragement of trade relations, and their promotion of advances in manufacturing and industry” (“Nineteenth Century International Exhibitions”, n.d., p. 1). In many ways, the 1851 Great Exhibition helped England imagine itself, and communicate an identity, as the global leader in the arts, sciences, diplomacy, and humanitarianism. The 1851 Great Exhibition provided
opportunities for visitors to see how different peoples were purported to live on a daily basis\textsuperscript{47} and encouraged visitors to consider how developments in science and technology could influence their own everyday lives. The breadth and depth of the Great Exhibition meant that multiple registers of vernacularity were reflected. These different registers were also visible in the classification of photographs that were displayed.

The Great Exhibition featured photographs that were presented according to purpose, artistry, and nationality with particular distinctions being drawn between these categories (Marien, 2002/2010; Taylor, 2002). Variety within categories was immense. Based on the description of photographic images in the catalogue for the Great Exhibition, photographs seemed to be grouped with other objects to encourage certain understandings about the value and use of the medium. For example, when photographic works were used as evidence of technical processes, like the use of particular chemical treatments or enamelling, they were exhibited as and with “Philosophical, Musical, Horological, and Surgical Instruments” along with false teeth, barometers, and French horns; however, if the photograph was a copy of an existing artwork like Thomas Craddock’s reproduction of engraver Thomas Holloway’s version of Raphael’s “The Blinding of Elymas,” it was included with “Sculpture, Models, and Plastic Arts, Mosaics, Enamels” in the Fine Arts category that also included drawings, carvings, as well as examples of new methods in lithography and paint-making (Ellis, 1851).

\textsuperscript{47} However, in the case of indigenous peoples whose material culture, and in some cases when the peoples themselves, were put on display, these exhibitions were largely focused on the spectacular nature of cultural difference rather than encouraging an appreciation of alternative vernaculars that were the processes and products of social interactions within particular cultures. Numerous scholars have rightly critiqued nineteenth (and early twentieth) century exhibitions of indigenous peoples as harbingers of a type of modernism which encouraged comparative evaluations between so-called ‘primitive’ and ‘developed’ societies (Auerbach, 1999; Greenhalgh, 1988; Young, 2009;). Indeed, photography was (and continues to be) used to support comparative judgments about racial and cultural hierarchies as Edwards (2002) and others have shown (Edwards & Hart, 2004; Maxwell, 1999; Pinney & Peterson, 2003). My goal here is not to celebrate nineteenth century exhibitions as an unproblematic way of representing the world, but to illustrate how the public display and classification of photographs has been an area of debate and disagreement from photography’s earliest days. If we reflect on how photography has travelled through different sites and discussions (and repeatedly returned to some), we can again appreciate how this media was and is used to communicate both about our individual and shared pasts and our everyday experiences.
The photographic entries in the Fine Arts category of the Great Exhibition catalogue include images of ruins and monuments like Thomas Craddock’s depiction of the Cloisters at Peterborough Cathedral (Ellis, 1851). Reflecting on how photographs were displayed in this category draws attention to how works designated as ‘Fine Arts’ were to be understood and appreciated as connected to one another. When photographs did appear in the ‘Fine Arts’ section, they were illustrating existing artworks or monuments. In this sense, the photographs were representations or surrogates for these works, rather than the photographs being considered artworks in and of themselves. Exhibit spaces at the Great Exhibition were documented in a number of ways and the commemorative watercolour paintings, made available as lithographs to commemorate the event, provide insight into how visitors would have encountered the different classes of objects on display. In the souvenir guide for the Great Exhibition, lithographs of the Fine Arts Court show objects clustered together related to particular themes – like neo-Gothic religious scenes or contemporary depictions of Greek and Roman mythology, for example (Michael, 1851/2012). J. Michael’s illustration of the Fine Arts Court also includes visitors to the exhibition who are shown clustered in twos and threes, in conversation with one another as they take in the works on display. Children are present too in Michael’s scenes, though they do not seem as interested in the material on exhibition as their elders are. Also in Michael’s rendering are a number of groupings of framed images, though the actual scenes and subjects that these images portray are difficult to decipher. Based on Michael’s illustration and the catalogue that lists the photographic images as being on display in a number of different areas within the Fine Arts exhibition space it is likely that the photographic images would be included amongst other types of art rather than segregated by medium. Situated alongside more conventional forms of artistic expression like sculpture and painting, visitors would then be conditioned to appreciate the photography as a medium for presenting real works of art.

The public viewing of artworks was not an entirely new phenomenon in the mid-nineteenth-century. Salon exhibitions organized and promoted by academies and associations had been regularly held for decades prior to the Great Exhibition. Visiting the Salon allowed “the ordinary man or woman… to rehearse before works of art the kinds of pleasure and discrimination that once had been the exclusive prerogative of the
patron and his intimates” (Crow, 1999, p. 87). While viewers could rehearse pleasure and discrimination, they did not necessarily have the same types of experience as art connoisseurs with extensive and exclusive knowledge of allegorical and historical references as well as compositional techniques. The organizers of the Great Exhibition sought to display particular photographs as “the most recent processes and techniques of the Fine Arts where the results were not to be judged on artistic merit, but on their application and suitability of purpose” (Taylor, Photographs Exhibited in Britain 1839 - 1865, 2002, p. 3). While these criteria seems curiously contradictory – photographs were included as Fine Arts, but not to be evaluated on artistic merit – it seems as if viewers were encouraged to evaluate the medium by making their own meaningful connections between the photographs and other material on display.48

If the photographs included in the Great Exhibition in the Fine Arts category were to be evaluated according to their application and suitability of purpose, it suggests that it did not really matter what the photographs depicted, as long as they were ‘art-like.’ Notably absent from the Great Exhibition were studio portrait photographs made by British photographers. While the works of British photographers at the Great Exhibition were restricted to the scientific and artistic categories, photographs made by practitioners in ‘Foreign States’ like Austria, France, and the United States were exhibited as part of their respective national displays. Commissioners of the different ‘Foreign States’ represented at the Great Exhibition selected what they deemed to be exceptional examples of photography from their particular states. The commissioner responsible for American entries, Edward Riddle, was expected to identify a wide range of objects that best represented the United States. Photography from Foreign States did not need to be classified as serving a particular purpose - displaying the results of a technical method in the scientific classes or as a suitable way of depicting or imitating

48 While the types of photographic images included as Fine Arts in the Great Exhibition correspond to trends in expression at the time, particularly in painting where the shift towards Romanticism emphasized depictions of the natural world and nostalgic portrayals of pre-industrial life (Fride-Carrassat & Marcadé, 2005), evaluating ‘artistic merit’ was still very much influenced by professional art societies and Royal Academies (in England and in France) that were instrumental in shaping expressive forms (Rosenfeld, 2004). If visitors were not familiar with the history of these institutional influences, they could not have been called upon to discern artistic merit in general, let alone how artistic merit might be interpreted in a relatively new medium.
existing types of two-dimensional expression in the Fine Arts category in the way that British photographs were categorized. For the United States, Riddle selected images from Mathew Brady’s collection of “illustrious Americans” (Ellis, 1851, p. 314) as the pinnacle of American photography.

Photographers in Britain and in France were often tasked with producing works that imitated certain aspects of existing artistic forms or documented important national sites, using photography to transport the ‘local,’ recalling Latour’s (2005) discussion, of a particular time and space to new localities via prints and exhibitions. Brady’s photographs of important figures in American history are part of a series of actions where the local is transported from one time and space to another. Brady’s images included in the Great Exhibition came from a series that was published as The Gallery of Illustrious Americans. While far from representative of the everyday experience of Americans in the mid-nineteenth century, The Gallery of Illustrious Americans does show how Brady, and his collaborators who participated in the project, were trying to show Americans to themselves (and to others) in a way that encouraged a national sense of pride and identity. Beginning in 1850, Brady collaborated with lithographer Francis d’Avignon to publish lithographed paper copies of daguerreotypes that portrayed influential American political leaders and war heroes (including Lewis Cass, John Caldwell Calhoun, Winfield Scott, as well as naturalist John James Audubon). Advertising in The Literary World, an American periodical that chiefly featured book reviews and discussions of literature and fine arts, Brady and d’Avignon offered paying subscribers the opportunity to receive folio copies of the portraits at quarterly intervals throughout the year and to have their own set of images that were, as described in their promotional material, a “great National work, which has been universally pronounced by American and Foreign Journals, to surpass, in artistic and typographical beauty any publication of the kind ever issued” (Brady, 1850).

Tasked with reviewing and assembling items of the Great Exhibition, commissioner Riddle was expected to identify a wide range of objects that best represented the United States. As a relatively ‘new’ nation from a European perspective, the United States had few artistic traditions to draw on in comparison to the established
academies and associations in Britain and France, for example. Photography from Foreign States did not need to be classified as serving a particular purpose - displaying the results of a technical method in the scientific classes or as a suitable way of depicting existing types of two-dimensional expression in the fine art class in the way that British photographs were categorized. Riddle did not need expert knowledge of art, photography, or any other practice to make selections that would best represent the United States. Brady’s photographs at the 1851 exhibition were exhibited amongst a diverse assortment of objects drawn from across a multiple registers of American life and included examples of rubber boots, dentistry equipment, mineral specimens, perfumes, and quilts. Rather than setting photography apart from objects that could illustrate aspects of everyday American existence, Brady’s daguerreotype images were set amongst these objects as representative of photography the United States. Brady’s daguerreotypes at the Great Exhibition are vernacular photography in the sense that these portraits depict a specific (and idealized) understanding of America that stressed concepts of military and political ingenuity, scientific enquiry, and exploration as embodied in particular men. However, Brady’s images of stern-faced uniformed and well-suited men do not necessarily depict the everyday realities of life for the majority of Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. Growing industrialism, particular in the north increasingly brought people into cities, but agrarianism still dominated in the south and in rural areas. While it may be impossible to highlight a singular experience as ‘typically’ representative of everyday American life in the mid-nineteenth century, or even today, the medium and technology of photography made it possible for more people to create, view, and own images that represented not only how they wanted to imagine and remember their country but also how they want to imagine and remember themselves.

Since the nineteenth-century, photographers have made and still do make images that purport to show people ‘as they are’ in an effort to capture everyday life. This type of photography includes a number of different genres, among them:

While lacking the formal institutions that influenced the European expressive arts, a distinctly American style of expression in painting, for example, was developing in the mid-nineteenth century with groups like the Hudson River School adopting and adapting techniques and stylistic expression according to the training and experience that individuals had received in Europe and using them to depict images of nature as the sublime and efforts at westward expansion and exploration in America (Avery, 2000).
ethnographic photography, documentary photography, and photojournalism. In the late-nineteenth century and the early-twentieth-century, the work of Jacob Riis and Albert Kahn, provide two examples of two different types of vernacular photographs. Riis’ images of impoverished New Yorkers in cramped and decrepit living quarters illustrated, literally, ‘how the other half lived’ in two publications in 1889 and 1890. The people depicted in Riis’ photographs were the figurative antithesis to idealized Americans that Brady photographed four decades earlier. Riis’ work drew attention to the everyday realities of life in tenement housing that went largely undocumented. Albert Kahn’s project to produce a record of life, in colour photography, the world over was different in approach and purpose from Riis’ work; however, Kahn’s work is a type of vernacular photography in that it captures everyday life as a way of showing commonalities between people in a effort to encourage intercultural understanding (Okuefuna, 2008). Looking at these two collections now, we can see how vernacular photography can be used to show people at their (perceived) worst and at their (nostalgic) best, providing an impetus that might change destructive vernacular practices, in Riis’ case, or, in the case of Kahn, to create an archive of the diversity of everyday cultural life the world over. Photographic depiction of everyday life and everyday activities (sometime idealizing and sometimes de glamourizing the two) are seen throughout the twentieth century including August Sander’s typologies of German people, People of the 20th Century, images produced by photographers like Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, and Walker Evans and others as part of the United States Farm Security Administration (FSA) program in the 1930s and 1940s, through to Robert Frank’s 1958 study, The Americans, and more recently, the work of artists such as Tina Barney and Richard Billingham. With the photographers mentioned above, it is possible to trace a movement from producing photographs that represent an essentialised version of everyday professions and social positions, to documenting the challenges and successes of individuals as representative of a larger social body (as did the photographs made by FSA photographers during the Depression captured individuals who, in some ways, stood in for how Americans were confronting ecological, employment, and financial hardships), to creating more artistically minded compositions that emphasize both the artifices and artificialities that are a part of contemporary life.
The carefully composed studio portraits by Mathew Brady on display at the 1851 Great Exhibition provide insight into how mid-nineteenth-century photography could be used as a way of communicating particular cultural attributes in the present as well as providing material that could be used to remember those particular attributes, and those people selected to depict them, in the future. The criteria for evaluating photographs at the Great Exhibition reflect evolving ideas about what photographic images could and should be used for and how people should interpret and understand them. The attempts to divide particular types of photography into different categories and the inadvertent (or intentional) exclusion of British portrait photography while photographers from Foreign States showcased the best representative works of their respective nations did lead to the further growth of photography societies and the expansion of photography exhibitions, both in type and scope.\(^{50}\) Brady was far from the only ‘national’ photographer who worked to produce (and profit) from images depicting his fellow countrymen in memorable ways.\(^{51}\) The praise for and interest in studio portraits in public exhibitions like the 1851 Great Exhibition illustrate a growing desire to view and engage with photographs. By the second half of the nineteenth-century, the increasing ease in terms of effort, skill, and economic investment, with which photographs could be made meant that more and more daguerreotypes, cartes-de-visite, and other photographic images were produced. And more and more often, these images were brought into and circulated through people’s homes. Photographs that occupied the home could provide records of relational encounters and allowed people to organize photographic images in ways that reflected the individual preoccupations of their hearts.

*The Gallery of Illustrious Americans* allowed people to bring photographic representations (remediated through lithographic reproduction) into their own homes and, in the specific case of Brady’s work, express and reflect on their connection to a

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\(^{50}\) By 1857 at the Exhibition of Art Treasures of the United Kingdom at Manchester, hundreds of portraits were included amongst the nearly 900 photographs on display and featured British politicians, literary figures, religious leaders, and society figures (Taylor, 2002). The 1850s as a decade saw dozens of exhibition across Britain on a number of themes including war photography from the Crimean conflict, the allegorical and expressive work of photographers like Cameron and Robinson, as well as urban scenes and historical monuments.

\(^{51}\) Étienne Carjat, for example, created a record of Parisian artists through his photographic portraits in the 1860s and 1870s some of which were published as *La galerie contemporaine*, and shown in the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1867 (Gernsheim, 1986).
larger sense of being American. At twenty dollars per subscription for the first volume, *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans* was an expensive investment in 1850. However, those who purchased a copy can be said to belong to an ‘imagined community’ as described by Benedict Anderson (1983) where individuals who have access to circulating media, like newspapers, for example, share a common experience of reading or reviewing the same information with others, even though they may never meet. The commercial promotion in periodicals and the positive reviews that Brady’s work received, with one critic praising “the grouping together of the most distinguished men of the Nation into a Gallery like this, and at a period like this, [as] not only a noble and patriotic design, but … [a furnishing] of art and patriotism for coming times” (National Portrait Gallery, n.d.) helped to promote both Brady’s name and his images. As a collection of images, *The Gallery of Illustrious Americans* met the needs of nineteenth-century Americans to create a record of national identity for the present and the future. Just over a decade after Daguerre’s and Talbot’s presentations, photography was well-situated as an important part of practices – the ways that people make sense of the past to inform their contemporary age.

*Domestic Spaces: cartes-de-visite, Kodak Culture, and beyond*

Popular exhibitions like the 1851 Great Exhibition and the dozens of fairs and exhibitions that were held throughout the second half of the nineteenth century provided individuals with access to different types of photography that purported to show technological advancements, artistic possibilities, and cultural and social types in a number of ways. While these fairs and exhibitions afforded viewers the opportunity to depart from their everyday work and family responsibilities to enjoy diversions – both educational and entertaining – presented in exhibition spaces, photography in the mid-1800s was increasingly moving from an elitist novelty practised by individuals with varying degrees of artistic and scientific intentions to the practices and products used by the middle-class (and others) to create and preserve images of individuals, in particular, images of family and friends. As people were becoming more familiar with photography – seeing them in exhibition, sitting for their own portraits and exchanging and displaying those images – photography was becoming more familiar as an everyday part of the home. Having portraits made of individuals, as well as portraits of entire families, meant
that people could decorate their homes and carry with them image-objects that depicted their loved ones in ways that both publicly and privately communicated an individual’s personal deeply meaningful connections to the people pictured in the photographs. When these portraits were

Displayed in parlors of living rooms or as part of everyday attire, these objects occupied a liminal space between public and private. They were, in other words, meant to do their work over and over again, and to be seen by both intimates and strangers. They are liminal in other senses as well. Photography is usually about making things visible, but these elaborated photographs are equally dedicated to the evocation of the invisible – relationships, emotions, [and] memories.

(Batchen, 2004, p.96)

Rather than appreciating the aesthetic qualities of a particular image and its compositional strengths, the photographs that people had made of themselves and the photographs they chose to consult again and again were valuable because they were visible reminders, to themselves and to others, of important relationships.

Inexpensive images helped to make photography more commonplace and allowed people to both display photographs in their homes and carry photographs with them as they travelled. Efficiencies in technical practices helped to make more photographs available to more people more often. French photographer Andre Adophe Disderi’s method for producing multiple negatives on a single glass plate and then printing positive images on albumen paper was quickly adopted as a standard practice in the production of carte-de-visite images (Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001). At first, the stylistic conventions of cartes-de-visite borrowed from earlier daguerreotype production where, owing to the necessity of lengthy exposures, sitters were often depicted holding or reading a book, providing a practical solution to the problem of how to sit still and occupy their hands while economically alluding to their culture and education. […] The slightly aloof raised chin and quizzical stare into the mid-distance that characterise portraits of the period are not only a result of the need to be held steady … but also a reflection of the enduring beliefs in character and morality.

(Hamilton & Hargreaves, 2001, p. 33)
The technological limitations of cameras in the 1860s and 1870s influenced the content of the images that could be made. Having a photograph made during this time required a certain comportment while sitting in front of the photographer’s lens. The postures and appearances of those pictured in cartes-de-visite were adapted from earlier types of portraiture associated with those of elite status, and photographers were eager to provide patrons with the opportunity to showcase the best possible versions of themselves. Carte-de-visite portraits, however, were not meant to be displayed in a grand hall or hang amongst a family’s collection of heirloom paintings. Carte-de-visite “were literally touchy-feely artefacts – not to be … looked at with deferential awe or revered from a distance but catalogued and collected, gossiped and commented upon. By the very literal handyness of their use, cartes imbued their subjects with the quotidian qualities of their format” (Plunkett, 2003, p. 69). Some cartes-de-visite might also prompt intellectual or moral inspiration; however, the cartes-de-visite themselves were physical objects that could be handled and shared in intimate situations.

Carte-de-visite were images to look at, objects to touch, admire, keep and pass along to others, who would similarly touch, admire, and keep them in frames, in books, and consult them at leisure. Nineteenth-century writer Charles Dickens describes the reactions of people seeing a photograph of themselves with responses ranging from exclamatory surprise or dismay to the “speechless examination of the newly-arrived cards, merely expressing [an] agony by an eloquent silence… twisting the work of art first this way and then that, holding it now at a distance, and now near, and anon upside-down” (Dickens, 1862, p. 165). This description of being intrigued with one’s likeness as well as the medium that supported that likeness can perhaps be considered an antecedent of Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) immediacy and hypermediacy – the novelty of seeing a photograph of one’s self and being able to twist the image ‘this way and then that,’ drawing it close and holding it afar speaks to the oscillation that occurs between being aware of the content of the image and the medium that supports that image. Additional media framing for the type of photographs that Dicken’s mentions are found in “those wonderful books which everybody possesses” (1862, p. 165), photographic albums. Photographic albums could be used to store multiple photographic images, could be consulted on a regular basis, and could illustrate particular connections between those depicted in the album’s pages. The value of photography in this instance
is not that it brings the world to the viewer, but that it brings people the viewer knows and cares for closer to them and provides a way to both remember and imagine the people pictured. In his essay on photography, “Doings of the Sunbeam,” rather than adapting and applying existing conventions related to how one might be expected to examine a painted portrait, Oliver Wendell Holmes describes a way of looking at photographs that emphasizes how images might allow viewers to reflect on relationships – examining the expressions of family and friends in such a way that a photograph reveals new perspectives on each viewing so that the “mental and emotional shapes by which [our friend’s or family member’s] inner nature [have] made itself known to us” are recalled when looking at the image (1864, p. 259).

Not only were people keen to collect, display, and consult photographs of their friends and families, they were also keen to make their own photographs. “By 1880,” art historian Mary Warner Marien writes, “photography had been quietly absorbed into the texture of everyday life” (2002/2010, p. 165). Photographs were used in special editions of newspapers, as part of advertisements, as souvenirs, and as identification documents. Technological and media advances also meant that new actors were now involved in networks of photographic representation and networks of memory practices involving photography. Cumbersome and sensitive equipment that demanded particular knowledge and skill to complete the steps involved in creating a photographic image was replaced with smaller, more portable, easier to operate cameras, and dedicated image processing centres that carried out technical and chemical treatments by mail order. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the first more or less ‘point-and-shoot’ cameras that required just the press of a button to make an exposure made it possible for people to participate behind the lens and make photographs of their own.52 The Kodak Company in particular popularized personal photography with its slogan “ ‘You push the button – We do the rest,’ entic[ing] people to carry a camera and make spontaneous shots in a way that had never been done before” (Marien, 2002/2010, p.

52 These early personal cameras were one actor in a complex network for photographic production. For example, individuals could purchase cameras and film, expose film, and then mail that the camera to a processing centre where trained technicians would make the prints and send them back (Mulligan & Wooters, 2011).
169). These so-called ‘snapshots’ became a new way for people to document and share images of people and events they wanted to remember. Snapshots did not replace studio portrait photography or subvert the burgeoning field of artistic photography that sought to distance itself from commercialism. Curator of photography at the Morgan Library & Museum Joel Smith writes,

Not incidentally, Kodak and its thousand successors succeeded by fueling what proved to be a growing middle class’s dual fascinations with gadgetry and self-memorialization. The point-and-shoot camera came early into the hands of artistic photographers, whether through daily domestic circumstance, as an emblem of the demotic enemy, [or] as the means to a distinctive new formal idiom free for the taking.

(Smith, 2001, para. 14)

The new possibilities, and limitations, of the snapshot form stretched across the multiple registers of vernacularity in the late-nineteenth-century and well into twentieth-century life.

Snapshots are key mediators in exploring how people make meaning with and communicate memory through vernacular photographs. Snapshot activity is easily visible in the types of places that Latour (2005) suggests researchers look when trying to follow non-human actors. These include: areas of innovation, things that are taken for granted, recognizing re-creations, and the imagination of alternative ‘truths’ (p. 79-82). Moments of novelty and uncertainty mark the development and use of snapshots across multiple registers of vernacularity where certain types of photographs are situated as familiar objects. In the first few decades of the twentieth century, as cameras became smaller and more portable, photo-finishing techniques also became quicker and more accurately representative of light and tones (Marien, 2002/2010, p.168). While it was possible to make colour photographs with several complex technical and chemical treatments, it was not until 1930s with the development of Kodachrome, Agfacolor, and other colour treatment processes that colour photography (in slide format) became a

53 Sir John Herschel first used the term ‘snapshot’ in relation to photograph in 1860 (Berger, 2011, p. 185).
reliable option, and not until 1960s, due largely to the expense of the film and photofinishing, that it was widely accessible and adopted by non-professionals (Hirsch, 2011).\textsuperscript{54} Today, colour photographs can be made with the touch of a button on a digital device and printed in full colour within seconds. The challenges of selecting an appropriate film speed to match a particular type of lighting or experimenting with colour saturation are, in most cases, distant novelties. Snapshots, whether contemporary or historical, also point back to their creators – specifically the individual who made the particular image and referentially to earlier photographers who have stood behind cameras.\textsuperscript{55} Sometimes photographers are even present in their own snapshots: people behind the camera may be inadvertently or purposely captured in the reflection of mirrors and windows. More recently, the popularity of ‘selfies’ where the photographer holds the camera at arm’s length to make a self-portrait image allows the photographer to be both subject and maker of a photograph.

While these situations all point to how vernacular photographs are part of complex networks of activity, snapshots are often involved in counterfactual histories. When Latour describes counterfactual histories, he speaks of “the resource of fiction” and how “thought experiments” make it possible for the seemingly “solid objects of today” to transform “into the fluid states where their connections with humans may make sense” (p. 82). Whether they are 3 ½" by 5" black and white images made with box cameras, colour prints developed from 35mm film, or digital files, photographs are actors that lend themselves to acts of imagination. Photographs show us the recent and more distant past; however, in viewing photographs we are able to imagine other times and other places not necessarily ‘just as they were.’ We make our own connections to the past, \textit{as we understand it} from our present positions.

\textsuperscript{54} As Robert Hirsch notes, while colour photography may seem entirely conventional across all forms of photography, until the late 1960s there was a distinct divide: “colour photography was associated with advertising, while black and white photography was associated with both art and authenticity” (2011, p. 304 )

\textsuperscript{55} This issue of re-creation is particularly relevant to the types of photographs associated with the \textit{Dear Photograph} website where contemporary photographers stand in the same location as earlier photographers to create an image.
Snapshots play an important role in meaning-making activities associated with mnemonic practices, particularly mnemonic practices involving the creation, circulation, and preservation of snapshots in photographic albums. As innovative and controversial mediators, albums they can travel great distances between friends, family members, and strangers... “The family album,” as Catherine Zuromskis notes, “has conventionally served as the ideal resting place for the snapshot” (2013, p. 54). Zuromskis goes on to describe how photographs in family albums may be carefully framed and captioned so that the “story of each image is crystallized into memory, history, and nostalgia,” representing “the family in important moments but also to present an idealized version of the family network in less important moments” where “scenes of daily life and leisure... buttress meaningful and memorable milestones” (2013, p. 54). The language that Zuromskis uses here situates the photo album as highly contrived and carefully manufactured to present a particular understanding. Zuromskis’ critique sets up a concern for the ‘subtexts’ in action in any album: how for example, people are purposely omitted or edited out (2013, p. 55). Many scholars, including Spence and Holland (1991), Hirsch (1997), Kuhn and McAllister (2006), and Rose (2010) have stressed that albums are spaces of ongoing activity. When people encounter snapshots in physical photo albums, they very often do so because they have knowledge of the people and events depicted within. Viewing a photo album can be a “means of reactivating a suspended conversation” between “reawaken[ed] ... actors” (Langford, 2001, p. 19). Time and distance may separate the subjects depicted in an album from the people consulting that album but a connection is possible, a reimagining of the past and other localities, because “A book of photographs layers surface upon surface of real and virtual intersections; clusters and breaks are spaces of associations whose meaning...

56 Tracing what people do with vernacular images as part of everyday practices is a difficult task as the intentions and motivations for making and remaking photographic images vary widely depending on the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of specific individuals and groups. While it is difficult to make generalizations about how people have used photographs in their homes and personal spaces to draw on memory and make meaning, what is clear is that photography as a medium is an important actor in a network of communication. Sociologist David Halle’s (1987; 1992) work offers critical empirical evidence and analysis regarding how people display photographs in their homes. Through studying homes in New York in the late twentieth century, Halle examines how the display of certain types of family photographs in certain areas of the home correlates with perceptions of value, identity, and status. Halle also describes how the physical spaces of a home shape opportunities to display photographs.
must be taken into account” (Langford, 2001, p. 4). How contemporary viewers of albums identify and make sense of those clusters and breaks is influenced by where and how those albums are encountered.

Creating, preserving, and selectively altering photo albums are mnemonic practices that serve contemporary needs. As albums pass from generation to generation, they continue to serve the desires of the present as family members reflect on their connections to those pictured. Favourite images (or copies of favourite images) may be distributed through a network of actors, possibly joining other snapshots in other albums or appearing on mantles or elsewhere. These lines of “pictorial communication,” (Chalfen 1987, p. 7) again, are largely between friends and family and often take place in domestic spaces. Sociologist Richard Chalfen describes how “Snapshots, home movies, and home video are forms of home mode communication. The ‘home mode’ is described as a pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centered around the home” (1987, p. 8). Chalfen’s research focuses on how American families make and use snapshots as part of communication systems. To do this, he examines “Kodak culture” and “Polaroid people,” the social practices and people involved in “whatever it is that one has to learn, know, or do in order to participate appropriately” in home mode communication and “the patterned qualities” of “the symbolic world… as they appear in shoeboxes of snapshots [or] in family albums” (1987, p. 10, 11).

Through a systematic coding of snapshots in family albums, Chalfen suggests a chronology of how people appear in these albums beginning with the birth of a child and pictures of that child’s first bath in a bassinet, through the stages of childhood to young adulthood and marriage, married life marked by vacation and travel, then parenthood, and key moments in later life such as important anniversaries (1987, p. 75-77). This suggested chronology resonates across many family photo albums and vernacular photographs. However, the “exhibition events” that Chalfen mentions, where at least one person besides the maker of the photograph is present when viewing an image (1987, p.
While Chalfen’s principal objects of interest are snapshots and albums, Martha Langford’s work extends the notion of these objects as key actors in communication systems, but one of her primary focuses is on what people actually do when they look at photo albums.

Langford argues, “photograph memories are nested in performative oral tradition” (2001, p. viii). They are key sites of activity where different stories about the past and the present intersect and influence one another. Langford’s research has also shown that people participating in exhibition events do not necessarily have to have prior knowledge of the people depicted in an album, knowledge of the album maker, or the photographer (Langford, 2006). Following her detailed analysis of “an anonymous snapshot album donated to the McCord Museum in 1992” where “there was little expectation about discoveries of the compiler,” Langford conducted interview research with five women (2006, p. 226). None of these women had prior knowledge of the album or the individuals shown in the album, but when asked to view the snapshots and leaf through the pages of an album “valued for its typicality” of displaying “Quebec family life in the 1920 and 1930s” (2006, p. 226), the women were quickly able to imagine a story for the young woman depicted in many of the images. The five women, ranging in age from a teenager to a woman in her early fifties, often “had memories ‘in common’ with the compiler” (2006, p. 234). Even if the women had not experienced exactly the same events and activities shown in the album made at least six decades before they encountered it, they commented on a sense of resonance between the unknown compiler’s pastimes and her experiences with family, friends as captured in the snapshots and their own personal experiences. Through subsequent research Langford eventually identifies the compiler of the album, and the main subject of many of the

57 Chalfen, in part, draws on examples that appear in popular periodicals as light-hearted articles about a husband’s discomfort at his mother-in-law’s portrait hanging above his bed, and submissions to and responses from advice columnist Ann Landers including one that mentions that hurt feelings of a woman who finds that the picture of her daughter, framed, and given as a gift to her neighbor is swapped out for a picture of the neighbour’s dog (1987, p. 26, 29). These misunderstandings and unintended associations point to how ‘exhibition events’ provide possibilities for a variety of meanings to emerge in relation to photographs and how they are displayed.
photographs that appear within, as Margery Paterson whose brother obtained the album following her death in 1998 and subsequently donated it to the McCord (2006, p. 241). ‘Typical’ though the album may be in its illustration of Margery’s early life, from childhood to becoming a young adult, Langford’s research suggests that the ordinariness of the album and the photographs makes possible deeply resonant connections between the past and present. Paterson’s album is not a blank slate to be written over by contemporary viewers. It may be understood as a palimpsest that is used and reused to make new meanings. As a palimpsest, Paterson’s album provides the possibility of a space of exchange for individuals to reflect on their own experience and connect their own memories with the photographs on display.

The conversations and reflections that brought up memories and revealed the interviewees’ resonant responses to the photographs could take place because Paterson’s album became a mediator in communicative activity. Consulting vernacular photographs and photography albums in museums and archives as a lone researcher can provide important insights into the past. However, Langford notes “Ironically, the very act of preservation – the entrusting of an album to a public museum – suspends its sustaining conversation, stripping the album of its social function and meaning” (2001, p. 5). While it is unlikely that the creators of any personal photo album envisioned their collection of vernacular photographs being housed by a museum or archive, once vernacular photographs and albums end up in heritage institutions their social functions and meanings are transformed; the photographs and albums become entangled in a new series of associations with new actors. As such, meaning-making related to those photographs and albums may be very different than the meaning-making that takes place in the family home where most of these vernacular photographs and albums reside.

Research conducted during this dissertation included viewing vernacular photograph and albums in collections at the McCord Museum and the International Center of Photography (ICP). At the McCord, this included the Alice Constance Dunn album (discussed further in the next chapter), and the Paterson album that Langford describes above, as well as other material donated by Paterson’s brother, including a snapshot record of a European Grand Tour in 1925. At the ICP, I viewed a selection of
five albums from the Barbara Levine collection – ranging from an album that depicts life in rural Oregon in the early 1900s to a the drug store album compiled between 1935 and 1937 by Vivian June Vollbracht with ready-made paper frames for mounting photographs of friends. It is still very much possible to make meaning with these photographs and albums because these objects are mediators. Latour reminds us that mediators “simply offer occasions, circumstances, and precedents” and that mediators can trigger other mediators with “a lot of new and unpredictable situations... ensuing” (p. 58, 59). Vernacular photographs and photography albums that have been separated from their makers and those who may have originally consulted them on a regular basis, can still be a part of important contemporary (and future) actions. These actions are shaped by the types of networks they are caught up in, for example, in family collections, in archival collections, and in museums and galleries.

*Snapshots in and out of the (Art) Museum*

While vernacular photographs and photography albums are associated with domestic spaces, they have become increasingly popular as objects worthy of display in museums and art galleries. Photographs have been shown in public exhibitions since the middle of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the mid-twentieth-century that photographs, and more specifically, vernacular photographs and snapshots, began to appear in museums and galleries. In the United States, the actors involved in some of the early exhibitions in the 1910s continued to play an influential role in shaping public exhibitions of photography for much of the twentieth-century. Exhibitions of photography, as art, helped the medium gain a foothold in influential public museums, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In fact, New York was a key site of action for photography exhibitions in the first part of the twentieth-century. The Little Galleries of the Photo-Secession at 291 Fifth Avenue in New York, also known as ‘291’ often featured work by Alfred Stieglitz, an American who worked in a variety of media and sought to promote photography as an aesthetic and expressive form equal to painting and sculpture (Voorhies, 2004). Stieglitz viewed himself as an artist and, in his career of more than four decades, he moved from creating pictorial images to embracing modernism. Edward Steichen, who collaborated with Stieglitz at 291, made images that were to be shown as art, produced commercial images in his work for advertising
campaigns, headed the Naval Aviation Photographic Unit during the Second World War, and was curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York for more than a decade. Stieglitz and Steichen moved through overlapping artworlds in New York and American photography and while they would consider their own images to be art, rather than vernacular productions, they did train their cameras on what may be called vernacular scenes. These images, though, have particular aesthetic qualities that are associated with artistic photographic movements, such as pictorialism and modernism.

Steichen’s “The Flatiron Building,” for example, made in 1904, is an ethereal depiction of one of New York City’s iconic buildings. The photograph shows dusk falling as shadowy figures make their way through streets lined with leafless trees. While the scene here may be vernacular, in the sense that the scene shows an everyday happening, Steichen and Stieglitz selected this image for inclusion in a 1910 exhibition that “promote[d] Pictorialist photography as a fine art” (“The Flatiron,” n.d.). At the time, Steichen’s work was not considered vernacular photography and to refer to “The Flatiron” as an example of vernacular photography would deny the efforts that Steichen himself took to try and legitimize fine art photography. With Stieglitz’s “The Steerage,” (made in 1907) another vernacular scene is depicted with passengers aboard a steamship, some who gather near their drying laundry, others, who hold children in their arms, and groups, who cluster together along railways. Like Steichen, Stieglitz would probably not, think of his photographic work as vernacular, regardless of the content depicted. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s description of “The Steerage” stresses that Stieglitz considered the image “his first "modernist" photograph,” marking his “transition away from painterly prints of Symbolist subjects to a more straightforward depiction of quotidian life” (“The Steerage,” n.d.). Photographers, such as Stieglitz and Steichen, who considered themselves artists, were influential actors in contemporary art movements of the early-twentieth-century. “The Flatiron” and “The Steerage” are examples of how photographer’s captured everyday scenes and expressed them in such ways that emphasized photography’s “unique properties and characteristics” as an artistic medium (Newhall 1937/2009, p. 167).

Beaumont Newhall’s emphasis on photography’s particular expressive qualities is evident in his curation of the first photography exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art
in New York (MoMA). On March 17, 1937, *Exhibition of Photography: 1839-1937* opened to the public and showcased more than 800 objects. In addition to the hundreds of photographs on display, “cameras and photographic apparatuses [were] shown” to “demonstrate the particular characteristics of different techniques, the artistic qualities of each process, and the relation of technical and aesthetic developments of photography to the taste and social needs of the times” (Museum of Modern Art, 1937). Art historian Christine Y. Hahn describes how Newhall’s curatorial work in the 1937 exhibition focused on “Photography, its presence everywhere in the modern world, used by the ordinary citizen, the scientist, and the artist [as] … the ultimate reflection of modern culture, and by extension, modern popular art” (2002, p. 150). Hahn’s description here suggests that the works on display in *Exhibition of Photography: 1839-1937* reflected different registers of vernacularity, which as Abrahams reminds us include “the traditional and the innovative, the highbrow and the popular” (2006, p. 12). Rather than grouping images by themes specific to the content or intended use of photographs, *Exhibition of Photography: 1839-1937* was organized according to a technological history of photography that began with visitors entering a life-sized *camera obscura* before moving onto sections that featured different types of photographic production like daguerreotypes and calotypes (Hahn, 2002). Assessment of what a photograph should be – artistic, descriptive, or expressive – was not prescribed for viewers. Historically, though, museums often dictated to visitors how certain works should be appreciated by encouraging certain types of comparison, emphasizing particular examples as pinnacles of artistic or technical achievement, and endorsing particular values.^[58]

*Exhibition of Photography: 1839-1937* brought together a diversity of images from across the registers of vernacularity. The images Newhall selected came from a variety of ‘high’ and ‘low’ sources, from “rare prints to widely reproduced magazine photographs, advertisements, and movie stills” and included “photographs which were signed and unsigned, scientific photographs, photographs printed in newspapers, and

^[58] Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Tony Bennett (1995), in particular, describe how museums both participate in and reflect the meaning-making processes of different eras related to knowledge and power. By examining how museums have allowed for certain types of publics to gather and experience the display of particular objects, Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett discuss how different relationships between people, objects, and exhibition spaces shape “acts of knowing” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 214).
taken from airplanes” (Hahn, 2002, p. 147). The display of so many different types of photographs across the Museum of Modern Art's four floors in 1937 challenged some of the existing ideas about how objects should be viewed in art museums. Hahn notes that in a New Yorker review of Exhibition of Photography: 1839-1937, Lewis Mumford criticized the lack of distinct thematic divisions based on artistic expression and questioned the place of such an exhibition in a museum of art when it lacked an appropriate “weighing and assessment of photography in terms of aesthetic merit” so that viewers of the exhibition were left to their own interpretations – as Mumford puts it, “adding to [their] burden” and “reducing [the museum's] proper sphere of influence” (as cited in Hahn, 2002, p. 147).

Museums are key actors in influencing the interpretation of objects on display – communicating particular ideas about how to make sense of the world and how to make sense of the past. With respect to mnemonic practices, museums have long played important roles in the work of (re)interpreting the past to serve contemporary needs and desires (Bennett, 1995; Falk, 2007; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; McClellan, 1994; Smith, 2006). Meaning-making activities associated with museums are never fixed. The breadth and depth of Exhibition of Photography: 1839-1937 allowed visitors to the Museum of Modern Art, and the thousands who visited the exhibition as it travelled across the United States in 1938 and 1939, to develop their own interpretations for the myriad images on display. In the forward to the exhibition catalogue, Newhall approaches the question of whether photography should be viewed as art and reviews debates about how photography might fit in relation to other forms of expression; however, he emphasizes that rather than comparing photography to painting or other arts, photography is best evaluated on its own terms and its capacity for producing detailed images of the world around us (Museum of Modern Art, 1937). Visitors to Exhibition of Photography: 1830-1937 were able to engage with images of the world – scenes that included both photographs of times and places that were previously only imaginable (the exhibition included a significant collection of historical photographs, all from noted photographers, from the nineteenth century) as well as scenes of people engaged in mundane tasks of everyday life.
The images included in *Exhibition of Photography* included the work of well-known photographers Alfred Stieglitz, Ansel Adams, Brady, Robinson, Talbot, Daguerre, as well as emerging figures Margaret Bourke-White, Edward Westlake, Brett Weston, and Paul Strand who would go on to be recognized as some of the twentieth century’s most influential photographers. For many of the individuals whose images were displayed, photography was or would become the defining medium for their artistic and documentary creations. The Museum of Modern Art in New York continued with avant-garde exhibitions of photography and less than a decade after *Exhibition of Photography 1839-1937*, the museum staged an entire exhibition devoted primarily to contemporary vernacular photographs. *The American Snapshot: An Exhibition of the Folk Art of the Camera* opened in March 1944 with nearly 350 images drawn from “the files of the Eastman Kodak company to which they had been sent as entries in various competitions throughout the years” (Museum of Modern Art, 1944). The photographs “were made by youngsters, by college boys and girls, by young parents, by grandparents, by people of every age, interest, or status” (Morgan, 1944, p. 9). The photographs on display in *The American Snapshot* included family photographs, children at play, animals, and urban scenes. In the catalogue of the exhibition, Willard D. Morgan, the director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, encouraged visitors to appreciate the resonance between the photographs on display and photographs those visitors may have had in their own collections:

> We remember having produced a picture, maybe several pictures, just as good as those in this exhibition. But we have stowed those pictures away in albums or in sheafs [sic] of envelopes, deep in some desk or bureau drawer. We cherish them for their own sakes. The pictures shown here differ from most other snapshots primarily in that they have been brought to light so that they may be seen and enjoyed by a wider group of people. They have been collected, through the years, because of their human interest, their beauty, their acute perception of life and the visible world. None of them was made especially for this showing. *They are all essentially blood brothers to those prized pictures of your own making.*

(Morgan, 1944, p. 16-19, emphasis added)

Through a complex network of actors, photographs that were once made by ordinary people to mark ordinary occasions found their way into the museum space. *The*
American Snapshot showcased ‘localizers’ in action – the transportation of other places and other times to the space of the gallery (Latour, 2005, p. 194) through photographs that stressed everyday experiences like the ones that museum visitors would capture with their own cameras. Morgan writes in the catalogue for the exhibition, “the necessities of an exhibition such as [The American Snapshot] may underemphasize the true snapshot character of these pictures. To be seen by the public, the pictures had to be enlarged” changing the way that people would be able to interact with them (1944, p. 19). Remediated from the original snapshots that were created through standardized photo-finishing methods in commercial processing centres, the photographs in The American Snapshot made the snapshot ‘larger than life’ in a sense, but it also allowed people to investigate the finer details of the images and notice elements that may have previously been passed over.

Following the Second World War an increasing number of exhibitions at museums and galleries featured the work of photographers in both solo and group shows. Vernacular photography and vernacular themes continued to capture the interest of photographers like Robert Frank, Lee Friedlander, and Garry Winogrand who turned their cameras to everyday happenings in American communities. Newhall describes how Frank, in particular, “photographed the American scene in its most popular aspects: outings, parades, automobiles, filling stations, billboards, roadside bars, the lonely desert highway” (2009, p. 288). These types of photographs are far different than the portraits of illustrious Americans that Brady made over a century earlier, but they all speak to a desire of to capture images worth remembering, images that could be shared and consulted in the present and for posterity. By the 1970s, artists and photographers also increasingly turned to historical photographs found in personal and archival collections, remediating, incorporating, and translating that past in new ways. Jo Spence, in particular, was at the forefront of a movement involving the repurposing of family photographs alongside contemporary images to complicate the idealistic narratives that may be portrayed in family photo albums (Cross & Peck, 2010; Marien, 2002/2010).

Spence and others, including Lorie Novak, Karen Ellen Johnson, as well as Canadian artists Sandra Semchuk and Marien Penner Bancroft have used and made vernacular photographs of their own experiences to reflect on issues of gender, identity,
and memory. Spence and colleague Rosy Martin also worked to develop a method of “psychological theory in which new photographic portraits were made in order to ‘disrupt, replace, or rework’ an aspect of personality” (Marien, 2002/2010, p. 463). These photographs can unsettle existing understandings of memories and recast vernacular photographs in a new light. This unsettling is possible, in part because of the technologies and media involved in making and remaking photographs. Marien describes how the artists in the 1970s turned to the “snapshot, with its innocence of technique and composition, and the cheap camera, with its lack of sophisticated metering or fine lenses [as] an exciting means to extricate photography from its longstanding infatuation with ‘artistry’” (2002/2010, p. 463). Rather than debating what mattered in terms of aesthetic and technical proficiency, a growing interest in how vernacular photographs might allow for complex communicative interactions with and (re)interpretations of the past, including moments of omission, silence, and difficult memories, expanded and complicated communicative networks.

While remediating and repurposing vernacular photographs can allow for important memory work related to individual identity and memory, it can also play an important role in shared memory practices. In the late 1970s the National Film Board of Canada invited submissions from people across the country who wanted to share their stories of the country in a project called Sites of History. Tasked with reviewing and organizing some 3000 images, Martha Langford recalls “that there were a tremendous number of pictures of people posing in front of monuments,” images of vernacular architecture, and informal family gatherings (personal communication, June 10, 2013). From these images, Langford and her colleagues worked to select images to create a travelling outdoor exhibition that allowed people to literally “[turn] the pages of a big Canadian photo album” (personal communication, June 10, 2013). Interest in contributing personal vernacular photographs to public exhibitions has not waned. In 2000, Baltimore’s Contemporary Museum opened “Snapshot: An Exhibition of 1000 Artists” with images contributed by individuals that ranged from “invited art-word luminaries to the unknown (including [people who sent photographs] in response to public solicitation via email list)” (Smith, 2001, para. 7). As the exhibition travelled, museums continued to invite the public to share their images, localizing other places and other times in the gallery space and incorporating local expressions into the ongoing
exhibition. Like *The American Snapshot* exhibition half a century earlier, the novelty of sharing one’s images with a wider public and the interest in viewing other people’s everyday photographs remains.

At the end of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the twenty-first-century, vernacular photographs have been shown in numerous exhibitions. Some of these exhibitions such as the International Center of Photography’s 2006 *African American Vernacular Photography: Selections from the Daniel Cowin Collection*, and the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia’s 2014 *Pigapciha! 100 Years of Studio Photography in Nairobi* speak to how everyday photographs have been used, collected, and preserved by a variety of communities. Photographs included in these exhibitions show individuals in both informal and formal situations participating in making images that could help capture particular moments that could then be reviewed and shared in the future. Other exhibitions such as the 1998 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art’s *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present* and the 2013 Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York’s *Everyday Epiphanies Photography and Daily Life Since 1969* are attempts to provide a survey of vernacular photography that shows a connection between contemporary practices of image making and those of previous generations. The recent and current interest in exhibiting vernacular photography in museums perhaps speaks to a concern “that the snapshot’s arrival on the art museum’s walls is a symptom foretelling its passing from our lives” (Smith, 2011, para. 11). Joel Smith suggests that current practices associated with making, sharing, and circulating vernacular photographs that include “surrender[ing] the memory-making process to conscious editorial control before an image even gets to the hard drive” and “download[ing] the virtual faces of family and friends for occasional visual reference amid email and stock quotes” means that today’s digital photographs are “unlikely ever to graduate into physical form for the accidental benefit of later generations” (2001, para. 12). With changes in media and technology, the practicalities of making and sharing vernacular photographs have changed. The non-human actors that are now involved in capturing images and displaying that will be consulted on an everyday basis are far different than they were even a decade ago. The desire to make sense of the past with vernacular photographs persists. New technologies and new media actors afford new
connections and new relationships as people continue to seek ways to share their pictures and their memories with others.

**What Photography Should Be: New Media Spaces and Online Connections**

In the twenty-first-century, gathering friends and family to consult a photo album has waned as new media and new technologies make it possible for people to share vernacular photographs at the click of a button. Social media websites, such as Facebook, allow users to arrange photographs in ‘albums’ that can then be shared with friends and followers. While some of the language of existing photographic practices like ‘album sharing’ are taken up with this new format, reviewing vernacular photographs online now involves clicking and scrolling as opposed to page turning. Making and sharing photographs in 2015 can appear far different than making and sharing photographs in 1995, or even 2005. Media scholar José van Dijck (2008) comments that “recent research by anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists seems to suggest that the increased deployment of digital cameras – including cameras integrated in other communication devices – favours the functions of communication and identity formation at the expense of photography’s use as a tool for remembering” (p. 58). However, as van Dijck argues, photography’s role in memory practices and “photography’s function as a memory tool is still equally vibrant, even if its manifestation is changing in the digital era” (2008, p. 58). The ubiquity of recording technologies now means that we can document every moment of our lives, if we so choose. Mobile technologies, like Internet-connected cellular phones, make it possible for individuals to make and share photographs with family, friends, and strangers, more quickly than ever before. Photo-editing applications on mobile phones also allow almost instantaneous editing of the images we make, providing greater and greater flexibility in choosing how we present ourselves, and others, to the world. Describing vernacular photographs in the early twenty-first-century, van Dijick goes on to note that “pictures once intended to remain in

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59 Snapchat, for example, which is discussed later in this section, involves photography and can be a critical tool for creating and sharing a sense of identity. Snapchat images though are temporally limited – they disappear from the Snapchat application after a set period of time. However, as will be discussed, people have found ways to preserve and share Snapchat images outside of the application and beyond what the image sharing platform was originally intended to do.
personal archives increasingly enter the public domain, where they are invariably brushed up or retouched to (retro)fit contemporary narratives” (p. 71). Vernacular photographs, though, have always been (re)configured to fit contemporary understandings of the past. Selective framing (or overt cropping) of images and the use of various editing techniques have been used for nearly two centuries to strengthen or downplay different connections between people who might be pictured in a photograph. Selectively choosing and using photographs to stress certain relationships has a very long history.

The Internet and websites are new actors in the lengthy and complex history of photography being used in mnemonic practices. As such, they do not ‘replace’ actors in stable networks; they are new actors that are a part of new networks where memory and images are transformed and translated in actions of meaning-making. Digital media brings new types of actors into relationships. As before though, new formats and technologies do not wholly supplant existing forms and practices. The way that people have used photographs, made with film negatives and printed in darkrooms or photo finishing centres, for example, influence the way people use new tools. People who seek to make sense of the past to meet the needs of their present may now exploit digital cameras, digital files, scanners, and digital file sharing opportunities to document and share their understandings. As people adopt and adapt these formats to meet their needs, new networks form. However, these new networks, may echo connections that earlier actors achieved. Art historian Margaret Olin writes,

Placing photographs on the Internet, at its most basic not dissimilar to the experience of creating a scrapbook or an album, is a way of not merely having photographs but creating something with them that can take on a life of its own and attract its own community. Certainly the Internet allows increased access to images; it allows more people to ‘handle’ them, to use and collect them, and to gather around them; it allows people who have never met to get in ‘touch,’ form communities, and ‘meet.’

(Olin, 2012, p. 149-150)

Olin’s description here brings to mind Latour’s reflection on the place of an actor in an actor network: “an ‘actor’ … is not the source of an action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it” (Latour, 2005, p. 46). Vernacular photographs are
one type of actor, social media websites another, the Internet another still. As these actors meet in different ways, the important work of meaning-making and memory-sharing can take place. Like the actors before them though, the Internet and the websites (including, but not limited to Flickr, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Twitter) that contribute to documenting moments and experiences and sharing them through photographs offer opportunities rather than certainties.

Most social media websites make few demands with respect to technical proficiency in order to upload, share, or comment on photographs. Minimal knowledge of software and file structure is needed. In some ways, the Kodak promise of ‘You push the button – We do the rest,’ has been reimagined for the twenty-first century: ‘You click a button – We do the rest.’ For individuals interested in a more ‘hands on’ approach to creating, editing, and creatively remaking vernacular photographs, a variety of software tools for professional and hobbyists alike afford opportunities for infinite remediation of images. From the early-1990s and onwards, software like GIMP (the GNU Image Manipulation Program), and Adobe Photoshop have been available to alter and enhance digital images. Importing vernacular photographs into these programs means that digital files must be created. One of the primary ways that existing print photographs have been ‘digitized’ is through scanning. Scanners share some of the qualities of cameras in that they capture images by transferring information onto a light sensitive recording device. Early experiments with scanning technology were essentially devoted to making images of existing photographs. In 1957, computer scientist Russell Kirsch and his colleagues were able to make an image – a digitization of one of Kirsch’s own family photographs that depicted his three year old son Walden – with the aid of drum scanner and programming language that would allow a computer to ‘see’ a picture (Baum, 2007). Here, a vernacular photograph was one critical actor in a once innovative process that has become relatively commonplace. By the end of the twentieth century, scanners had found their way into family homes and photo finishing centres.

Digitizing images opened new opportunities for expanding ‘home mode’ communication, and it also broadened possibilities for creative memory practices. In the 1990s, creative professionals at the vanguard of using and developing applications that explored possibilities for sharing memory collaborated with colleagues who had specific
technical knowledge related to online communication. Museums, universities, and other institutions supported projects that experimented with computer-based multi-media tools and technology. Some of these projects persist in online spaces or electronic archives. Esther Parada’s 1995 work, *Transplant: a Tale of Three Continents*, is one example. Parada was commissioned to produce a work for the Derby Photography Festival and based on her interest and research in “English Garden traditions” she developed a series of what she termed digital gardens, “exploring a range of cultural assumptions regarding artifice and nature, wilderness [sic] and civilisation, native and foreign, purity and hybridity” (Parada, 1995). *Transplant* relates the story of Mary Leiter, a young woman from Chicago who married British aristocrat George Nathaniel Curzon in 1895. George’s career as a diplomat took the family to India, but the Curzons often relied on money from the Leiters to support their lifestyle (Parada, 1995). Parada’s work here traces the connections between horticulture, colonialism, and memory. The Leiter family fortune was built and heavily invested in grain stocks. The early-nineteenth-century saw the transformation of landscapes near Chicago to foster the growth of money-making crops such as wheat and corn. These transformations took place across the globe and Parada suggests that the cultivation of specific plants, in part, underlies the story of Mary Curzon and her travels from Chicago, to Derby, and eventually her role as diplomatic wife in India.\(^60\) *Transplant* allows visitors to navigate their own paths through a succession of archival photographs, images, and texts connected through hyperlinks. Visitors to the website can choose a number of routes through the story Parada offers and switch between pages as they like, unbounded by a particular linear narrative.

In describing *Transplant* as a then work-in-progress at in September 1995, Parada reflects on the affordances that new media, especially, digital online platforms offer. Parada notes,

> I would like to make the case that the changes we are experiencing today are part of a long Western — and perhaps human — tradition of

\(^60\) One page of *Transplant* includes reference to how horticultural research influenced colonial rule. Parada cites Lucile Brockway’s research into “the role of The Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew in the cultivation of cinchona bark, the source of the wonder drug that controlled malaria” and offered some protection against the illness for the colonial civil servants tasked with governing in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific (as cited in Parada, “Daughter,” 1996).
meddling, mixing, and manipulating our environments (in both minor and massive ways). And that digital technology’s facilitation of artifice, encourages us to make this manipulation explicit – perhaps even to examine more effectively the cultural constructions, the virtual worlds, which we inevitably inhabit.

("A Tale of Three Continents" lecture, 1995)

In this excerpt, Parada stresses the value of hypermediacy where technological tools can be used both to develop and draw attention to spaces of interaction and exchange. While digital and online technologies make it possible to create and manipulate new types of virtual spaces, mediation has long played a role in how we make sense of the past in the present. Recall that when Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe remediation, they note that it is the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy. Commenting on how contemporary artists use new media tools to experiment with images, creating, for example, collages, photomontages, and different types of hypermedia, Bolter and Grusin stress that “In all cases, the artist is defining a space through the disposition and interplay of forms that have been detached from their original context and then recombined” (1999, p. 39). Digitizing existing vernacular photographs drawn from personal and archival collections and using them in online exhibitions may encourage reflection on how the past is recombined and (re)mediated in the present.

Parada’s work also reflects how the remediation of family and archival photographs might be situated across multiple registers of vernacularity. Valerie Eggemeyer comments that Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents “has the ‘high’ or research intense study of culture and social dynamics of the family unit” as well as the “‘low’ or vernacular aspect[s]” of photomontage associated with family albums (2004, p. 23). Rather than directive instruction about how visitors to Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents should interpret the story of the Leiter and Curzon families, Parada’s online exhibition offers entry points into a story for visitors to participate actively in the meaning-making process. Sara Roegiers and Frederik Truyen describe how new media forms, such as Internet websites, borrow from the ‘traditional’ tools that are used to describe the past, “pictures, historical maps, diagrams and time lines,” and help convey history from one generation to the next (2008, p. 69). “Digital media,” Roegiers and Truyen argue,
“activate these tools, for instance by allowing users to witness... processes in action” so that the tools shift from story-telling aids to story “entry point[s]” (2008, p. 69). Visitors to Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents can choose the depth and breadth of material they want to explore through a series of mouse clicks. Parada includes references to complex notions of colonialism, identity, and resource exploitation, but she also includes everyday images of Mary Leiter and her children and excerpts from Leiter’s diary. There are multiple opportunities here across multiple registers to engage with the past.

Two decades after Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents became available online, a number of online exhibitions featuring vernacular photographs have appeared (and disappeared) as museums, artists, researchers, hobbyists, and others experiment with new media possibilities. Digital files – a series of binary code that are translated and transformed across multiple devices – present new challenges and new concerns for photography. Photography’s material past, like tangible prints stored carefully in albums, is far different from photography’s material present where disks, drives, and cloud computing mean that images may never exist beyond a computer screen. It is unlikely that today’s vernacular photographs will be ‘discovered’ in forgotten shoeboxes in an attic or make their way into antique stores.

The contemporary social rules bound up with making, engaging with, and circulating vernacular photography can appear vastly different than the social conventions associated with photography in the mid-nineteenth-century. We can now make, view, and send a countless number of images on a daily basis. Compared to 150 years ago when photography often involved the careful consideration for posing at one’s best, relying on the expert knowledge of a photographer to capture and develop a photographic print, and preserving said print as a cherished object, our current experiences with vernacular photography emphasize instantaneous making and remaking. Currently, one of the most popular photography software applications, Snapchat, allows users to take and send images made on mobile devices and “control how long it is visible by the person who receives it, up to 10 seconds. After that, the picture disappears and can’t be seen again” (Bilton, 2012, para. 4). However, users of Snapchat regularly create screen captures of images made with the application, effectively preserving them so that they can circulate well beyond the original media
platform where they were made. The creators of Snapchat assert that “Snapchat isn’t about capturing the traditional Kodak moment. It’s about communicating with the full range of human emotion — not just what appears to be pretty or perfect” (Spiegel, 2012, para. 7). While Evan Spiegel’s comments here attempt to draw a distinction between photography of the past, ‘the traditional Kodak moment,’ and new media tools that promise the possibility of capturing vernacularity in all its diversity, he fails to consider that the Kodak moment itself is a construct that is constantly made and remade as people engage with and use media and technology to document both everyday and extraordinary moments in their lives.

Artist and scholar Joanna Zylinska (2009) reflects on contemporary anxieties about photography’s transition into the digital era by returning to the notion that photography has never been a static process. Responding to Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of ‘liquid modernity,’ Zylinska contends that there is an “inherent liquidity of culture and its objects – including photographs” and “that liquidity provides us with a very different model for understanding cultural objects as permanently unfixed and unfixable” (Zylinska, 2010, p. 141, emphasis in original). Vernacular photographs – whether analogue or digital – are mediating objects with complex connections to other objects and actors in flexible and dynamic networks. Conceiving of social connections as flexible and changing networks rather than static givens also relates to discussions of memory that allow for memory practices that are inherently variable. Zylinska’s work illustrates this relation when she writes,

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61 Bauman (2000) contends that individuals are part of increasingly fluid sociality and can shift to take on a variety of roles that would be previously unthinkable in past eras of ‘solid modernity’ where social institutions (and the individuals within them) resisted change.
The notion of liquidity also allows us to address the problem of memory... in relation to photography without the anxiety, technophobia or hysteria that have often accompanied discussions about the future of this medium. What changes in this particular articulation is not a cultural object as such – a photograph, or even the discipline or practice of photography – because these are being understood here as having *always* been unstable, liquid and only ever temporarily stabilised. What changes instead is our way of understanding this object, and of speaking about it.

(2010, p. 141, emphasis in original)

Creative digital expressions and experimentations that remediate existing images draw attention to the networked relationships that have always been present in the sharing and circulation of vernacular photographs. Computer terminals are actors that translate strings of ones and zeroes into images that resonate as familiar, similar to the types of photographs found in family albums. The spaces where we now find vernacular photographs include virtual albums and online exhibitions. These spaces are accessible across multiple devices at almost any time. Photographs are increasingly available across the different registers of vernacularity and play important roles in the transformation and translation of memory and meaning-making.

**What Photography Should Be: Ongoing Practices of Memory and Mediation**

Contemporary meaning-making networks that involve vernacular photography and new media actors, the Internet, social media websites, digital cameras, and software programs that allow for easy editing of images, mean that multiple copies of different images are accessible in a wide variety of ways. Rather than returning to visit particular images at an exhibition or in a museum or even repeatedly consulting a particular page of a photo album, digital media are not tied to specific locations in the way that previous exhibitions of photography may have been. The laptop computers and smartphones that we carry with us allow access to an unlimited number of vernacular photographs that family, friends, and strangers have shared online. Similarly, memory practices are more mobile than ever. Looking at how particular spaces may shape and contribute to memory practices provides valuable opportunities to reflect on how actors intersect and influence one another. However, these spaces – the public exhibition, the museum gallery, the family home, and the Internet connected website – are very much a part of
social life that is constantly being made and remade through different associations, assemblies, and relationships. Memory practices, as part of social life, are processes of dynamic remediation. Adapting past and existing ways of making and sharing vernacular photographs to meet contemporary desires to communicate memory is the work of remediation in action. In their reflection on remediation, Paul Prior and Julie Hengst (2010) offer a reminder that “Remediation points to ways that activity is (re)mediated – not mediated anew in each act – through taking up materials at hand, putting them to present use, and thereby producing altered conditions for future action” (p. 1). As we have seen in the history of photography and photography exhibitions presented in this chapter, the actions of making and displaying photographs that both depict and are situated across the multiple registers of vernacularity reflect the needs of the present and provide materials that will be adapted, repurposed, and remediated in future memory practices.
Chapter 4.

Methodology

“Events are not caused by anything other than the story that led them to be the way they are.”

(Becker, 1998, p. 61)

As outlined in chapter two, the concept of spaces of exchange in this dissertation refers to the mediated spaces – both physical and digital – where communicative interactions take place. In particular in the online world, communication tools make it possible for people to participate in, create, and add to projects. These contributions then make it possible to trace the types of interactions that are encouraged in particular spaces and provide insight into the communicative exchanges that vernacular photography remediations afford. As described in chapter three, the histories of vernacular photography, its remediations, and different spaces of exhibition and exchange, illustrate how a variety of technological, media, and social forces, have over time, influenced how people use vernacular photographs in memory practices. Rather than abrupt shifts that dramatically change how vernacular photographs are used in memory practices, people have adopted and adapted both existing and new media to meet contemporary needs that reflect surprisingly consistent concerns about how vernacular photographs can be used to remember the past, communicate in the present, and stand as records for the future. This particular view of vernacular photography’s present and historical uses, as being exemplary of a series of ongoing and evolving practices, reflects what sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (2003) discusses in his examination of how the past is ‘mapped’ or ‘shaped.’ Different narrative patterns reflect desires to, for example, illustrate continuity, stress distinctions between particular eras, or selectively endorse or omit events to support contemporarily preferred versions of the past. Identifying spaces of exchange in vernacular photography’s lengthy history helps to
underscore how memory practices involving vernacular photography have often appeared at the intersection of new media, remediation, and communication. Digitally mediated spaces of exchange borrow from these existing and evolving practices to afford opportunities for sharing images and understandings of the past.

Remediating vernacular photographs can help us imagine the past, but the capacity for sharing those imaginings is shaped by spaces, technologies, and media. The projects that are the focus of case studies in this dissertation, Lorie Novak’s Collected Visions and Taylor Jones’ Dear Photograph, illustrate some of the different ways in which the online presentation of vernacular photographs associated with memory practices both draws on and deviates from conventions associated with traditions for the exhibition of vernacular photographs. Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are not static or closed systems. They are objects of study that are dynamic, changing with the design interventions of their creators and contributions from the public, appearing in different iterations depending on the software and hardware used to view and engage with the websites, and taking on material form in gallery exhibitions and book publications. While Collected Visions begins with Lorie Novak’s experiments with new technologies in museum spaces before entering the online world and Taylor Jones’ Dear Photograph is ‘born digital’ before appearing in offline exhibition, they both provide valuable insights into the ways in which new media technologies, through processes of remediation and remaking, afford people the opportunity to participate in creative communicative exchanges about the past. The purpose of this study, then, is to explore the different connections between remediation, memory practices, and spaces of exchange in order to reflect on how contemporary uses of vernacular photography in specific new media spaces draw on and adapt historical and existing practices of exhibition and communication.

In this chapter, I offer a description of the research activities involved in this dissertation. These activities have helped to shape my thinking about the connections between vernacular photography, remediation, memory practices, and spaces of exchange. Reviewing existing scholarly and popular writing, conducting archival and interview research, and seeking out instances of physical and virtual exhibitions of vernacular photography helped me to reflect on the individuality of Collected Visions and
Dear Photograph. These research activities helped me to situate Collected Visions and Dear Photograph as individual cases amongst a range of projects, exhibitions, and memory practices that draw on photography and cross the multiple registers of vernacularity. Describing the different research activities and reflecting on how specific case study methodologies can be used to investigate individual instances of a phenomenon, this chapter helps to lay the groundwork for the ‘origin stories’ of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph presented in chapters five and six. These chapters provide accounts of important actors and events involved in the creation and development of the respective projects.

Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are examples of what economic geographer Bent Flyvbjerg describes as “information-oriented selections” (2006, p. 231). These are cases that are intended “to maximize the utility of information from small samples and single cases [which] are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content (2006, p. 230). Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are information-oriented selections – they both provide ways of examining the concept of remediation at the intersection of print and digital vernacular photographs and in online platforms, they focus on voluntarily submitted vernacular photographs, they have explicit connections to museum exhibitions, and they allow visitors to submit and comment on images – submissions and comments that reflect, respond to, and offer multiple perspectives on memory. They also resonate with one another by illustrating how spaces of exchange both persist and change over time, with Collected Visions now nearing two decades on the Internet and the much more recently created Dear Photograph. Collected Visions and Dear Photograph offer practical sites, points of reference, to explore the concept of spaces of exchange that afford opportunities for the communication of memory.

As with many qualitative research projects, the presentation of methods, analysis, and the written findings that follow the conclusion of the project can suggest a certain linearity that is far from the actuality of reflection, revision, and reconsideration involved in developing a suitable research approach (Yin, 2010). The information presented in this chapter cannot fully account for the (often diverse and divergent) research approaches considered or the multiple iterations of research questions that
evolved over the course of the project. However, what is offered is a narrative that describes the rationale and influential forces that induced particular decisions regarding the research focus and research phenomenon. By outlining the different activities included in this project, I hope to show the processes involved in developing the origin stories and the analytical explanations offered in ‘microstories’ of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. This work illustrates how vernacular photography, remediation, and memory are part of a series of complex, mutually influential relationships that are made visible and communicated in spaces of exchange.

Beginnings

Since 1992, when technological proficiency and interest in sharing photographs online was first possible (as described below), countless images have been circulated online. The opportunities afforded by the Internet to share information were, at first, the domains of those with specialized knowledge related to highly technical scientific expertise. However, the first photograph to be shared online was not a technical or scientific image. In 1992, information technologist Tim Berners-Lee working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN), asked his colleague Silvano de Gennaro for an image that he could use to test upgrades to what would become known as the World Wide Web. The image Berners-Lee received was one of four women – each with a personal connection to the CERN project – posing as the parody signing group Les Horribles Cernettes (Hough, 2012). The .gif file displays de Gennaro’s amateur experiments with photo-editing software: the four women (Michele de Gennaro, Angela Higney, Colette Marx-Neilsen, and Lynn Veronneau) appear against a computer-generated pastel blue background, carefully, but clearly cropped from the original image.62 The first photograph to appear in an online space was the result of everyday interactions – work colleagues playing with vernacular photographs they had on hand, images they made themselves, to test the possibilities of working with images in this new media.

62 Multiple attempts to contact de Gennaro were made in an effort to gain permission to reproduce the image here. Unfortunately, no replies were received.
Since the mid-1990s the use of digital media both to share and to create photographs has expanded exponentially. However, some researchers claim that, before the twenty-first-century, “photo-sharing sites simply functioned as add-ons for online print finishing services, [while] the new generation of sites such as SmugMug, Buzznet, Zoto, and Flickr (launched in 2004) functioned as interfaces, which facilitated a playful engagement with one’s own snapshots and those uploaded by others” (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p. 17). This movement of using digital media as part of photographic practices illustrates two of the key factors that have been influential for as long as people have been creating, manipulating, and sharing vernacular photographs – adoption and experimentation. The adoption and adaptation of new media forms to serve contemporary desires to communicate is evident since the nineteenth century, for example, in the popular fascination with and circulation of photographs in the 1870s with cartes-de-visite just as it was in the 1970s with Polaroid instant film. The current widespread phenomenon of using social media and online applications to communicate with vernacular photographs is not so different from earlier adoptions and experimentation with new media that allowed people to share, communicate, and engage with photographs as part of everyday activities.

Like Silvano de Gennaro’s image of Les Horribles Cernettes that became the first photograph shared on the Internet, a series of fortuitous events in the mid-1990s and in the first part of the 2010s helped to influence the creation of Collected Visions and Dear Photograph as online spaces of exchange. Collected Visions first appeared online in 1996, only four years after Berners-Lee uploaded the photograph of the Les Horribles Cernettes. Access to the Internet was still not widespread at this time and the decision to produce an online exhibition in conjunction with gallery exhibitions of Novak’s work appears, at first, more coincidental than part of a determined effort to engage with new media possibilities. Following a series of exhibitions in Houston and Washington D.C. involving vernacular photographs that drew on her own collection of family images and those contributed by colleagues and others interested in her project, Novak found that advances in projection technologies allowed her to rely on computer generated images rather than those created by a slide projector. Scanning thousands of print photographs, Novak developed an archive of images, but was primarily interested in creating a way for people to interact with the photographs. At first, the possibility of producing a CD-ROM
that would allow for individual home access to the images was considered (Novak, personal communication, June 19, 2013). However, at the time, this format would not allow people to contribute to collection of photographs. In the late 1990s Novak began working with the New York University Center for Advanced Technology as part of a series of collaborative projects that paired university faculty with teams of individuals who had specific expertise to support the “development and dissemination of multimedia technologies and applications” (Overview and Background, n.d.). Eventually, *Collected Visions* became a collection of different multimedia projects that Novak has facilitated and that follow a similar pattern of working with vernacular photographs contributed by different communities and the wider public.

While *Collected Visions* as an online space of exchange evolved from exhibitions in museums before it became a digital online platform, *Dear Photograph*’s evolution as a space of exchange begins as a form of online communication before growing to expand to gallery exhibitions and print publications. The origins of *Dear Photograph* begin at the family dinner table in Taylor Jones’ childhood home in May 2011. Noticing his brother seated in the same position, in the same location pictured in the family album they were reviewing, Jones made a photograph, started a weblog, and invited friends to review and share their own photographs that followed the same style of creating images that involved revisiting a photograph from the past and making a new image with that existing photograph (Jones, 2012). The following year in 2012, Jones selected images submitted to the *Dear Photograph* website to exhibit at the *Images Festival des arts visuels de Vevy*, in Vevy Switzerland and published over 200 of the submitted images in a book titled *Dear Photograph*.

*Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are complex multimedia memory projects involving the remediation of vernacular photographs. The trajectories of the two projects are different. However, both *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* pass through these similar phases of gallery and online exhibition in their development. Tracing how the projects were adapted for exhibition in different types of mediated spaces – in galleries and online – provides insight into how vernacular photographs, remediation, and the sharing of memory interact in part, by adapting existing practices of display and communication. In their various iterations as websites, museum exhibitions,
and bookworks, *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* present different affordances and limitations for people to communicate about the past. Rather than explore the similarities and differences between the two projects, this dissertation focuses on how the two cases may be used to investigate the relationships between vernacular photography, remediation, memory practices, and spaces of exchange. With the goal of identifying and examining the features of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* as multimedia spaces of exchange, my intention here is not to establish a set of fundamental characteristics that may be used as criteria for recognizing and evaluating potential spaces of exchange. Rather, my concern is with how “specific projects... set in motion a critical dynamic” (LaBelle, 2006, p. xii) of memory and communication through the particular use of remediated vernacular photographs in certain types of spaces.63

**Cases Found and Made**

*Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are spaces where memory is creatively repurposed to serve the needs of an increasingly mediated present. The decision to focus on *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* as case studies for this research project was the result of a lengthy and iterative process that included three major components: background reading in scholarly, popular, professional publications and online content, interviews and discussions with artists and curators who have experience working with vernacular photographs, and visits to archival collections of vernacular photographs both online and in-person. This work allowed me to move towards defining the research concepts that interested me and to articulate the phenomenon I wanted to explore – online spaces of exchange where vernacular photography is remediated to

63 I draw on and paraphrase Brandon LaBelle’s (2006) research rationale in his book on the history and development of sound art from the middle of the twentieth century to the present day. In LaBelle’s work, he outlines the value of this approach that is not “a survey of works” (p. xii), but a method that identifies projects (research subjects) with the intent of illuminating the intended research object.
communicate memory. The process of selecting cases for this work was then one that relied on an interpretative and inductive approach.

In this dissertation, *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* can be considered research foci that were ‘found’ and ‘made.’ They can be viewed as both empirical units and as theoretical constructs that inform understandings of how new media offer both possibilities and platforms for people to use vernacular photographs to communicate memory in spaces of exchange. Very often, I found myself returning to these two projects because I was intrigued by the fact that people were using them as online platforms to review and create mediated stories about personal and imagined pasts and sharing them with the world. In this sense they were ‘found’ cases: examples with individual characteristics, which are specific to that example, but also ‘made’ in that they are examples which coalesce or emerge through the interaction of ideas and evidence as they developed over the course of my research project (Ragin, 1992, pp. 9-10). The iterative process that led to the selection of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* is reflected in what sociologists Charles Ragin and Howard Becker discuss in their reflection on case study methodologies:

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64 Research approaches for studying communication may often fall into one of three categories: positivism, interpretative, and critical realism (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 2007; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). These categories reflect different epistemological understandings of social realities. Positivism relies on empirical observations that will allow a researcher to understand and anticipate outcomes. Auguste Comte, the nineteenth-century scholar who is widely credited as establishing the key tenets of positivism, describes the approach as ‘savoir pour prévoir et prévoir pour pouvoir,’ which can be translated as “know in order to foresee and foresee in order to act” (Aldridge, 1999, para. 1). Positivist approaches are valuable, particularly when a researcher hopes to account for phenomenon which can be measured – for example, calculating the number of hospital beds for a region given the demographics of that region – however, positivist approaches are somewhat limited if what is to be ‘measured’ is open to interpretation based on individual or shared practices of meaning-making, phenomenon, ‘a sense of well-being’ for example, or attitudes about a particular event. Interpretative approaches are diverse in number and are often based in the belief that meaning is not found in the objective observation of empirical inquiries, but produced through communicative interactions people have with one another and their social worlds. To explore these types of meaning-making, interpretative approaches that are based in a research process of description in order to understand and explain a particular phenomenon may be more appropriate than positivistic approaches. Critical realism shares features with both positivistic and interpretative approaches, in that it tends to acknowledge that structural forces – namely economically and political forces – are observable and predictable, but that people have differential opportunities to shape communicative interactions and engage in interpretative meaning-making practices by working within, alongside, or against existing structural forces.
Asking “What is a case?” (or, more precisely, what this – the research subject – is a case of) is counterproductive. Strong preconceptions are likely to hamper conceptual development. Researchers will probably not know what their cases are until the research, including the task of writing up the results is virtually completed. What it is a case of will coalesce gradually, sometimes catalytically, and the final realization of the case’s nature may be the most important part of the interaction between ideas and evidence.

(Ragin, 1992, p. 6)

With this in mind, Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are cases that provide evidence of a particular phenomenon – two instances of the diverse ways that new media provides opportunities for the popular remediation and sharing of vernacular photographs by adapting and drawing on existing exhibition practices.

Research strategies based on case study methodologies have advantages and limitations. Numerous scholars have outlined various purposes and processes that may be considered when adopting a case study approach. Gary Thomas (2011), in particular, offers a helpful summary of some of rationales and techniques and suggests a general outline that may be used to generate an overall understanding of the reasons a researcher might chose a particular case study approach for a specific research project. Thomas describes five elements as critical to case study approaches: research subject, research object, purpose, approach, and processes. These elements influence each other. Thomas suggests that the elements are akin to a series of layers that the researcher works through when developing and carrying out a project. Figure 6 shows these layers and the different considerations that must be taken into account with each layer. A researcher may often, but not necessarily, begin with a research subject or research subjects. These may be subjects that a researcher is familiar with through personal or professional experience (local subjects), a subject (or subject) that is representative or typical of a particular subject (key subjects), or a “deviant” subject (or subjects) that is an exception to general understanding about an object (outlier subjects)
Figure 6. Case Study Layers. Adapted from “A Typology for the Case Study in Social Science Following a Review of Definition, Discourse, and Structure,” by Gary Thomas, 2011. Qualitative Inquiry, 17(6), p. 518.

(Thomas, 2011, p. 514). Thomas also underscores the notion that the relationship between subject and object is a dynamic one. For example, the selection of a research subject\textsuperscript{65} – in this dissertation the research subjects are Collected Visions and Dear Photograph – influenced the articulation of the research object, how vernacular photographs are remediated in online spaces to communicate memory. The research object is “the analytical frame... within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates and explicates” (Thomas, 2011, p. 513). Thomas stresses that the research object is “forged – it is malleable” (2011, p. 515, emphasis in original). Articulating the research object, Thomas reminds us, “is not an end in itself;” rather, it is a “means to end” that leads to discussion, explanation, and elaboration (2011, p. 515).

Rather than discrete stages, where one must be completed before moving onto

\textsuperscript{65} The relationship between 'subject' and 'object' as research terms in studies concerned with viewing photographic images or the creation of photographic images is troubled in a number of ways. Photographs have been used (and abused) to communicate specific messages about power, inclusion, and 'otherness' in ways that foster attitudes about privilege and exclusion (Edwards & Hart, 2004; Sontag, 1977; Lutz & Collins, 1991). The use of 'subject' and 'object' in philosophical and epistemological discussions also leads into lengthy and ongoing debates about the relationship between subject and object, perception, experience, and consciousness (Velmins, 2009). These terms, 'subject' and 'object' are imperfect. However, as terms for describing elements of a research process, they do remain useful. In Thomas’ (2011) discussion of subject and object, the two elements are connected through reciprocal influence, and it is with this notion of connected elements in mind that I use the terms subject and object in this dissertation.
the next, the definition of subject and object (like the reflections and decisions regarding purpose and approach) may happen in conjunction with each other. As decisions are made about the purpose of a particular research project, a number of questions may be explored: will the research test an existing theory? Develop a new theory? Provide descriptive information on a research subject or object that has not been studied before? Reflecting on these types of questions informs the selection or development of a particular methodology that will aid in collecting and analyzing data in single or multiple cases. This is the work of the research process. With the goal of this dissertation being to trace the connections between vernacular photography, remediation, memory practices, and spaces of exchange, the case study elements that Thomas describes offer a way of retrospectively organizing a narrative about the research that has been conducted. Rather than starting with a defined research subject or object, or a preference for a specific purpose or approach, the research conducted for this dissertation often involved reflection on and between the different layers that Thomas describes. Generalizations about inductive or deductive reasoning can suggest that there is a linear trajectory that starts with a hypothesis, in the case of deductive inquiry, or observation, in the case of inductive inquiry, and ultimately lead to confirmation (or rejection) of a hypothesis, respectively (Trochim, 2006). The research trajectory for this dissertation was far from linear. As detailed in the sections that follow, a variety of research activities overlapped and were repeated in order to refine and articulate and focus in on the research subject and research objects in this project.

**Explorations: Interviews and Archival Research**

When I first began this project, I had questions about online exhibitions of vernacular photographs: are there similarities between what is shared online and what is shared in museum exhibitions? Where do the vernacular photographs, especially historical images, which are shared online, come from? Are they shared by family members? ‘Discovered’ at flea markets? What processes are involved in remediating print images – how are different technologies used? What types of choices do people face when doing this work? How are vernacular photographs in online exhibitions used to communicate shared or imagined understandings of the past? These types of questions prompted me to set about gathering information and trying to determine if
there was a particular ‘field,’ a “broad scope of theoretically relevant events” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 79). In this exploratory stage, I did not yet have a sense of seeking to test or attempting to develop a particular theory, and I soon discovered that the field of sharing vernacular photographs online was an expansive one – far too large and too nebulous to capture in an inventory that might provide insight into key cases. However, this early information gathering stage provided important background into the breadth of projects that involve sharing vernacular photographs online. Through a variety of activities including reviewing existing and popular resources (including journals, periodicals, websites), visits to museums and online exhibitions, reviewing archival collections both in person and online, and conducting interviews with curators, artists, and scholars who work with vernacular photographs, I began to develop a sense of where I wanted to situate my own research and how to describe the work that I was doing. This initial stage also helped me to reflect on and articulate the eventual purpose and approach (two of the critical elements that Thomas (2011) identifies) I devised for examining Collected Visions and Dear Photograph.

**Interviews**

Individuals who make decisions about how vernacular photographs are used in exhibitions at museums – curators as well as scholars who collaborate in developing exhibitions – make a number of decisions about how material will be displayed. These decisions are influenced by a number of factors including, but not limited to: the professional and educational background of the individual, the institution’s history and mandate, the type and condition of material, the priorities of community and institutional stakeholders, and the financial investment required to maintain and conserve the material. To learn about how decision-makers at cultural institutions have supported and are supporting the public exhibition of vernacular photographs in museum spaces, I conducted five interviews with current or former curators who have worked on exhibitions with remediaged vernacular photographs. These interviews were conducted at the individuals’ places of work – the Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the McCord Museum in Montreal, Concordia University in Montreal, and the International Center of Photography in New York (ICP). The first interviews took place in Vancouver. My existing connections with the Museum of
Anthropology (MOA) and the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG) allowed me to meet with Karen Duffek, Curator of Contemporary Visual Arts & Pacific Northwest (MOA) and Grant Arnold, Audain Curator of British Columbia Art (VAG). Through these interviews (using referral sampling66) and continued reading in contemporary remediations of vernacular photography, I identified Hélène Samson, Curator of the Notman Photographic Archives (McCord), Martha Langford, Professor of Art History at Concordia, and Brian Wallis, Director of Exhibitions and Chief Curator at the International Center of Photography (ICP).

Face-to-face interviews with these individuals helped me to reflect on and conceptualize spaces of exchange as a key element in this dissertation. Interactions with interview participants were shaped through the use of semi-structured interviews following an approach outlined by Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame (1981) designed to generate a topical account of practice. With this approach, an interviewer develops a series of open-ended probing questions with a particular focus in mind, (in this case, the individual’s involvement with exhibiting remediated vernacular photographs), but based around the solicitation of information about interviewees’ personal and professional experience that takes the form of an oral history or autobiographical account. This type of interview technique can highlight unexpected connections. In preparing interview guides for each interview, I sought information about each individual’s education, practical experience, collegial and community networks, as well as personal inclinations that influenced the individual’s involvement with remediated photography in exhibition (see the appendix for an example of an interview guide).

Interviewees described their goals in developing photography-based exhibitions. Hélène Samson articulated her desire as a curator to develop what might be thought of as ‘exchange places’ in the sense that Langford (2007) describes. Recall that Langford’s discussion of exchange places refers to how artists may “incorporat[e] gaps and exit

66 Referral sampling, or snowball sampling, refers to how initial study participants may be asked by the researcher to identify potential interview subjects that the researcher may (or may not) be aware of. This type of sampling can also reveal connections between individuals in relationship networks (Morgan, 2008). In this dissertation, interview subjects were asked to identify individuals who influenced their understandings of vernacular photography and exhibition of vernacular photography.
points into their work” where viewers have the opportunity and are encouraged to “oscillat[e] between acts of memory and acts of imagination” (2007, p. 103). The McCord Museum’s annual summer exhibition of photographs on McGill College Avenue outside the museum often explores a theme that allows curators to draw on existing historical photographs in the collection and to remediate and reframe them in a contemporary way. Samson described how the museum hopes to engage with visitors to the McGill College Avenue outdoor exhibitions and prompt them to reflect on the spaces and places that they travel through on a daily basis. Samson notes:

They are beautiful photographs [selected for the exhibitions], it's a pleasure to look at them, but also we ask something more and as people are walking, they have the time to look at them, it's on the street from June to October and it's downtown so there are a lot of people who can look at these pictures many, many times during the summer.

(personal communication, June 10, 2013)

Samson is clear that one of the McCord's intentions with the outdoor exhibitions on McGill College Avenue is to communicate new perspectives on the city’s past that relate to contemporary issues. These exhibitions are outside the museum space; that is, they extend beyond the walls of the institution and are free to access at any time of the day or night during the summer months. The outdoor exhibitions on McGill College Avenue helped me to think about how vernacular photographs may appear in ‘unexpected’ places. The Notman Photographic Archive currently holds over 1.3 millions images that depict scenes that show life in Montreal, Quebec, and Canada from the 1840s to the present day (Notman Photographic Archives, n.d.). It would be nearly impossible for an individual to review all of these images by sorting through archival fonds and albums.

67 Between 2006 and 2013, exhibitions regularly drew on images primarily from the Notman Photographic Archives, but also other photographs from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the McCord’s collection. They often involved collaborations with contemporary photographers to ‘re-photograph’ the locations pictured in the historical photographs, partnerships with students at Concordia University who drew on images in the archives as inspiration in their contemporary work, and a variety of remediations including exhibitions where images from the Notman Archives have been presented in stereoscopic format or magnified to show minute detail.
Exhibiting certain photographs from the Notman Archive in outdoor displays on McGill College Avenue moves these vernacular photographs from traditional archive and gallery spaces into an everyday space of Montreal civic life.

Samson also described how she hopes viewers would respond to the photographs on display. She noted that her goal was to respect the visitor’s intelligence and to present material in such a way that the viewer “can grasp the content and the ideas of the exhibitions [suggested by the curator], but [that the exhibition] also brings [the visitor] towards new questions” (personal communication, June 10, 2013). Samson used the term “étonnement” to express the entry into a possible exchange: “étonnement: it’s the beginning of the questioning. When your curiosity and your sense of "oh wow! What's that?" It's the beginning of the questioning” (personal communication, June 10, 2013). The description of étonnement upon which Samson reflects, aligns with Stephen Greenblatt’s (1991) discussion of resonance and wonder in exhibitions. As discussed in chapter two, Greenblatt suggests that resonance and wonder are two deeply meaningful reactions that visitors may have in response to exhibitions. Visitors may be led towards a series of rich reflections on how the material on display has come to its current position in an exhibition; this is how Greenblatt describes ‘resonance.’ Visitors may also be stopped short in their travel through an exhibition and be drawn to a particular item on display with an overwhelming sense of attentive curiosity; this is Greenblatt’s description of ‘wonder.’ Curiosity, questioning, resonance, and wonder may all be invoked by the McCord’s outdoor exhibitions on McGill Avenue. Samson’s goal to encourage étonnement for visitors in the selection and exhibition of photographs was also echoed by other curators who work with exhibitions of vernacular photographs.

Brian Wallis, chief curator at the International Center of Photography from 1999-2105, commented that one of his goals in developing an exhibition is to appeal to a visitor’s sense of intelligence and curiosity (which, again, echoes Greenblatt’s discussion of resonance and wonder). However, Wallis also notes that the museum space is inherently “an alien context for presenting materials,” but that the museum space can also be used to “accentuate” or “dramatize” the artificiality of an exhibition to “amplify aspects of the historical context, which might be the context in which the work was originally made or various histories that the work has lived through including the present”
For Wallis, a successful exhibition focuses on an interaction, or a transaction, where visitors have “paid some money, entered into a restricted space, [...] shown up with some demonstrated interest” and the goal of a curator in developing exhibitions:

is to keep them interested for as long as possible and make the experience as rich and rewarding as possible. So, when I hear that people come here and they spend two hours, I’m like, "okay, we've done our job." Because I assume that they've read all the wall labels, they've spent time with the media and projections and they've really looked closely at the objects on display.

Wallis further frames this notion of an imagined interaction in the gallery space but stresses the underlying principle that guides the International Center of Photography:

the goal of all our exhibitions and, in fact, all our activities, is fundamentally educational which is to [...] stimulate a dialogue, which hopefully will get people thinking in different ways about the cultural questions that we're raising [and] ultimately maybe changing some attitudes about how we look at things.

Like Samson, Wallis expresses a concern for how museum exhibitions can encourage visitors to reflect critically and ask questions, a concern that curators Karen Duffek and Grant Arnold also expressed (personal communications, February 7, 2013; July 6, 2012). The close examination that curators hope to encourage when displaying vernacular photographs in order to facilitate a dialogue shows respect for what visitors may bring to the exhibition space, but it is rare for exhibitions to offer a means for visitors to communicate about their experience in the space or contribute their own messages that may be included in the exhibition.

Curators spoke about the challenges and opportunities associated with trying to facilitate a dialogue (though this remains largely a one-way type of communication with
an authoritative narrator describing and offering context and interpretation for images) in the physical space of the museum. Curators also spoke about the differences between physical and digital spaces. For Karen Duffek at the Museum of Anthropology, the Internet – through social media and institutional websites – does provide for communicative exchanges that allow artists and community members to share information and images: Facebook, for example, affords community members the opportunity to share historical images and identify common family members, while the Reciprocal Research Network allows for visual access to First Nations collections at MOA and institutions around the world (personal communication, February 7, 2013). However, ‘online exhibitions’ hosted via MOA’s website often mirror gallery exhibitions, provide additional context for gallery exhibitions, or stand as records of exhibitions and programming. As spaces of communication and exhibition, MOA online exhibitions, in general, attempt to present an exhibition, a catalogue, or educational resource in digital form, rather than developing exclusive digital content that exists only in the online realm. However, MOA online exhibitions do show attempts to build and engage in a dialogue.

In 2010, the exhibition Border Zones: New Art Across Cultures was displayed at MOA. The companion website launched at the same time (and is still available) took a ‘webzine’ approach in presenting material that might normally be found in an exhibition catalogue: written contributions from artists, scholars, and curators, as well as video recordings of artist interviews. Visitors to the website are invited to view the online

68 The Reciprocal Research Network (RRN) was co-developed by three First Nations groups in British Columbia (the Musqueam Indian Band, the U’mista Cultural Society, and the Stó:lō Nation and Stó:lō Tribal Council) and MOA. Researchers, community members, curators, and students may request access to the RRN to review information on nearly half a million items created by Northwest Coast First Nations peoples that are held by 27 museums in Canada, the United States, and England. Once an individual is granted access to the RRN, he or she may develop projects with other collaborators or work independently to review and annotate museum records and images. Individuals may also add to the RRN – uploading media to provide context for a record or set of records that may, for example, include translating English words into indigenous languages and providing audio of proper pronunciation, identifying people depicted in images, suggesting attribution of a particular item based on a maker’s style, or providing video documentation of manufacturing techniques. While there are some vernacular photographs in the RRN, the focus of this platform is to provide a limited network of people with the ability to access and share information from institutional databases. The RRN provides opportunities for communicative exchange between people who are a part of this network, but the careful management of access to the network means that the RRN is not widely available or necessarily used as part of everyday practices by the general public.
material with a particular outcome in mind: “This is your portal to the ideas behind the exhibition. While this site looks at each of the artists and artworks in the show in depth, we hope you’ll find that many of the ideas discussed can apply to your everyday life and to other artworks you may encounter” (Benbasset, 2010). Visitors to the Borderzones.ca webzine were also entreated to send questions and comments to the Borderzones Webzine Team. These types of invitations illustrate how online communication is being used in online exhibitions at MOA and provides insight into what the museum intends with its communication – that an in-depth textual explanation of artworks, accompanied with visual images, will resonate with a visitor’s everyday experience.

Ascertaining if and how these resonances occur is a challenge. The notion of remediating the in-person gallery experience online has significant limitations, as Brian Wallis discusses when describing how the International Center of Photography presents online exhibitions:

We have not gotten very far in developing our online presentation of exhibitions and, you know, there are not that many museums that have, unfortunately. I mean all the tools are there. It’s a great idea. People talk about it all the time. We talk about it all the time. But it just hasn’t really been that well done, that often and you would think that it would be an easy thing to translate an exhibition into electronic form, but I think that the speed with which people pass through information online or even in terms of, like, a DVD or something, there’s just a translation problem. People will come and spend two hours in the gallery but they wouldn’t necessarily spend that online. They’ll spend two hours online watching a movie, but they wouldn’t spend two hours online walking through an exhibition. So, I think the problem is really just figuring out a way of translating that experience into something that functions in this kind of hybrid web format and I don’t think anybody has really cracked that code yet.

(personal communication, June 17, 2013)

Wallis’ comments here reflect the difficulties of trying to replicate the museum-going experience in an online environment. Attempting to find the ‘right’ media form that can provide a similar experience to moving through a gallery space has been a much-
debated topic of interest for scholars and museum professionals interested in the opportunities that virtual realities may afford (Cameron & Kenderdine, 2010; Parry, 2007; Styliania, Fotisb, & Petrosa, 2009). However, this focus on the identifying and exploiting particular media and technologies to replicate an experience can lead away from thinking about how media platforms may afford different kinds of opportunities to solicit responses from visitors about how objects, images, or ideas resonate with their individual experiences.

The interviews I conducted with curators and individuals who work with vernacular photographs encouraged me to think of the museum as a point of departure or point of intersection for the types of works I was interested in exploring. In particular, I became very interested in how vernacular photographs travelled into and out of museums through exhibitions and online projects. Images from both Collected Visions and Dear Photograph have been shown as part of gallery exhibitions. As discussed in chapter three, the history of exhibiting photographs in galleries is influenced as much by existing artistic and aesthetic conventions as it is by popular modes of display that have seen vernacular photographs displayed in shop-front windows, exchanged as cartes-de-visite, pasted into drug-store albums, and uploaded to social media websites. The interviews with curators helped me to reflect on how museums continue to offer certain affordances, but also impose constraints, when it comes to exhibiting vernacular photographs. While museum spaces can and do provide ‘exchange places’ where visitors may be profoundly affected by a photographic work that allows visitors to participate in a ‘seeing through’ that connects individuals’ personal experiences to the image on display (Langford, 2007, p. 103), the opportunities for visitors to contribute to these spaces – to communicate with others and to share their own images – can be very rare. The museum’s use of online platforms to document, support, or contextualize gallery exhibitions, similarly, have generally not yet exploited the full potential of interactivity. Both Collected Visions and Dear Photograph intersect with the museum world that curators described in their interviews, but they also exist outside the conventions of museum exhibition, experimenting with new media and the ways new media allow people to participate and collaborate in communicating about memory with vernacular photographs.
Archival research on collections of vernacular photographs and the exhibition of vernacular photographs also helped me to understand existing and historical practices of display and communication related to these images. Where possible, I conducted this work in conjunction with the interviews described above. Interviewees informed me about the existence of archives related to collections, artist files, and exhibition records, that would be particularly relevant to my interests in how vernacular photographs are exhibited in ways that encourage the communication of memory. Spending time, in person, at archives in Vancouver, Montreal, and New York provided me with opportunities to investigate and reflect on how vernacular photographs are part of complex and evolving relationships that can connect people across space and time by using media and exhibition spaces in creative ways. In the sections that follow, I describe some of my interactions with material in the archives that helped me to develop a narrative that situates contemporary digital remediations of vernacular photography, such as *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*, as part of a series of ongoing adaptations and creative manipulations that have a rich and lengthy history.

*The Alice Constance Dunn Archive – Remediating Vernacular Photographs and Reconfiguring Imagined Pasts*

One of the main areas of examination in my investigation of archival materials was the review of personal collections of vernacular photographs, most of which were assembled in various types of albums. The McCord Museum in Montreal has an extensive collection of vernacular photographs and family albums that features material, both from such prominent Canadian families as the Molsons of Montreal, as well as seemingly average (though in their own way extraordinary) collections of early and mid-twentieth-century Canadians who documented their everyday experiences and not-so-everyday experiences of cross-continental and international travel. With guidance from curator Hélène Samson, I focused my review of material at the McCord on the Alice Constance Dunn collection, from which images were being prepared for the McCord’s annual outdoor exhibition of photographs for the summer of 2013 called *Devoir de mémoire Honouring Memory - Canada’s Residential Schools*. A handful of Dunn’s
photographs from her time as a teacher at St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Alert Bay, British Columbia were selected for inclusion in the exhibition. However the larger album and collection from which these images were drawn is composed of an eclectic mix of dozens of photographs, both made and purchased, that Dunn amassed during her time and travels in the 1920s and 1930s, mostly in Western Canada, and include scenes that depict a day at the beach in Vancouver, studio portraiture of a dog and cats, landscapes with houses and with farm animals, along with the images she made while teaching at residential schools in both Alert Bay, British Columbia and Elkhorn, Manitoba.

*Devoir de mémoire Honouring Memory - Canada's Residential Schools* exhibition includes Dunn’s photographs of young First Nations students at Residential Schools in casual Western-style clothing and are pictured at play or posed informally (see Figure 7). These images contrast with other images included in *Devoir de mémoire Honouring Memory - Canada’s Residential Schools*, images selected from other collections at the McCord, from Canadian institutions such as Library and Archives Canada, and from the General Synod Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada, where order and formality appear to be emphasized. Dunn’s original vernacular photographs, most measuring no more than two inches by three inches, reproduced and remediated on large metal panels, are recontextualized and repurposed from the personal mementoes of a school teacher to engage with a twenty-first century-public dialogue about how the history of Residential Schools in Canada is remembered. In this remediation Dunn’s photographs are accompanied by narrative panels that literally and figuratively frame the images in ways that are far different from viewing the photographs in their album at the McCord’s archives. One panel tells the viewer:

Originally from the Eastern Townships, in Quebec, Alice was 27 years old when she decided, after several years of teaching in Montreal, to join the missionary schools of western Canada. Years later, she wrote of her experience: “Personally, often against the rules, I encouraged the use of native language during recreation. In this way, the children would not ‘lose’ their ability to communicate with their families.

*(Devoir de mémoire Honouring Memory - Canada’s Residential Schools, 2013)*
This information, though, is not immediately available with Dunn’s photographs in the McCord archive – is drawn from museum records, diaries, and curatorial and acquisition interviews with Dunn’s daughter who donated the images to the museum.

In and of themselves, Dunn’s photographs have resonant and wonderful qualities, in the sense that Greenblatt (1991) uses the terms; the juxtaposition of images, preserved in a rather eclectic fashion in the pages of a photo album struck me as wonderous – unusual, but surprisingly ordinary in their depiction of scenes of Western Canada, historically familiar, but distinctive in their representation of First Nations children. Alert Bay, where Dunn captured a trio of boys – possibly taking a break from a baseball game owing to the glove resting on the steps – in Figure 7 off the coast of British Columbia’s Vancouver Island is a long way from McGill Avenue in Montreal. Sitting in the library of the McCord Museum reviewing the album that Dunn made allowed me to reflect on the complex and circuitous journey that these vernacular photographs made before finding their way onto outdoor panels in the summer of 2013. Dunn herself would likely never have imagined that the photographs she made while working at St. Michael’s and Elkhorn schools in British Columbia and Manitoba would be exhibited as a reflection on the legacy of Canada’s residential schools. Dunn’s photographs begin to shed light on the multiple registers of vernacular life for First Nations children in the 1920s. While not denying or attempting to alleviate the significant pain inflicted by an institutional system that was created to assimilate indigenous children and undermine long-standing cultural, linguistic, and social practices of First Nations people including Dunn’s photographs in the 2013 exhibition provides an opportunity to highlight the individuality of those who attended residential schools. When vernacular photographs are remediated for public display, as they are in the mémoire Honouring Memory - Canada’s Residential Schools exhibition, the curatorial perspective shapes the way viewers are invited to engage with the images. In Figure 7, the exhibition panel text describes the photographs as “individual portraits,” which
Figure 7. Exhibition panel, Devoir de mémoire Honouring Memory – Canada’s Residential Schools, 2013, online reproduction. McCord Museum, Montreal. Used with Permission.
perhaps afforded the children a bit of self-esteem.” Rather than offering a conclusive account of a historical period, these vernacular photographs and this type of language have the potential to open up space for a viewer to imagine the past in new ways.

As a temporary exhibition, Devoir de mémoire Honouring Memory - Canada’s Residential Schools cannot be revisited – the panels were removed in the fall of 2013 and a new exhibition on photographic postcards of Montreal in the 1920s made by Harry Sutcliffe was mounted for the summer of 2014. The plaza on McGill Avenue outside the McCord provides space outside the museum galleries for visitors and viewers to encounter and reflect on the past. However, as visitors pass through the McGill Avenue space, they do not necessarily have opportunities contribute to that space or share their reflections and experiences with others. Different spaces, different technologies, and different media of representation act in conjunction with one another to afford different types of meaning-making.

The Family of Man The Edward Steichen Archive – Popular Media Events and Universal Vernaculars

While museum archives and exhibition spaces may not typically provide space for visitors to add their own stories or ask questions of the curatorial authority that has shaped the space of encounter, discussion about museum exhibitions in popular and vernacular venues – magazines and newspapers, for example – can represent a variety of different perspectives. One widely discussed photography exhibition is The Family of Man, which first opened at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York in 1955. Reviewing the exhibition records and archival material related to this exhibition at the MOMA archives and reflecting on the remediation of photographs from one format to another provided insight into how the display of a certain type of vernacular photography became a popular media event. Curator (and photographer) Edward Steichen sought out professional and amateur photographers the world over and asked them to submit images for an exhibition that would highlight a sense of shared humanity in the aftermath of the Second World War. The photographs Steichen assembled fit broadly, if awkwardly, into the definition of vernacular photography in that Steichen selected images that “show[ed] people of various races and nationalities doing approximately the
same thing,” which focused the “subject matter [on] the simplest kind[s] of activit[ies]” (Adams, 1955, p. 69). This effort to showcase a universal vernacular that both illustrated the similarities and contrasts of daily life around general themes, such as “birth,” “children,” “career,” and “love,” reflected Steichen’s desire to encourage viewers to recognize shared or common experiences.

With these universal themes in mind, Steichen set about surveying existing photography collections held privately and publicly in Europe and the United States. He issued a call for photographs to camera clubs, photojournalists, magazine editors, and others. Describing the development of the exhibition, Steichen notes: “I wanted this exhibition to grow out of the photographs that had already been made instead of photographs responding to an idea. […] Instead of tailoring photographs to fit the exhibition – the exhibition was tailored to the photographs” (Steichen, 1955, p. 6). This description provides insight into how Steichen imagined the relationship between media and communication forms; the exhibition format supported the selected photographs (media objects) in ways that communicated Steichen’s universal themes.

While Steichen was an experienced photographer and artist, he worked with a team of people to develop The Family of Man, including his protégé Wayne Miller and designer Paul Rudolph. Together, they created a “media environment” that “presented viewers with an array of images, displayed in various sizes, at different heights, and at all angles. This heterogeneous form of installation asked viewers to follow their own course among the images, to focus on the pictures that were most meaningful to them, and to knit their subjects into the fabric of their own personalities” (Turner, 2012, p. 57). Walking into the exhibition at MOMA, visitors were handed a brief interpretative pamphlet with a passage of prose by poet and author Carl Sandberg and then channelled into a series of spaces with photographs displayed in the above-described fashion. Rudolph’s first focus, as Miller recalls, was on technical proficiency with format: working and reworking image sizes, frames, and angles of display with the content of the photographs being secondary (Miller, 1972). Through working together to display photographs in novel and creative ways, Steichen, Miller, and Rudolph collaborated to develop a space where people could engage with photographs on their terms.
A significant portion of the material related to *The Family of Man* in the Edward Steichen Archive at MOMA focuses on the reception of the exhibition in New York and around the world. Touring 88 different venues in 37 countries between 1955 and 1963, where it was viewed by over 9 million people (Hartmann, 2010), *The Family of Man* was a popular phenomenon with subsequent book and television productions that also reached millions. In the United States, newspapers reported on the exhibition’s showing in Moscow during the summer of 1955 on an almost daily basis. Reflecting on the popularity of *The Family of Man*, Steichen commented “I had a feeling that the exhibition would be received well but I was completely unprepared – the people took it over” (Steichen, 1955, p. 7). While the museum exhibition as a communicative format does not tend to offer visitors the opportunity to ‘speak back’ to the works on display, Steichen wrote: “I have had letters from people who said that they liked the exhibition and also talked about their neighbors, their families, friends and lives. People have come two and three times. They feel stronger looking at these pictures” (Steichen, 1955, p. 8). This communicative exchange happened outside the gallery space. Visitors were so compelled by what Steichen sought to communicate in *The Family of Man* that they sought out ways to express this to him and to talk about their own experiences in the gallery and beyond.

*Collected Visions – In the Gallery and Beyond*

Visiting the International Center for Photography, I hoped to examine exhibition records and information related to the exhibition of Lorie Novak’s *Collected Visions*, which ran from November 3 – December 31, 2000. I had read extensively about the exhibition prior to my trip to New York and was looking forward to gaining new insight into the exhibition. While I appreciated the opportunity to visit the space where the exhibition had been on display and imagine how the vernacular photographs would have
been projected and displayed on the gallery walls, records and material about the exhibition itself were not available for in the ICP archives.\footnote{If such records exist, it is likely that Ed Earle, the ICP curator who worked with Novak, holds them. When Earle retires from the ICP or moves on to a different institution, curatorial records may move into the ICP archives. Unfortunately, I was not able to conduct an interview with Earle while in New York or seek permission to examine any existing material regarding the 2000 Collected Visions exhibition.}

Instead, at the International Center for Photography, with the help of archivist Claartje van Dijk, I was offered the opportunity to examine five albums dating from the 1890s to the 1930s. Examining these albums, like the Alice Constance Dunn collection at the McCord Museum, helped me understand how people adopted and developed different techniques to capture, communicate, and preserve their everyday experiences using then-contemporary media with its own set of associated affordances and limitations. Ms. van Dijk also provided access to exhibition photographs from the Collected Visions: an Installation by Lorie Novak exhibition. These images, available by request to researchers but not available for reproduction or public circulation, provided important visual documentation of the exhibition including information about how people had access to computer terminals to review the online version of Collected Visions. Like the information about The Family of Man contained in the MOMA archives, the images of Novak’s exhibition helped me to reflect on the practical characteristics of the exhibition space. The entrance to the exhibition made use of an alcove-like space where two computer terminals allowed visitors the opportunity to visit the Collected Visions project archive. Through this entry-way, visitors walked into a larger gallery space where Novak’s multi-media projections were shown. Three of Novak’s prints were situated above the computer terminals – remediations of her own family photographs that feature Novak with her mother and other family members.

From her remediated and layered images, Novak peers out at visitors who pass through the alcove and sit down at the computer terminals. Overlaying contemporary images with those drawn from her own family collection suggests, as Langford notes, that Novak has incorporated gaps and exit points in her work that provide exchange places (Langford, 2007, p. 103). These gaps and exit points in the framed photographic prints are echoed in the computer terminals below where visitors have the opportunity to
navigate their own path through the collection of vernacular photographs that Novak presented. The gallery space did present the possibility of exchange places during the exhibition’s nearly two-month run. However, like many other exhibitions, the opportunity for visitors to share their own memories and contribute their own images and understandings of vernacular photography was limited. Visitors could contribute their own images and understandings by seeking out Novak’s website when they left the museum, though whether or not visitors choose to follow up in this way is difficult to determine. Photographs contributed to the online component of *Collected Visions* are not tagged according to the date that they were included in the archive; tracking which photographs were contributed during the two months of ICP’s exhibition of *Collected Visions: an Installation by Lorie Novak* is a challenge.

While I was enthusiastic about the opportunity to review material related to *Collected Visions: an Installation by Lorie Novak*, in actuality, the few photographs currently available for consultation in the ICP archive left me with more questions than answers. Curatorial notes and exhibition records for the 2000 show were not a part of the archive at the time of my visit. While chief curator Brian Wallis provided insight into Novak’s work in general, I was not able to speak with the curator, Ed Earle, who worked with Novak on this particular exhibition. As with *The Family of Man*, reviews of Novak’s exhibition offer a sense of how visitors may have experienced the show, but these are second-hand accounts. With only three images of the installation, it was difficult for me to draw possible conclusions about how people encountered *Collected Visions: an Installation by Lorie Novak*. The distinct temporal nature of many exhibitions means that there may only be a few weeks or a few months to visit and experience a particular exhibition; they are uniquely time-bound and they very often are not meant to endure. At the close of an exhibition, the material on display may return to the artist or museum storage, interpretative panels are taken down and sometimes discarded, and the gallery space reconfigured for the next display. If an exhibition is not well documented, imagining what might have been is largely speculation.

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70 Internet use in 2000 in the United States varied widely and was influenced by a number of variables including income, education, and race. While roughly forty percent of American households had access to the Internet, those with incomes well above the national average had significantly higher access (Newburger, 2000).
After visiting the ICP and reviewing the installation views of “Collected Visions: an Installation by Lorie Novak, it struck me that when the exhibition was on display in 2000, it was during a time when the relationship between gallery space and online space was viewed with tremendous potential to increase visitor interactions and exchanges. As media historians Daniel J. Cohen and Roy Rosenzweig (2006) note, the late 1990s were a period of great promise when museums looked to online exhibition as opportunities to engage with people who were not able to attend exhibitions in-person and to increase dialogue with and across different communities. However, reflecting on and formally documenting how the gallery space and the online space work in complement with each other and where they provide unique opportunities dependent on their respective medium of communication was not necessarily a practice that museums seem to have had the time or interest to pursue. Today, it is still possible to view some of the earlier online exhibitions that were well-received when they first appeared, exhibitions such as the San Francisco Exploratorium’s Remembering Nagasaki that features Yosuke Yamahata’s photographs of the Japanese city in the aftermath of the atomic bombing on August 9, 1945 alongside commentaries from those who survived the bombing to contemporary reflections, including those from scientists, historians, and the general public.

While the ICP visit provided some insight into Collected Visions: an Installation by Lorie Novak, interviews with Novak and Wallis offered important information and context that enhanced the story of Collected Visions. A mixed-method approach to collecting data is critical for examining the development of online exhibitions as part of a larger history and use of vernacular photographs. While there are conventions that have evolved over time associated with particular types of media and certain exhibition spaces, there are no standardized conventions with respect to how people communicate with and about vernacular photographs in exhibitions. Because a variety of influences shape how people interact with vernacular photographs, it is important to remember that no exhibition occurs in a vacuum or closed system. Studying archival material ranging from personal collections, museum records, and installation photographs at different institutions helped me to consider the complex set of affordances and limitations that influence how an exhibition is ultimately presented and experienced. It also attuned me to the fact that the origin stories of exhibitions that may be pieced together through
Examine Online Spaces

Examining webpages from Collected Visions and Dear Photograph was a major component of this dissertation research. However, collecting data from any online source presents some unique challenges. Websites change over time and while access to posts may persist, the design and presentation of images over time is not necessarily the same as it was when the image first appeared. For example, consulting Dear Photograph in June 2011 is not the same as consulting the website today. The URL (uniform resource locator) or web address remains the same, but site administrators can alter sites without leaving any publicly accessible records of these changes. To make a comparison with the world of a bricks and mortar exhibition at a museum or gallery – the material on exhibition stays the same, but the descriptive text panels may be changed and the walls may be painted a different colour. If it is possible to track changes to a website’s appearance over time, we may be able to make observations about how the changes accommodate the evolving needs of both those who contribute to and visit the site. One way of consulting archived websites as they appeared in earlier iterations is by using the Internet Archive Wayback Machine. The Internet Archive Wayback Machine began ‘crawling,’ or selectively indexing, the Internet in 1996 (“About the Internet Archive,” 2001). Currently, the archive provides records of over 378 billion webpages that users can consult on-demand (“About the Internet Archive”, 2001). Unlike some of the earliest web-based art projects involving vernacular photography, including Esther Parada’s Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents, both Collected Visions and Dear Photograph have archived versions of their respective sites available through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine. These records are far from inclusive, but they do
provide valuable insight into how these websites have changed over time and what aspects have persisted.

Using the Internet Archive Wayback Machine can provide important information about how formatting and presentation – key mediating qualities of the research subjects – have (and have not) changed over time. Decisions about which versions of the websites were to be reviewed with respect to collecting this information about formatting and presentation though were based on the units of analysis within each case study: the individual pages with a photograph and a narrative. At the Collected Visions website, these pages are grouped into ‘galleries’ and ‘exhibitions. Six galleries and ten exhibitions are currently available to view. Within each gallery or exhibition, the number of pages varies, but each gallery or exhibition is organized around a principle theme or purpose. Individual examination of the pages within each gallery and exhibition allowed for a comparison of nested elements, that is a consideration of the particular components within a specific case (Thomas, 2011, p. 518). Examining these individual pages within the cases (e.g. Collected Visions pages are considered in relation to one another rather than comparing them to Dear Photograph pages) follows the process-tracing model where dissimilar cases can be used to develop theories that reflect a shared outcome that illuminates a research phenomenon. For Collected Visions, postings are organized as ‘essays’ in ‘exhibitions’ or ‘galleries.’ I reviewed each page or ‘essay’ in the accessible exhibitions and galleries – some 454 contributions by individuals who have made use of their own images or those available in the Collected Visions archive, a collection of 2506 images. In the case of Dear Photograph, postings follow a chronological order beginning on May 24, 2011. While postings occur nearly daily for long stretches, there are gaps in postings. Several weeks or months may pass with no postings. During data collection in 2013, my review of Dear Photograph postings began with that first post from May 24, 2011 and continued until October 3, 2013 (a total of 861 pages). Following October 3, 2013 there was a gap in posting for several weeks and after visiting Dear Photograph repeatedly in the weeks that followed October 3, 2013, and finding no new contributions, I stopped my review.
Case Study Layers: Developing a Research Narrative

The exploratory research conducted through interviews and archival research helped me to determine how the origin stories of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photographs* could be told. The exploratory research also helped me to articulate the particular research object that the two cases could help me explore: how the remediation of vernacular photographs in online exhibitions affords the possibilities of communicative spaces of exchange where memory is shared. Returning to Gary Thomas’ discussion of case study research, he notes that “The subject is in no sense a sample, representative of a wider population[,] … Rather, the subject will be selected because it is an interesting or unusual or revealing example through which the lineaments of the object can be refracted” (2011, p. 514, emphasis in original). This notion of refraction suggests that the selected cases that are the focus of a study need not share identical criteria or variables. If different cases help to illuminate the specific phenomenon under study, then they offer valuable insight both in their similarities and in their differences.

Social science researchers who draw on case study approaches have faced questions about the theoretical value, reliability, and validity of a research method that may focus entirely on a single case or a limited number of research subjects. Bent Flyvbjerg (2006) addresses some of these criticisms of case study research in his discussion of what he identifies as five key ‘misunderstandings’ about case study as a methodological approach. First, Flyvbjerg asserts that the contextually-dependent knowledge that can be gained from the close study of a particular case does not stand in opposition to predictive, rules-based contextually-independent knowledge, but may provide a way for accounting for the complexity and multifaceted nature of social experiences. Second, with respect to the possibility of generalization from select case studies, he notes that “formal generalization, whether on the basis of large samples or single cases, is considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress” (p. 226) and that theoretical generalizations can (and have been) made from theorizing
related to a specific example.\textsuperscript{71} Third, that while the case study approach has generally been understood as a basis for developing and testing hypothesis as part of the initial stages of research, it has value across the entire process of research and can be a critical part of theory building. Fourth, Flyvbjerg counters the contention that case study research is overly subjective and tends to support the researcher’s pre-conceived ideas by arguing that all research methods are influenced by subjectivity and case study may actually lead a researcher to interrogate his or her subjectivities and pre-conceived notions through the critical in-depth engagement with a single case. Fifth, and finally, the assertion that the often-narrative nature of case study research makes it difficult to summarize is not a reflection of the method, but the complex reality of the specific phenomenon that is being studied; therefore, narratives, like origin stories, can be viewed as a meaningful way of presenting one’s research findings.

Recasting some of the debates related to case study research and presenting them as opportunities, as Flyvbjerg does underlines the notion of continuous reiteration and reflection that is possible with this type of research. \textit{Collected Visions} and \textit{Dear Photograph} are the subjects of my research, cases that have allowed me to consider a number of diverse (and sometimes competing) research interests by examining two very specific and practical examples of how vernacular photography, remediation, new media, and the communication of memory may be interrelated. Case study research allows for a certain flexibility when investigating research subjects because, while a researcher may set forth with a notion about why a particular case is important and how it illuminates the research phenomenon, these pre-conceived ideas about why a particular case is worthy of study – as a typical instance or an outlier, for example – may change over time. When Flyvberg reflects on his own work as a case study researcher, he describes how halfway through his research on Danish urban planning, he came to the realization that what he had hoped to examine as a critical or key case of local power relations was actually an extreme or outlier case (2006, p. 231). How a particular case is

\textsuperscript{71} Here, Flyvberg discusses Galileo’s experimental thinking related to the study of gravity; rather than conducting an extensive series of tests with various objects and different heights, Galileo effectively falsified an existing theory – Aristotle’s explanation of gravity – by conducting a focused inquiry into the different factors that were commonly understood to influence the effects of gravity (p. 225).
categorized in relation to other possible cases may change over the course of research. More importantly, thinking about how a case sheds light on the research object throughout the research process highlights both the complexity of the research subjects and object as well as the challenges of drawing distinct boundaries between types of cases.

The five elements that Thomas names in his discussion of case studies (subject, object, purpose, approach, and process) are all present in this dissertation. In conducting research, the five elements overlapped and intersected in a number of different ways. While it is now possible to construct a linear narrative of research activities that took place, in actuality, the activities – like reviewing existing popular and scholarly discussions of vernacular photography, conducting interviews, and carrying out examinations of various archives – were part of a lengthy iterative process that contributed to the creation of the dissertation as a research narrative. Figure 8 offers a visual summary of when these research activities took place in relation to one another.

As depicted in Figure 8, the “Articulating Research Object” bar is relatively small compared to the amount of time devoted to other activities. This is not to suggest that determining and expressing the research object was a small task. Rather than being positioned at the start of the project, as is the case in Thomas’ description of case study layers, the articulation of the research object in this dissertation occurred near the middle of the overall process. Once the research object began to crystalize, it was then possible to narrow in on research subjects and take steps to examine them thoroughly as individual cases.

When the research subjects and the research object became clearer, I could then turn to the three other layers that Thomas (2011) names in his description of case study research: purpose, approach, and process. In this dissertation, these three elements are intertwined. During my research, I was particularly interested in how particular actors helped to influence the conditions where online spaces of exchange might occur and how remediated vernacular photographs might be used in these spaces to communicate memory. To understand how contemporary meaning-making processes associated with vernacular photography and memory drew on existing methods of
Figure 8. Order of Research Activities and Dissertation Preparation 2011-2016
exhibiting vernacular photographs, I investigated past practices of displaying vernacular photographs in domestic spaces, at different types of exhibitions (inside and outside museums), and in online spaces. This work allowed me to reflect on and articulate the purpose, approach, and process involved in my research.

With respect to purpose, what Thomas (2011) refers to broadly as “a reason for doing the study” (p. 515), the research conducted for this dissertation sought, in part, to respond to the notion that new media has somehow irreparably altered and impoverished memory practices and meaning-making practices that involve vernacular photographs. The approach, which Thomas describes as reflecting whether research is primarily theoretical or illustrative (p. 516), informs the selection of particular methods. In this dissertation, insights gained through conducting interviews and archival research allowed me to consider how memory practices involving vernacular photographs have consistently drawn on and adapted existing and emergent technologies and media formats to organize understandings about the past for the present. With this in mind, an intensive examination of the material contributed to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph – the vernacular photographs that are shared as well as the narratives and comments that accompany them – was conducted in the hopes of describing how two contemporary examples continue to draw on and adapt existing memory practices associated with the exhibition of vernacular photographs and make use of those practices across two different types of spaces: online and gallery exhibitions. The process, what Thomas describes as “an examination of the nature of the choices that were made at the time about the parameters that delimit the subject of study” (2011, p. 516), returns to the selected research subjects (Collected Visions and Dear Photograph) and establishes the boundaries of the study. In this dissertation research, the process of reviewing Collected Visions and Dear Photograph included decisions about the number of webpages that would be examined in order to identify potential themes that reflected what people were willing to share in online spaces of exchange when participating in memory practices involving vernacular photographs.

The purpose, approach, and process of this dissertation align with what education scholar Michael Bassey (1999) describes as a “theory seeking and theory testing” case study. While theory testing studies often have a clear stance about the
research object at the beginning of one’s study, theory seeking studies tend to reflect how a theoretical understanding or assertion about a particular research object develops through one’s course of study. Bassey notes that these two approaches to testing with and developing theories can occur in tandem when a researcher begins his or her project with tentative propositions about the relationship between concepts or variables. These propositions can then inform attempts at theory testing when a researcher moves towards tentative generalizations (Bassey, 1999, p. 62). The relationship between theory seeking and theory testing as an approach underscores the notion of possibilities rather than certainties. In cases such as Collected Visions and Dear Photograph, communicative spaces of exchange are not guaranteed: they are possible when different elements come together. The messages and material that people contribute to these spaces provide evidence of communicative exchanges. As the number of communicative exchanges increases, certain styles of expression and representation that borrow from existing practices of remediation and display are adopted and adapted to serve the needs of the present. These emergent themes are discussed in chapter seven.

The notion of a theory seeking and theory testing approaches also corresponds to what political scientists Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005) refer to as ‘building block’ processes where specific cases, as evidence of a particular phenomenon can be used to serve a kind of heuristic purpose (p. 76). A theory suggested in a research project that corresponds to the building block process does not promise a definitive and conclusive assertion about a particular research object. Instead, building block approaches support particular, though not necessarily exhaustive, explorations of a research object so that certain generalizations may be made. In this way, a theory seeking and theory testing approach aligns well with an iterative and reflective process of selecting research subjects because each case can be viewed as a building block that “is itself a contribution to theory; though its scope is limited, it addresses the important problem or puzzle associated with the type of intervention that led to the selection and formulation of the research objective” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 78). This building block approach that progressively contributes to theory development and analysis is also “self-sufficient” because, as it is focused on a specific case or limited number of cases, “its validity and usefulness do[es] not depend upon the existence of other studies of
different subclasses of that general phenomenon” (p. 78). Building block approaches allow a researcher to examine a select number of cases, which may have similarities and differences, in order to assert a particular theory about a specific research object. In this research, *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are cases that illustrate how the remediation of vernacular photographs in spaces of exchange to communicate memory through the adoption and adaptation of new media is not an isolated or a strictly historical phenomenon. Using *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* as building blocks in developing this theory, we can see that they are two research subjects, each with their own individual contexts, which present the possibility of a space of exchange by drawing on a number of similar (though not entirely the same) variables.

**Towards a Reflective Analysis: Assembling Information through Process-tracing**

When I was able to articulate the research object with the two research subjects in mind, it was then possible to develop a plan for examining the *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* websites and collecting data about the types of vernacular photographs that were contributed to each website and how people used the images to communicate memory. I developed a rubric to assist in note-taking where I collected information on, among other features, the estimated age of the photographs, content and compositional elements, and where applicable, corresponding comments that were shared with the photographs (like short narratives or comments). I collected this information in order to identify the types of vernacular photographs that people have shared through *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* and to consider how these images, as part of an online media platform, may be used to communicate memory. With this information, I then set about developing a research narrative through what political scientists George and Bennett refer to as “process-tracing,” which is

> a unique tool for discovering whether the phenomenon being investigated is characterized by equifinality (or ‘multiple convergence’ as it referred to by some scholars). Process-tracing offers the possibility of identifying different causal paths that lead to similar outcomes in different cases. These cases, in turn, can serve as building blocks for empirical, inductive construction of a … theory.

*(George & Bennett, 2005, p. 215)*
Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are different projects that lead to a similar outcome (the similar outcome being insight into a specific research object); they present the possibility of online spaces of exchange where memory is communicated through the exhibition of vernacular photographs. The different ways in which the vernacular photographs are displayed in Collected Visions and Dear Photograph also draw on and adapt existing conventions associated with the exhibition of vernacular photographs in museum spaces. Adopting a process-tracing approach here aligns well with the idea that Collected Visions and Dear Photograph are research subjects that illuminate the research object.

Accounting for how new media contribute to spaces of exchange requires a consideration of how museum exhibition (where the term spaces of exchange as a concept originates) influences and is influenced by new media in the display of vernacular photographs. As shown in chapter three, the use of vernacular photography for the purposes of communicating both individual and shared memories has lengthy histories. The selected projects that are the research subjects in this dissertation are then positioned not to illustrate a distinct departure from earlier practices of communication and memory work. Instead, this dissertation locates and describes historical spaces of exchange – both within and outside of museums – where vernacular photographs play a critical role in the communication of memory. In doing this, it is possible to reflect on how the recent adoption of digital media affords opportunities for creative reimaginnings of existing practices in order to serve contemporary desires to communicate with and about the past. Interviews with artists and curators, as well as archival research into museum collection holdings of and exhibitions related to vernacular photography shed light on how the possibility of spaces of exchange have been created in museums and how new media present both new opportunities and new challenges for creating spaces of exchange now and in the future.

Collected Visions and Dear Photograph each present different opportunities and limitations for the communication of memory using remediated vernacular photographs. However, both cases provide occasions to consider how people adopt and adapt existing new media to share the past with others in meaningful ways. Collected Visions and Dear Photograph present the possibility of spaces of exchange that offer the
opportunity for visitors to receive messages about the past and participate in their own work of meaning-making that reflects the oscillation between acts of memory and purposive imagining (Langford, 2007, p. 103).
Chapter 5.

Origin Stories: Collected Visions

American artist Lorie Novak’s (b.1954) Collected Visions project invites visitors to participate in memory work with a variety of media. Collected Visions installations have been exhibited in museum spaces, and people have shared and creatively repurposed vernacular photographs online through the Collected Visions website. This ongoing project, which began in 1996, reflects Novak’s longstanding interests in media and remembering, and has provided the possibility for spaces of exchange where people can communicate and reflect on memory by sharing vernacular photographs. The Collected Visions project can also be thought of as a node where a variety of individuals, technologies, and media interact in order to facilitate and encourage communicative interactions and exchanges. Following Novak from her training as a photographer to her contemporary reflections on the future of new media provides insight into the different influences and relationships that have contributed to the Collected Visions project.

Novak notes that in the years following the completion of her Bachelor of Fine Arts program (1973) in photography at the University of California, Los Angeles, and programs in Art and Psychology at Stanford (1975), she came to revisit her family photographs as she experimented with different coloured slide gels and projections:

One day I projected an old family slide on a wall in my apartment. There I was as a child, looming like a ghost. The floating image had a dream/nightmare-like quality, and I felt as if I were making a memory materialize. These became a stage and the projections of family photographs the players. This was a turning point in my work.

(Novak, 1999, p. 15).

In Novak’s work, the past meets the present through the creative repurposing of vernacular photographs that are intermixed with contemporary images. By the early
1980s, after completion of a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Art Institute of Chicago (1979), Novak continued to experiment with projections of family images, producing photographs of domestic spaces that featured her collection of family slides. These still photographs incorporate multiple layers of media superimposed on one another that reveal and conceal the projected family photographs interwoven with Novak’s contemporary images. Novak herself frequently appears in these images (see Figure 9), sometimes as a child in the images she has selected from her family’s collection, and also in contemporary self-portraiture where she is often distorted. Novak’s contemporary self may be out of focus, partially hidden by camera equipment, or obscured by opacity so that her contemporary presence amongst the projected images is difficult to make out.

Novak “uses various technologies of representation to explore issues of memory and transmission, identity and loss, presence and absence, shifting cultural meanings of photographs, and the relationship between the intimate and the public” (Novak, “Bio,” n.d.). Some of her recent work extends these themes through the appropriation of other images, beyond the confines of her family and her person. For example, she has begun to develop an accumulating collection of daily copies of the New York Times newspaper for her project *Photograph Interference*. This work, like the earlier *Collected Visions* project, includes the remediation and reconfiguration of print material in critical and creative ways.

In this chapter, I provide an origin story for *Collected Visions* – a narrative that offers contextualization for a number of different events that influenced the development of Novak’s project. This origin story draws on information from popular and scholarly publications written by Novak and others, reviewing Novak’s online projects and portfolio, and an in-person interview conducted with Novak. As an artist and educator based in New York City, Novak is situated in a network of relationships with institutions, for example, the New York University Tisch School for the Arts where, she is a

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72 This description of an ‘origin story’ borrows from Eviatar Zerubavel’s (2003) discussion of how social memory is organized according to particular patterns that aid the dissemination of past events in order to support a particular contemporary point of view.
professor, and the International Center of Photography, where material from the *Collected Visions* project was included in an exhibition, *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak*, in 2000. She has also shown her work at museums and galleries across the United States and around the world. Novak’s personal and professional experiences working with colleagues, technologies, and new media – different actors in a series of relationships – led to the development of the *Collected Visions* project.
Mediating Layers

Novak's interest in layering and distorting vernacular photographs with a variety of media has remained a part of her practice for nearly three decades. In her installation work in the 1980s, slide projectors were critical components of her exhibitions. Recalling the exhibition of \textit{Critical Distance}, first shown at the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, Massachusetts, Novak describes how she manipulated projections of her family’s slide collection to create larger-than-life images [that] dissolve into each other as they are projected into darkened rooms. The space is transformed as slides cover entire walls, appear on the floor, and move across corners. The continuous emerging and dissolving of images in a darkened room evoke the sensation of thoughts rising and falling the mind. Exploiting the power of the transitions as one image fades into another, I expanded my ideas concerning the relationships between historical imagery (collective memory) and private imagery (personal memory).

(Novak, 1999, p. 17)

These ‘dissolving images’ that fade in and out across space have remained a key feature of Novak’s installation work. In some ways, this notion of dissolving echoes Novak’s still photography work, which often features superimposed layers of media that alternately reveal and conceal references to personal and public pasts. Drawing on images from newspapers, magazines, and television as well as her own personal photographs, Novak’s pieces reflect on the relationship between personal experiences and public events and how this relationship influences memory. When Novak describes how images dissolve into each other, the images do not dissipate or disintegrate suggesting a loss of memory. Rather, through ‘dissolving,’ the images, and the memories that are elicited through viewing the images, are constantly transforming and transitioning in the gallery space.

Projecting transitioning images of vernacular photographs and pictures from news media became a hallmark of Novak’s work through the 1990s and the early part of the 2000s. In the 1990s, Novak developed \textit{Traces}, \textit{Playback} and \textit{Collected Visions} (in addition to other projects) as installation pieces. In both \textit{Traces} and \textit{Playback}, Novak uses multiple projectors (ten and five, respectively) to display her family images.
interspersed with media images from major events in American and world history since the Second World War. These installations also include some of Novak’s earliest efforts to incorporate sound in the exhibition space for her installations. In *Traces*, images of a woman swimming are continuously projected on the floor and accompanied by an audio loop of water rippling (see Figure 10). In *Playback*, a looping projection of children jumping into a play pool repeats while accompanied by a soundtrack that includes live radio samples of news programs, music, and talk shows (see Figure 11). For Novak, the use of sound in her installation work offers “audio-equivalents of the types of imagery used” (Novak, “Playback, 1992,” n.d.). By using a variety of images and a variety of sounds in her multimedia exhibitions, Novak provides a variety of “gaps and exit points” (Langford, 2007, p. 103) for visitors to the exhibition to engage with the material on display. Through these gaps and exit points, visitors have an opportunity to participate in that “oscillation between acts of memory and acts of imagination that make photographic experience matter” (Langford, 2007, p.105). Drawing on the transitional possibilities of

Figure 10. Lorie Novak, Installation view of *Traces*, 1991, photograph. University Art Museum Cal State Long Beach, Long Beach, California

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different media to produce a multimedia experience – specifically how slide projections and audio tracks can be overlapped and fade in and out – to produce a multimedia experience, Novak offers visitors an ‘exchange place’ in the sense that Martha Langford (2007) describes, but not necessarily a space of live exchange where visitors have opportunities to interact with one another in situ.

For visitors entering into the darkened galleries where limited lighting enhances the viewing of Novak’s projected slides, engaging with the installation is largely an individual experience: it is difficult to see and interact with other people in the gallery space and the auditory aspects of the installation mean that visitors must listen to the audio rather than converse with one another in order to experience the different aspects of Novak’s work. Meaningful and deeply affective memory work can take place in these installations. Visitors can reflect on the past as it is presented in vernacular photographs.

Figure 11. Lorie Novak, Installation view of Playback, 1992, photograph. Tufts University Art Gallery, Medford, Massachusetts
and popular media images of events that may be very familiar.\textsuperscript{73} The layering and transitioning aspects of Novak’s work – the gaps and exit points – also invite visitors to imagine how their own personal memories and experiences shape understandings of both the past and the present. The processes and products of the memory work undertaken by visitors to Traces and Playback, the reflecting and imagining, as important as they are, are difficult to situate as part of a series of ongoing communicative interactions. Visitors pass through the gallery space, but any memory work that they might do in the gallery space is invisible. While examining unobtrusive measures can reveal how visitors to move through a space, like wear patterns on gallery floors that can provide insight into the paths people have taken as they move through an exhibition, the ways that visitors are prompted to consider the past and how it might be used to make meaning in and sense of the present are impossible to discern. As Latour notes, “If your actors don’t act, they will leave no trace whatsoever. So you will have no information at all” (2005, p. 150). The reflective and imaginative memory work that may be happening in the exhibition space is not necessarily shared with others who are reflecting and imagining in that same space.

**Collected Visions – Initial Iterations**

In 1993, Novak first exhibited Collected Visions I at the Houston Center for Photography. This work, shown in three concurrent sections, each running on a slide projector loop of ten (sections one and two) or twenty (section three) minutes, consists of projected and layered images that draw on a collection of photographs Novak solicited from more than 150 friends, colleagues, and students both at New York University and colleagues at the Houston Center for Photography (Novak, 1999). All of the images depict girls and young women from their infancy to early adulthood. While the girls in the images are clearly identifiable – that is, their faces and bodies are not obscured to

\textsuperscript{73} Traces and Playback were exhibited at galleries across the United States between 1991 and 1996. Playback was also shown in Breda, the Netherlands in 1993. The images Novak selected from news media sources (including photographs of Holocaust victims, American civil rights demonstrations, the Vietnam war, and the first Gulf War) depict occasions and events that influenced later twentieth century life in general and had significant impacts on American life following the Second World War. The images also parallel Novak’s autobiographical images in that they focus on national and global events that, in media representations, have shaped the world since Novak’s birth in 1954.
conceal identity – no names are associated with specific images in accompanying documentation or titles. As an installation work, *Collected Visions I* is a complex multimedia assemblage. Three larger than life projections dominate the gallery space as they dissolve between the photographs across 10 x 15’ and 10 x 6.9’ screens. In one part of the work, the different images of the girls are layered with an image of a woman’s hands holding open different texts that address female creative practice and societal expectations of women ranging from Louisa May Alcott’s 1868 publication, *Little Woman*, to Carolyn Gold Heilbrun’s 1988 work, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (see Figure 12) (Novak, *Collected Visions I*, 1993-94, n.d.).

![Installation view of Collected Visions I, 1993, photograph. Houston Center for Photography, Houston, Texas](image)

This first iteration of *Collected Visions* allowed Novak to explore and critique how women are represented in her own family photographs and the photographs contributed by her friends, colleagues, and others. The multimedia and remediated aspects of *Collected Visions I* brought together multiple layers of images and sound (Novak asked composer Elizabeth Brown to create an instrumental accompaniment for the installation). By transferring the vernacular photographs of girls and young women to slide film, inserting overlays of Novak’s contemporary photographs, and setting her images to
music, Novak’s first exhibition in the *Collected Visions* series is rich with gaps and entry and exit points that invite encounters with photographs rather than dictating how particular images should be viewed and understood. As with her earlier installation work, *Collected Visions I* was prompted by material in Novak’s personal collection of images:

> In my search for new ways to examine my personal images against those of our culture, I realized I could use other peoples’ family photographs in much the same way that I used images from the media [in *Traces* and *Playback*]. Because I come from a family of all girls (sisters, cousins, and nieces), I started by collecting snapshots from women. I wanted to see if other women's images were like mine.  

*(Novak, 1999, p.19)*

This desire to investigate other women’s experience of growing up as depicted in family photographs, this desire to compare and reflect on the similarities and differences of personal pasts as captured by vernacular images, led Novak to the surprising realization that despite the individual experiences and personal histories of the women who shared their photographs, the photographs themselves were remarkably alike. Novak describes the unexpected commonalities of the photographs, noting that

> The similarity of so many of the images I collected was striking, especially in the ways that they only hinted at the female experience of coming of age. Except for clues of dress or format (black-and-white versus color, white border on the print versus no border), the differences in how girls and women present themselves in family photographs from the 1950s and 1960s as compared to the 1980s and 1990s are far less apparent than expected, given the changes in women's roles and the influence of feminism over this forty-year period.  

*(Novak, 1999, p.19)*

Novak notes that one of the challenges of *Collected Visions I* was to communicate the striking similarities between the contributed photographs without being overly didactic (personal communication, June 13, 2013). It is obvious that the people depicted in the work are girls and young women. However, Novak wanted to allow people to come to their own conclusions about the meaning of the piece.

> While one of the original intentions of the work – to explore the experience of girls growing up – was informed by Novak’s interest in developing a critical feminist
project, Novak came to the conclusion that “you can’t use family photographs of girls to make any sense of what it’s really like to grow up as a girl” (personal communication, June 19, 2013). The surprisingly broad similarities between photographs provided little insight into the actualities of life for girls and young women. In hoping to make sense of what it means to grow up as a girl in the later twentieth century, Novak found that family photographs resisted her attempts to construct and present a visual representation of this particular gender and social experience. Recalling criticism, received at the showing of *Collected Visions I*, that the piece was too ‘traditional’ in its depictions of girls and women, Novak recalls that the prevalent similarities between images in her work, and how women in general have been photographed were disconcerting:

> You know, it looked un-feminist but I actually think it hopefully is kind of a feminist piece, but it was about [the fact that] I couldn’t do anything about the photos and the most shocking thing to me when I was making it was how similar photos were, how women let themselves be photographed has just not changed that much.  

(personal communication, June 19, 2013).

Without abandoning her interest in gender representations and feminist experience, Novak shifted her focus to address these questions of similarity and repetition in family photographs. Reviewing hundreds of vernacular photographs with striking similarities in terms of how girls and women performed in front of the camera, Novak began to reflect on the events and experiences that by accident, by choice, or by coincidence are not photographed and those events and experiences that cannot be photographed (personal communication, June 19, 2013). To address these issues of omission and concealment, Novak expanded her practice to include photographs that did not focus solely on girls and women. Additionally, she began conducting and recording interviews with the colleagues, friends, and individuals who contributed their photographs.

Following the Houston installation, Novak revised *Collected Visions I* for inclusion in the *Imagining Families: Images and Voices* exhibition at the National African American Museum Project at the Smithsonian in 1994-1995. This subsequent iteration of *Collected Visions* (like the installation at the Houston Center for Photography) is not well documented online or in an exhibition catalogue. This lack of documentation, in the way
of installation photographs, exhibition catalogues, or artist notes, limits what can be speculated about the experience of actually attending the first two installations of *Collected Visions* in Houston and in Washington;\(^7\) however, Novak’s reflections on how people responded to her work and their desire to share their own stories and stories about photographs provides insight into the development of the online component of the *Collected Visions* project:

As I travel with my installations, people always talk to me about their family photographs. Their stories reveal so much about photography’s relationship to memory and the family. I knew I had to include some of these narratives in my next piece. I also realized that I wanted to enlarge the scope of the piece to include images from men and boys as well as from women and girls. I began collecting snapshots from men as I was installing *Collected Visions I* in Houston in May 1993. With the focus no longer solely on girlhood, I could take a broader look at the cultural significance of family photographs. I had thousands of casual snapshots and posed portraits depicting home life, familial relationships, celebrations, rituals, vacations, children at play, awkward adolescence, and much more. What I saw in these photographs were the dreams, disappointments, joys, tensions, and stereotypes of modern culture. Without realizing it, I was laying the foundation for what would become the *Collected Visions* website.

(Novak, 1999, p.21)

As Novak articulates here, the installation piece becomes a node where the different aspects of memory, experience, and the desire to share stories interact. In this way, *Collected Visions* can be understood as responding to a specific and timely need to talk about and reflect on media and memory. What Novak had intended as an examination of girlhood becomes an opportunity to share personal understandings of how family images, those everyday photographs that people remember with varying degrees of fondness and concern, reveal, conceal, and shape our understanding of the past. Novak’s comments above also illustrate how the interactions with individuals who wanted to share their photographs influenced the development of *Collected Visions* as a web-based space of exchange.

\(^7\) Novak notes that the installation in Houston was particularly difficult to document owing to the nature of the gallery space and the different areas involved in projecting the images (personal communication, June 19, 2013).
Fortuitous Connections

Novak’s plan with *Collected Visions I* was to encourage visitors to engage in a critical reflection on complex processes of how girls become women, a complexity she hoped to communicate in a variety of images. Instead, the fact that the vernacular photographs collected from hundreds of people appear so similar (in terms of how girls and young women are depicted) became a limiting factor in communicating the manifold experiences of female adolescence and youth. *Collected Visions I* may not have solicited the types of responses that Novak originally had in mind, but it did prompt discussions and interactions – between Novak and those she encountered while travelling with her installation – about vernacular photographs. As an academic and an artist, Novak is familiar with public lectures and presentations that allow her to provide additional insight into her work. Through these lectures and presentations, Novak met with people who wanted to share personal memory stories that were elicited by and through their own vernacular photographs and the vernacular photographs they saw in Novak’s work. People shared their stories and they also shared their photographs. As Novak notes, during her installation of the Houston exhibition, she began collecting a wider scope of vernacular photographs than just those that depicted girls and young women. This accumulating collection of images provided Novak with material that she could work with and remediate in creative ways. Following the 1994-1995 showing at the Smithsonian, *Collected Visions* was not exhibited again as gallery installation work until 2000. In the five years between these exhibitions, Novak experimented with new media technologies and developed relationships with individuals who had technical expertise in digital media. These connections with and between media and people led to the creation of the *Collected Visions* website.

Describing the different media used throughout the development of the *Collected Visions* project highlights how advances in technology and the different affordances and limitations of media influence the ways information and images are shared. One of Novak’s key media in the early 1990s, slide film, is uniquely situated at the intersection of art, photography, and remediation. In his discussion of the development of slide film as an artistic medium, Charles Harrison (2005) describes how a variety of influences in the 1960s and 1970s led to slide film being used as a critical and creative response to,
among other things, modernism, abstract art, and the privileging of particular media as legitimate expressive forms worthy of exhibition in museums and galleries. Using slides, Harrison notes, reflects a concern for visual art that turns towards a “reinvestment in pictures” with referents, context, and content (p. 43). Additionally, projection-based slide works resist classification in existing categories of art. Due to long-standing influences of what could be considered in the realm of ‘high-art,’ Harrison suggests that “there was a virtual moratorium on […] work that might be unproblematically categorized in terms of either painting or sculpture” (2005, p. 43). Harrison goes on to note that artists Robert Smithson and Dan Graham, who explored the possibilities of slide film in the 1970s, “were not inventing a medium. Rather they were positioning their enterprises within an already established world of reference” and that “the attraction to color slide film may have been due, in part, to its relative technical innocence (as far as the history of art was concerned) ... and its practical association with documentation rather than self-expression” (2005, p.38, 39). In terms of artistic expression, slide film can be considered as an ‘in-between’ medium in that it refers back to existing practices of exhibition that were not quite a part of the museum\textsuperscript{75} and not quite as common as photographs in the domestic spaces. Slides were nevertheless, as Harrison notes, a popular way of sharing “snapshots of children and vacations, projected ad nauseam to forbearing audiences of family and friends” (2005, p.38). Slide film through the 1970s and 1980s in installation works in galleries bridged the familiar and the novel. The technology that one might find in a neighbour’s living room projecting images onto a bed sheet was the same technology being used by contemporary artists in galleries in New York, Paris, and London. Novak’s use of slide projectors beginning in the late 1970s situate her amid a group of photographers and artists who were experimenting with media in critical and creative ways.

By the 1990s, though, slide film was quickly becoming obsolete. The ability to transfer analog images swiftly and easily into digital files provided new opportunities to experiment with media forms. Novak’s work as an instructor at New York University (NYU) put her in contact with people who were actively experimenting with the

\textsuperscript{75} Slides might be used as illustrative examples to support art historical and archaeological lectures or used to record and document artworks (Harrison, 2005, p. 39).
possibilities of digital media. Novak (personal communication, June 13, 2013) comments that the initial iteration of *Collected Visions* in digital form resulted from a collaboration with the NYU Center for Advanced Technology where faculty members were invited to participate with researchers and programmers "with the goal of accelerating the development and dissemination of multimedia technologies and applications" ("Information," n.d.). The rapid emergence and decline of media forms near the end of the twentieth century at first presented a challenge for Novak and her collaborators. Describing the process of determining the most appropriate media format for her project, Novak recalls:

> When I started meeting with the group that helped me make [the website for] *Collected Visions*, we were going to make a CD-ROM. Before we even had totally developed the idea, the CD-ROM died. I mean it was like [snaps fingers], it was like that. So, we started developing for the web with Netscape 1.0 and by the time we launched, within a year, it was Netscape 3.0 and nothing else existed. And now Netscape is dead.

(personal communication, June 13, 2013)

Different media also afford different types of communicative interaction. The initial notion of a CD-ROM would allow users some flexibility in how they engaged with the *Collected Visions* photographs in that users could open computer files at their convenience, but the CD-ROM technology could not offer users the possibility of contributing their own photographs and their own stories to the *Collected Visions* project. Novak returns to the importance of sharing one's past and one's photographs when she reflects on how important it was for her to listen to and be present for the stories people wanted to share with her when she travelled with the *Collected Visions* installations. Identifying an appropriate media format also meant weighing the affordances and limitations related to sharing stories and images. The decision to create a web-based project came as a result of collaborative reflection, careful consideration of media possibilities, and a desire to encourage a particular type of engagement:

in working with the three women that I worked with on *Collected Visions* the website, we were just talking about if we were going to make something interactive, what could we do? And that’s kind of what we all came up with and I can't remember the exact chain of events but they really influenced [it]. You know I’d come to thinking
we would do something about storytelling but when it was a CD-ROM it wasn't going to be interactive - I mean it would be interactive, but it couldn't be participatory.

(L. Novak, personal communication, June 13, 2013)

Novak’s aspiration to develop a mediated space where people could participate by sharing their photographs and experiences speaks to a desire for the possibility of a particular type of exchange. Web-based formats offer the possibility of visitor contributions, but do not necessarily demand it. *Collected Visions* allows visitors to view photographs and photo essays, search through the collection and create their own photo essays, and to contribute their own images as well. These different degrees of participation reflect the willingness of Novak and her collaborators to experiment with media and technologies in order to take advantage of the potential for participatory interaction and the possibility of online exchanges. As Novak notes, “once we decided to make it for the web it was thinking about what could the web do” (L. Novak, personal communication, June 13, 2013).

**Online Iterations**

The *Collected Visions* website launched in May 1996 and coincided with a conference organized by Marianne Hirsch. The conference, *Family Pictures: Shapes of Memory* at Dartmouth College, and opening of a photography exhibition curated by Hirsch, “The Familial Gaze,” brought together academics, artists, and others interested in the relationship between memory and vernacular photographs – specifically family photographs (Hirsch, 1997). The first web-based version of *Collected Visions* had very little content. Novak relates that launching the website in conjunction with the conference allowed her to solicit photographs from people who were interested in sharing their images:

one of the women who I worked on *Collected Visions* with came up [to Dartmouth] and we had scanning stations set up and everyone brought up, we asked people to bring us photos and

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76 Novak notes that this conference was where she met Hirsch. Since 1996 the two have become colleagues and friends. Novak created the cover images for Hirsch’s 2012 book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust.*
collected, actually, a lot of images there. Which I kind of like, there are a lot of images in there from people who write a lot about family photographs [and] are in the project [the Collected Visions website], it was only because I launched there that I was able to get them all.

(personal communication, June 13, 2013)

The notion of making family photographs publicly available online was not well accepted in the early years of Internet usage. Novak recalls that people were not always forthcoming with their images, an attitude that has changed dramatically in two decades:

many people were very upset about putting family photographs online and just thought that it was a horrible thing I was doing, which is funny now and really quaint. So many people when I launched the project asked me why [I was sharing images online]. [People] either wouldn't give me photographs, which some people still don't put their family photographs online, ... or really questioned what [sharing photographs online] meant in this way that nobody really does anymore.

(personal communication, June 13, 2013)

The early content contributed to the Collected Visions website is not necessarily reflective of wider concerns in the mid-1990s for how vernacular photographs that were normally displayed in domestic spaces should be shown in public. While interest in and acquisition of home-based personal computers and Internet access for communication and activities outside of professional and business networks was steadily growing (Ryan, 2010), when it was launched in 1996, the Collected Visions website was an innovative way of exhibiting vernacular photographs.

Visitors to the Collected Visions website in the mid-1990s could access photographs, photo essays, and other items by clicking through an introductory page that included a series of overlaid audio tracks with different voices introducing themselves and Novak herself reflecting on the role of snapshots in American family life (see Figure 13). Clicking to access the Collected Visions homepage revealed an image of a mantel with different framed images and a series of links that led to different pages.

This page also included a short instrumental audio track that fades in and then out. 77 The different links from the homepage allowed visitors to see Novak’s video work, to visit the “CV Gallery” and review existing photo essays, to search the collected images, to create a photo essay of their own, to submit photographs, and to learn more about photographs and memory via a “Resources” page (see Figure 14). Visitors can choose their own paths through the website and can participate in a variety of ways. This flexibility in the exhibition of vernacular photographs online was also an innovation. Online exhibitions of the mid-1990s that included vernacular photographs, like Esther Parada’s *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*, did allow for varying degrees of interactivity where visitors could select different routes through the material presented.

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77 Novak worked with sound designer Clilly Castiglia to incorporate audio tracks into this early iteration of the *Collected Visions* website (Novak, *Collected Visions*, 1999).
What sets *Collected Visions* apart is the fact that visitors can, if they choose to, contribute material to the web space and creatively manipulate existing material.

![Image of Collected Visions website](https://archive.org/web/19970417170046*/http://collectedvisions.org/)

**Figure 14.** “Homepage,” 17 April 1997, webpage. *Collected Visions*, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, accessed 28 March 2015

These innovations, however, were not necessarily recognized by a wider community of people interested in exploring the creative possibilities of new media. Novak recalls that the *Collected Visions* website was not necessarily well received by people interested in digital technologies in the mid-1990s:

> at the time that it came out, the piece was ignored a lot by the technology field because of its subject. I met someone a few years ago who was one of the big guys writing about it and I asked him if he thought that was true, [because my thinking was:] "well, why didn’t the piece get more attention in the art technology field at the time?" and he totally agreed with me, because it was really ahead of its time. I mean, thanks to the three women I worked with, in terms of what it was doing but because it was family snapshots, you know, that just made people not even go to it.

(personal communication, June 13, 2013)
The content submitted to the *Collected Visions* website can appear entirely banal. The website itself has maintained a relatively simple and clean aesthetic since its inception – there are no revolving icons or flashing links. Recalling Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) discussion of remediation as the double logic of immediacy (media’s ability to “disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented” (p. 7)) and hypermediacy (media’s ability to draw attention to itself in the process of representing content), in the case of the *Collected Visions* website, immediacy at first seems to supersede hypermediacy. From an early twenty-first-century perspective, clicking through the links to visit the “CV Gallery” or “Archive Search” can be done almost without thought. A quick scroll and click and the visitor is brought to a new page. Examining the media more closely and the organizational decisions that influence how content is presented reveal a carefully constructed media platform for viewing and working with vernacular photographs.

In 2015, the *Collected Visions* homepage appears very similar to the version that was launched in the mid-1990s (see Figure 15). Novak’s videos no longer appear on the Website. *Positive Visions,* which was previously featured via a link from the introductory page is now included as a link from the mantel. The links to search the archive and create an essay have been amalgamated and a link to the “CV Museum” appears, leading to a series of themed ‘exhibitions’ based on the material submitted by visitors. Looking more closely at one component of the *Collected Visions* website, the “Search Archive Create Essay” series of pages illustrates Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) concept of hypermediacy. Hypermediacy stands out in “the multiplicity of windows and the heterogeneity of their contents” where “layers of programming” afford control to the website visitor who initiates “automated action[s]” by “clicking on buttons, choosing menu items, and dragging icons and windows” (1999, p. 33). Clicking through the “Search

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78 *Positive Visions* was launched on December 1, 1996, World AIDS Day, to coincide with the seventh annual worldwide Day Without Art. Since 1989, Day Without Art includes activities, programming, and projects developed and lead by artists and members of the museum community to recognize and remember individuals living with HIV/AIDS, those who have passed away because of the disease, and those who support and care for people with HIV/AIDS. The *Positive Visions* gallery available through the *Collected Visions* website includes contributions of vernacular photographs and stories from people who are affected by HIV/AIDS.
Archive Create Essay” link from the home page leads to a information page that details how a visitor might go about searching the collection and developing his or her own photo essay with corresponding hypertext links. This information page has the same aesthetic as the homepage – a black background, the same fonts, and the same orientation (see Figure 16). When a visitor chooses to “create a photo essay” or “search our database,” he or she is greeted with a brightly coloured page with a series of check boxes that may be selected (see Figure 17). With this interface a visitor is asked a series of questions including: “Who is in the photograph?” “What categories of photographs do you want to see?” “Do you want to limit your search by the time period of the photograph?” and “Do you want to see photographs you submitted?” There are multiple choices and options that will return a variety of images that visitors can then scroll
Figure 16. “Create your own photo essay,” ca. early 2000s, webpage. *Collected Visions*, accessed 15 October 2015

Why are family photographs important or unimportant to you? What are your stories? We want to know.

Please join our discussion about photographs and memory. We hope you will create a photo essay by putting your words with images – your own or those of others from our vast archive.

First, search our database for photographs. Then choose the images you would like to write about. You will then be given tools to write your text and design your essay. Then submit it to us for possible exhibition in the Collected Visions Gallery.

If you are interested in contributing your photographs to our archive, please submit them to us. If you want to submit a story without images, please email cvisions@cat.nyu.edu.

continue
Bolter and Grusin note that artists experiment with the possibilities of hypermediacy by “defining a space through the disposition and interplay of forms that have been detached from their original context and then recombined” (1999, p. 39). The photographs contributed by Novak, her colleagues, and visitors to the *Collected Visions* website are decontextualized from their places in family albums and picture frames and recontextualized in terms of content and media format. Novak notes that when visitors are asked, for example, “What categories of photographs do you want to see?” the number of categories and the scope of each category is shaped by a) software affordances (originally the database only allowed for a specific number of individual categories), and b) Novak’s own “totally unscientific” process of designating which
photographs fit in which category by looking at the image (personal communication, June 19, 2013). The programming and categories built into the *Collected Visions* website allow visitors to select and creatively juxtapose images in their own photo essays that can be submitted for consideration in the *Collected Visions* galleries. When searching the database it is also possible to come up empty handed. Certain combinations of categories (for example, ‘friends’, ‘in uniform’, ‘in the Early 2000s’) return no images. When the visitor is informed that his or her search query is unsuccessful, a quote attributed to Annette Kuhn’s work *Family Secrets* appears prominently on the page: “What happens, then, if we take absences, silences, as evidence?” Rather than being confronted with a ‘dead end,’ this quotation reminds the visitor that the *Collected Visions* collection is far from comprehensive and encourages reflection on what types of experiences and events are captured in photographs and what types of photographs people are willing to share online.

When results are returned from a visitor’s search, a page of thumbnail images appears with further guidance (see Figure 18). Hypermediacy is present here too as clicking any of the thumbnails opens a pop-up window with brief information about where and when the photograph was made. This multiplicity of windows creates a “heterogeneous space” of media on top of media (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 34). Visitors are entreated to review and reflect on the images, the text at the top of the page includes: “We hope you will contribute a story about one or more of the photographs that
triggers a memory or inspires you to write." This invitation to participate in memory work with vernacular photographs and to create something new based on one’s own memories is possible in this online space made possible through mediating technologies that allow a visitor to search and select photographs and add their own perspectives. When visitors select the image(s) for their photo essays, they are then led to a page with fillable boxes where they can type the title of the essay and write an accompanying text. Clickable radio buttons allow visitors to choose the size of the image and the colours for the background and text of their photo essays. Once information is entered, visitors can preview their essays and are asked to include their name, location, age, and email (these last two are optional) prior to submitting their essays. All of these steps and layers of mediation are involved in the process of creating an essay, but when visitors actually review the contributed essays in the Collected Visions galleries and the “CV Museum,” these layers of mediation are far less apparent.

The different components of the Collected Visions website underscore the notion of oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy, memory and imagination. Bolter and Grusin describe a hypothetical website visitor: “She oscillates between manipulating the windows and examining their contents, just as she oscillates between looking at a hypertext as a texture of links and looking through the links to the [units of meaning]” (1999, p. 33). Yes, a visitor can see that text accompanies images in the Collected Visions galleries (see an example in Figure 19). However, when looking at the photograph of a child smiling broadly while proudly wearing a superhero cape, the details of search queries, text boxes, and radio buttons are not visible. The immediacy of the photograph and the accompanying story that reflects on childhood dreams and adult realities takes centre stage. Reviewing Joseph’s submission (Figure 19), it is possible for visitors to reflect on their own childhood experiences. Joseph’s memory work can prompt others to engage in memory work of their own that may occur within or beyond the Collected Visions website.

Looking more closely at the types of photographs submitted to the Collected Visions website and how they have been used in photo essays on display in the Collected Visions galleries will help provide further insight into the oscillations between
memory and imagination that are made possible, in part, through this online media format. This will be discussed further in chapter seven.
Twenty-first-century Exhibitions

In addition to working on the *Collected Visions* website through the late 1990s, Novak also developed an exhibition for the International Center of Photography (ICP). *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak* was commissioned by the ICP to coincide with the institution’s reopening in Midtown Manhattan. ICP chief curator Brian Wallis notes that

it was really important to have [*Collected Visions*] here as part of our inaugural series of exhibitions because I do think that it opens up a lot of questions about how images can be either appropriated or recycled or rethought and how those kinds of images, ideas, and voices can be captured in a contemporary context.

(personal communication, June 17, 2013)

The exhibition ran from November 3 – December 31, 2000 and included an updated digital projection installation and computer terminals with scanning stations where visitors could digitize and contribute their own photographs to the *Collected Visions* website. The ICP exhibition was a result of Novak’s connections and relationships with members of New York’s artistic community, in particular, Novak’s relationship with Ed Earle, ICP Curator of Digital Media. Novak recalls that

I had been talking to him [Earle] for a while about this piece and it's because of him that the piece happened there. He is someone who has been one of the early curators dealing with new technology in the field, now there are a lot of people, but he was really early on, one of them. So, I had shown that piece to people at ICP a couple times but it was Ed that finally made it happen and I think also for that piece, showing it in a museum about photography made a lot of sense because it's a piece about photography - it's photography about photography.

(personal communication, June 19, 2013)

The exhibition at the ICP returned the *Collected Visions* project to a physical gallery space. *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak* was a small exhibition in terms of the space it occupied at the ICP. The gallery, however, became a node where
different media forms intersected and a space where visitors could contribute to the *Collected Visions* project by remediating and sharing their vernacular photographs.

While *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak* was not well documented at the time of exhibition, information about the space and the visitor experience is available. In an article on the use and place of vernacular photographs in museums, Joel Smith describes the exhibition at the ICP: “Visitors sat on a bench facing a corner of the room, where two perpendicular floor-to-ceiling video projections [...] cycled through sequences of snapshots from several hundred family collections. The photographs [...] were impressionistically combined with fragmentary recordings of conversations” (2001, para. 31). This aspect of the exhibition continued Novak’s interest in working with projected images, but advances in media and technology allowed her to exhibit images without relying on slide projectors. Novak notes that the first iterations of the *Collected Visions* installations that relied on slide projectors were, in some ways, limited by the noise of the technology, noisy cycling through slide film that would interfere with audio tracks (personal communication, June 19, 2013). Through her collaboration with the NYU Center for Advanced Technology, Novak worked with Jonathan Meyer who designed a software program run on a computer and projected with a digital projector, to cycle through different photographs. This advance in media technology allowed Novak to feature audio recordings of people talking about their photographs as well as an instrumental piece by composer Elizabeth Brown. The software Meyer designed in 2000 is similar to contemporary presentation software (like Keynote and PowerPoint). However, Novak notes that Meyer’s software allowed audio and images to be synced in ways that were not possible for out of the box software at the beginning of the 2000s.

In Ed Earle’s introduction to the exhibition, he makes particular mention of how the advances in technology and the choice of media influenced Novak’s work:

In this installation images and sound are both stored on two high-performance computers. The continually dissolving images are generated in real time through new programming tools developed for this exhibition[.] [...] The display of the images through high-resolution data

79 Sound design for *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak* was provided by Clilly Castiglia who also worked on the *Collected Visions* website.
projection gives the photographs a greater sense of presence than would be possible with conventional videotape.

(Earle, 2000, para. 2)

Novak had initially imagined that video technology would be the medium that most closely replicated the attributes of slide film that appealed to her and that video should be the media of choice for the exhibition (personal communication, June 19, 2013). However, in working with the software Meyer designed, Novak was able to create higher quality images than those possible with video and to integrate new images easily into her work (see Meyer, 2000). Meyer’s software accommodated contributions by visitors to Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak. During the nearly two months that the exhibition was on display, there were four “Collecting Days.” Promoted on the exhibition website hosted by the ICP, Novak invited visitors to “bring 1-10 of your family photographs that mean the most to you. This can be past or present” and that images may be “either posed or candid” and depict family in the broadest of senses: “all loved ones – friends as well as pets” (Novak, “Collecting Days,” 2000).

Novak’s invitation for visitors to bring photographs with them suggests that individuals’ favourite photographs were likely images that were printed from film negatives. In 2000, apart from a small photograph that might be tucked into a wallet, people were unlikely to carry vernacular photographs with them. The opportunity to digitize print photographs, to remediate them from one media format to another, was a novel experience. Supported by trained facilitators who could assist with the technical aspects of scanning and uploading photographs, the two scanning stations setup with Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak allowed people to participate in memory work with new media. At “Collecting Days” people could be introduced to a method of working with media tools to share their photographs. With knowledge of the Collected Visions website and its affordances to create photo essays that shared both

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80 Installation photographs in the ICP show two computer terminals that would be connected to the Internet to allow visitors to access the Collected Visions website. There was no documentation of “Collecting Days” or information about how scanners were added to these terminals available to me.
photographs and memories, visitors could contribute to the project after visiting the exhibition. Those who were not able to attend the ICP exhibition could also participate by sending images via email\textsuperscript{81} or post.

**Maintaining Mediated Spaces**

With *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak* and the *Collected Visions* website accessible at the same time, there was an oscillation between digital and physical spaces. While this oscillation between spaces drew to a close when the ICP exhibition ended, the notion that the website was and is built on connections and the willingness of people to share their photographs, their memories, and their stories persists. The *Collected Visions* website, which presents opportunities for people to remember and imagine using remediated vernacular photographs, persists as a space of exchange where memory work is encouraged. It also persists as a space where turn of the twenty-first-century media is, in some ways, preserved. Novak comments that updating the *Collected Visions* website could make it more “negotiable” for visitors, and while she acknowledges that

> there are some parts that just look really outdated, [...] I've decided that that is just part of the history of the piece [...] it's a style that was more popular back then but to go through and change all that it was not set up in a way that can be easily [done] you'd have to go back and update by hand and I don't think that's worth it. I think that's also a history that's just part of the piece of what it looks like. Considering it was made in '96, it doesn't look incredibly dated like some sites do and that's a testament to the woman, Betsey Kershaw, who designed it.

(personal communication, June 19, 2013)

The photographs available via the *Collected Visions* website now number over 3000. Novak remains interested in *Collected Visions*, but her interests as an artist have also

\textsuperscript{81} File types accepted for use in the *Collected Visions* website project initially were limited to JPEG, PICT, and Photoshop files with a resolution of 72 dpi. Now, JPEG, PICT, PNG, TIFF, Photoshop files are accepted with the same 72 dpi resolution. For consideration in installation and use beyond the website, the resolution for images has exponentially increased from “750 pixels(w) x 500 pixels or larger at 100 dpi” to “at least 1200 pixels(w) x 800 pixels or larger at 300 dpi” (Novak, “Submit your photos,” 1998; Novak, “Submit your photos”, 2003).
evolved, and she has worked on numerous other projects, many of which involve experimenting with and reflecting on new media. People continue to submit photographs and photo essays to the *Collected Visions* website; however, Novak notes that updating the website requires attention not only to organizing the submitted content, but also involves reviewing and streamlining the programming (personal communication, June 19, 2013). This type of work takes considerable time. While the *Collected Visions* website remains accessible and stable for the foreseeable future thanks to Novak’s NYU contact who transferred the website to a new server at the institution, whether or not the work will be exhibited again as an installation piece in a gallery space is uncertain.\(^{82}\)

What was originally intended as a five-year project (Novak, *Collected Visions*, 1999) to collect, exhibit, and encourage reflection on vernacular photographs at the turn of the twenty-first century is now nearing two decades on the Internet. The persistence of the *Collected Visions* website relies on a variety of connections, including those that brought together specialized knowledge about software and programming, institutional support to ensure the site’s longevity (by transferring material to a contemporary server), contributions from sound artists, Novak’s work, and hundreds of images willingly shared by visitors. While the *Collected Visions* project and website is not currently a key priority for Novak, she notes that she would like to return to the project:

> New ideas lead you other places [...] I would like to do a book about *Collected Visions* and I’ve also thought of doing an online book about it, [...], but at the moment, I’m kind of really thinking about the fragility of online things and will they survive? So, I still think a [hard copy] book with an online component is more interesting to me, but to stop and figure out how to make that book, I just haven’t done yet.

(personal communication, June 19, 2013)

Novak’s reflection on the future of the *Collected Visions* project illustrates how affordances and limitations of media play a critical role in communicating and sharing

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\(^{82}\) Novak comments that the software to run the installation images for the *Collected Visions* exhibition on display at the ICP currently requires a personal computer (PC) similar to the one used in the 2000 exhibition (personal communication, June 19, 2013). Showing the work would again require a consideration of the media format and the limitations and affordances of contemporary technologies that influence how people are invited to remember and imagine.
memory. Each medium has particular affordances and limitations that offer and constrain different possibilities for interacting and participating in spaces of exchange. A project that crosses media platforms and incorporates multimedia aspects can draw attention to the different media formats and the processes of remediation involved in presenting information. The *Collected Visions* project offers people an opportunity to communicate vernacular photography and participate in a type of memory work that relies on media not just as a way to preserve the past, but also as an active site of creative imagination and communication.
Chapter 6.

Origin Stories: Dear Photograph

“So, I know I’m not the best photographer in the world, but when this idea came to me, I knew I had to do it”.

(Jones, “The Story,” 2011)

Unlike the Collected Visions project that developed over a number of years through a variety of media iterations, the origin story of Dear Photograph and its development is much more compressed. Dear Photograph first appeared as a Tumblr website in May 2011. Images submitted to the website were published as a book in April 2012 and selected images were shown in a Swiss exhibition in September 2012. One way of telling the origin story of Dear Photograph and tracing the project’s development is to follow the man who uploaded the initial images in May 2011, Taylor Jones. Following Jones though requires a slightly different approach than the one taken when describing the work of Lorie Novak and the motivations and influences that contributed to Collected Visions. Dear Photograph may be thought of as a node (like Collected Visions) where a variety of individuals, technologies, and media interact to facilitate and encourage communicative exchanges. Unlike the longitudinal information about that process of developing Collected Visions that is available in statements by Novak herself, as well as in scholarly and popular sources that reflect on the Collected Visions project, existing information about Dear Photograph comes mostly from documentation created over a span of about one year during 2011 and 2012. The origin story of Dear Photograph emerges during this period.

Since my repeated attempts to contact Jones for an interview went unanswered, this analysis is based on several interviews conducted by reporters and writers interested in social media (Ehrlich, 2011; Manzoor, 2012), media outlets covering the
social phenomenon of posting vernacular photographs online ("50 websites most worth your while," 2011; Jones, “Dear Photograph: New Age Nostalgia,” 2012; Tossell, 2011), as well as interviews focused more generally on Jones’ work as a creative practice (Jones, “Lauren Laverne,” 2011; Jones, “Episode #18 - Internet Artist”, 2014). This material, some of which is archived via links at the Dear Photograph website and some of which can be located through online searches of popular media, provides insight into how Jones has imagined his work over time and offers details that reflect his motivations and influences when developing the Dear Photograph project. In this chapter, I examine Jones’ account of how he came to start the Dear Photograph project with a Tumblr website and describe how the website has changed over time. I then discuss how Dear Photograph has been presented in other media formats. I pay particular attention to exhibition of the Dear Photograph images at the 2012 Images festival des arts visuels de Vevey as this offers a valuable point of reflection on how web spaces and museum spaces afford both complementary and contrasting opportunities for communicative exchanges about memory that are made possible through the use, remediation, and circulation of vernacular photographs.

**Internet Artist**

Taylor Jones appears to have described Dear Photograph with the intention of communicating with a number of different audiences. The story he often relates in his accounts begins with how an impromptu review of family photographs at his parents’ kitchen table was the beginning of a multimedia project involving remediation, memory, and communication. In the introduction to the 2012 book publication of Dear Photograph, Jones writes:
My life changed completely on May 25, 2011. I was twenty-one years old and living with my parents in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. For all the times I'd thought of moving out on my own, I'm so thankful that I hadn't yet flown the coop. Again that night it was proven that everything good in my life has always started at home. We were just finishing up one of my favourite meals [...] and we decided to look through an old photo album together. We didn't have to go digging through half a dozen dusty boxes hidden away in the attic – nope, not in the Joneses' house. Mom, an avid scrapbooker, had piled our house high with hundreds of albums, which she carefully filled with thousands and thousands of family photos. Our lives had been beautifully and thoroughly scrapbooked.

(Jones, Dear Photograph, 2012, p. 1)

Jones’ narrative here points to a specific event in time as a major ‘watershed’ moment in the history of Dear Photograph and in his own life. Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel uses the term ‘watershed’ to refer to how people and groups use particular events to establish specific periods in history and draw distinctions (2003, p. 83-84). Jones’ socio-mnemonic narrative about distinct turning points in his life and creative practice identify specific periods as markers of transformative breaks between past and present. While Jones has assigned particular meaning to the family dinner in May 2011 as the starting point of Dear Photograph, in some ways this is an arbitrary distinction: Jones’ notes that he had previously considered moving out of his childhood home, but he doesn’t spend much time discussing or reflecting on how this action may have influenced the development of Dear Photograph. Focusing on an early summer evening narrows attention on a moment in time and allows Jones’ to make a clear delineation between an era before Dear Photograph and an era of Dear Photograph. While Jones highlights May 25, 2011 as the watershed moment for Dear Photograph, his story also illustrates the influence of what Richard Chalfen terms ‘home mode’ forms of photographic exhibition and ways of using photographs as affordances for communication in family life.^[83]

In Jones’ quote above, photography is described as part of everyday life in his formative years. Easily accessible photo albums that are carefully created and maintained by his mother surround him. Jones’ interest in vernacular photography, like

[^83]: Recall that Richard Chalfen describes the ‘home mode’ of as form of communication where photographs and videos are part of a “pattern of interpersonal and small group communication centered around the home” (1987, p. 8).
Novak’s, is rooted at first, in a preoccupation with autobiographical and family images. Stressing the importance of his relationships with his family, Jones’ description of how *Dear Photograph* began also illustrates ways domestic spaces sometimes play an important role in how people communicate with and about vernacular photographs. It is important to note that Jones describes the process of reviewing photo albums as a shared activity; it is an “exhibition event” in which more than one person participates (Chalfen, 1987, p. 25). The memory work and conversations that began over the kitchen table were subsequently shared more publicly through remediation and the use of various media that provides opportunities for vernacular photographs to circulate outside the domestic realm. Rather than describing a deliberate and systematic method of remediating and sharing vernacular photographs, however, Jones’ comments recall an improvisational and *ad hoc* approach that emphasizes his own capacity for novelty. Jones’ comments that in turning through the pages of a photo album, one particular image of his brother Landon as a three-year-old captured his attention because it depicted Landon sitting in the same chair in the same kitchen in 1995 as he did on that May evening in 2011 (Jones, *Dear Photograph*, 2012, p. 1). “I grabbed the photo from the plastic,” Jones notes,

> and held it up in front of me, matching the old photo of Landon against the present scene. It really is true: when the light goes on in your brain, everything seems to slow down and become very quiet, almost soundless. Everyone at the table – Mom, Dad, Landon, Keaton [Jones’ youngest brother], and even my dog, Mylie – gave me quite the looks”

(*Dear Photograph*, 2012, p. 2).

The description of one moment in an Ontario home when a variety of actors including Jones and his family, the photographs pulled from the family’s albums, and the kitchen table and chairs captures a particular ‘action’ in the sense that Latour (2005) describes. For Latour, “action” is “a surprise, a mediation, an event” where different actors meet and influence one another (p. 45). Following the moment of recognition in his kitchen, Jones describes pulling more photographs from the family album and “taking

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84 Chalfen notes that when studying home mode photography, a “public context” refers to any situation where “any audience that consists of more than the picture-taker” is present and that an audience may include one or two people (1987, p. 25).
picture after picture, holding up each shot against its present location and snapping a new photo to capture the scene" (*Dear Photograph*, 2012, p. 2). One action leads to the next. The technological affordances of relatively inexpensive digital cameras allowed Jones to creatively remediate the existing photographs from his family album. Technological and media affordances also made it possible for Jones to share quickly and easily what he had created with others. After ‘remaking’ his family photographs, Jones notes that he went to his computer and began a Tumblr website in order to upload his photographs to the Internet.

Jones’ choice of website to exhibit the digital images he created on that evening in May 2011 illustrates, in part, another influence based on his personal experience. In 2011, Taylor Jones was working as a social media specialist for Blackberry at Research in Motion in Waterloo, Ontario. Developing and managing social media content is something Jones is very familiar with and he notes that even before he began working in the field, he was intrigued by the possibilities afforded by online digital communication platforms: “I was always that person in high school that was more of an advocate for it [social media] before anybody else was and that was before, now it’s mainstream” (Jones, “Episode #18 - Internet Artist”, 2014). Jones’ background and interests in social media and digital content meant that he was comfortable working and communicating online and suggests that he was aware of some of conventions associated with online communication. When Jones “uploaded Landon’s winning grin and beloved cake, Tumblr asked for a caption” (Jones, *Dear Photograph*, 2012, p. 2). The framework for *Dear Photograph* was thus being set in place by Tumblr’s request for a caption – a short textual description that accompanies each image uploaded by a Tumblr user. In Jones’ narrative, the remediated image of his brother Landon stands out in the origin story he has developed for *Dear Photograph* (see Figure 20). However, in reviewing the *Dear

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85 At the time of the first *Dear Photograph* posts, Tumblr provided a platform for weblogs that allowed people to upload different types of media including text, images, video, and hyperlinks. Tumblr also offered a social media platform where individuals could follow blogs, share content through reblogging posts on their own Tumblr blogs, and offer commentary on posted material. In the early 2010s, the Tumblr platform facilitated and encouraged remediation and communication by making it easy to reproduce material from one blog site and post it on another; the same content can appear in a variety of places where it is framed and re-presented according to the interests and preferences of the person reblogging the content.
Photograph archives, the photograph of Landon was posted on June 2, 2011, a few days after the first posts to the Dear Photograph website. The story that Jones has developed about the start of Dear Photograph does not seamlessly match up with the first images exhibited on Dear Photograph. In fact, the discrepancy here lends itself to thinking about the flexibility of memory and how people recall and make sense of the past in the present (the (re)organization of memory in Dear Photograph’s origin story is discussed further below as well). The picture of Landon with his birthday cake is the first Dear Photograph image not to include Taylor Jones. When Jones finds himself asked to caption the image of his brother, he does not describe the photograph from his own perspective; he imagines what Landon might say to his past self. Jones writes:

I wondered: What would Landon say to his picture if he could talk to it? I typed out a salutation: “Dear Photograph.” And then I thought, Landon has this swagger thing going on, a little bit of attitude and edginess mixed
together with brotherly love. I finished the caption: “Dear Photograph, I wish I had as much swagger then as I do now.” I showed it to Landon, and he loved it.

(2012, p. 2)

Jones’ memory work here includes a communicative exchange where he has reflected on the past, through the imagined perspective of another individual, and offered that reflection through the (re)presentation of a vernacular photograph. In Jones’ narrative, this photograph of Landon stands out as the watershed image that marks the beginning of *Dear Photograph*. Despite the fact that four images precede this one, Jones’ story of imagining a narrative for his brother and his brother’s subsequent approval highlight the importance of communication and connection that the *Dear Photograph* website makes possible. For Jones, writing about his brother was a way of imagining a past in such a way that it could be shared with others.

Emphasizing Landon’s approval of the remediated image also sheds light on how Jones perceives his role as contributor to and curator of the *Dear Photograph* website. Jones’ use of the website to encourage participation by others provides a means for him to display his curatorial skills in developing a framework for exhibition and facilitating the possibility for others to share their own remediated vernacular photographs. Jones first asked for submissions to *Dear Photograph* on May 29, 2011. Between May of 2011 and September 2014, Jones uploaded hundreds of images – usually one per day. In an interview with videographer and podcaster Adam Rochon in 2014, Jones is pressed to describe himself when Rochon remarks on the success of *Dear Photograph*. Rochon asks Jones if he considers himself an entrepreneur. Uncomfortable with the title of entrepreneur, Jones downplays the notion, self-depreciatingly commenting that a project that can be coordinated from a basement using the Internet is not the same as becoming a ‘self made man’ that he associates with entrepreneurship. Jones tells Rochon, “I call

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86 The first call for submission asked visitors to: “Send in a photo like the ones shown on the blog, along with a caption saying “Dear Photograph”, along with something reflecting back on that photo. Please include your name, your Twitter handle, or be marked as Anonymous if you wish. Thanks!” [http://web.archive.org/web/20110612042700/http://dearphotograph.com/submit ("Submit," 2011)] More recently though, visitors are asked to agree to a detailed “Terms of Submission” that outlines rights and licensing.
myself an Internet artist” (Jones, “Episode #18 - Internet Artist,” 2014). The term ‘Internet artist’ is one that Jones describes as developing himself, in part due to the 2012 exhibition of Dear Photograph images at the Images festival des arts visuels de Vevey.

In an exchange with Rochon, Jones notes:

Jones: everything I do is on the Internet. I don’t work at a grocery store and I don’t deliver newspapers, I make things on the Internet. I got that [the term Internet artist] from […] the first gallery [exhibition] I had in Switzerland in 2012 and they asked me if I was artist because my art was all over the walls and I said no. And they were like, “no you’re an artist.”

Rochon: You have a gallery [exhibition], but you’re not an artist?

Jones: I know. I guess technically this is my work but this is other people’s work as well. […] I guess you can say I’m an Internet artist because I’m crowdsourcing people’s work and I’m making it available to the public and it’s sort of its own work of art and I guess everything that I do now [related to creating and mixing work that is presented on the Internet] makes me an artist of some sort.

(Jones, “Episode #18 - Internet Artist,” 2014)

Jones’ travels with Dear Photograph to Switzerland, like Novak’s travels with the Collected Visions exhibition, allowed him to reflect on his role in developing a collaborative project with the possibility for people to share their vernacular photographs with a larger public. However, Jones is somewhat reluctant to take the title of ‘artist.’ Qualifying that he thinks of himself as an ‘Internet artist,’ Jones’ emphasis is on creative affordances offered by a network of computers and his ability to manipulate and share media through this communicative network.

Dear Photograph has received thousands of submissions. Reviewing and selecting which contributions to feature on a daily basis, developing a book for publication, and preparing material for a gallery exhibition each require significant attention. In interviews and media features, Dear Photograph tends to be represented as a one-man operation with Jones at the centre. While Jones is certainly a key actor and mediator in the development and evolution of Dear Photograph, on a few occasions he
acknowledges the contributions of Karen Newbrough. In an interview with *Luxxe*, Jones notes that “[Newbrough] was the heart and soul of *Dear Photograph* when things were too busy for [him] to handle. People behind the scenes deserve more credit, so thank you Karen!” (Rohaly & Osborne, 2014). In the acknowledgments of the *Dear Photograph* book, Jones also makes special mention of Newbrough: “my manager, you’re the thumb in the *Dear Photograph* logo. You’ve been the backbone from the beginning and the most honest, upfront, and hardworking person I’ve ever had the chance to work with” (Jones, 2012, p. 243). The demands of updating a website on a daily basis are no small task. Like any artistic work, *Dear Photograph* relies on a network of individuals who work together and influence one another in direct and indirect ways (Becker, 2008). While Jones is very often the ‘face’ of *Dear Photograph*, his adoption of the title ‘internet artist’ and his reference to own work as mixing and making public the contributions of others reflects the fact that *Dear Photograph* has been shaped by a variety of interactions both in-person and online.

The watershed moments and action that influenced the development of the *Dear Photograph* website helped to popularize the method of memory work with vernacular photographs that Jones used on that May evening in 2011. In the sections that follow, I reflect on how this method of memory work and rephotography are presented in *Dear Photograph* contributions. I then describe the features and development of *Dear Photograph*, first as a website and then outline how contributions submitted to the *Dear Photograph* website have been presented in different media spaces.

**Take a Picture of a Picture from the Past in the Present: Rephotography and Memory Work**

Individuals who submit images to *Dear Photograph* share their creatively remediated vernacular photographs made by following a particular method of memory work. With each image, a person holds a printed photograph in one hand and matches up features in the printed photograph with the present day scene where the original photograph was made. In short, a person stands where an earlier photographer stood in order to create a contemporary photograph (very often a digital photograph) that includes a printed photograph of the same scene made months, years, or generations ago. The method used to create the images that have been submitted to *Dear
Photograph is a type of ‘rephotography.’ Rephotography, broadly, is “the act of taking a new version of an existing photograph to create a ‘then and now’ view of a location” (“Scotland’s Landscape,” n.d.). Photographing a photograph highlights the ‘double logic of remediation’ that Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe where there is a simultaneous desire to multiply media, but erase “traces of mediation” (p. 5). Rephotography draws attention to that oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy as well as the oscillation between past and present when a person returns to a particular setting with a photograph in hand. Viewing rephotography, one may have the immediate sense of standing where the photographer stood. At the same time though, rephotography multiplies media in that it may show a photograph within a photograph. When an image is posted on the Dear Photograph website, it represents a series of remediations where information and meaning have passed through a number of intermediaries and mediators. While Bolter and Grusin’s discussion of the relationship between immediacy and hypermediacy provides insight into how we might try to focus in or attempt to ignore media, Latour’s (2005) discussion of intermediaries and mediators reminds us that a variety of actors influence the representation of and ability to make meaning with rephotography. In rephotography, photographs are both intermediaries (seeming to transport meaning from there and then to here and now) and mediators that “transform, translate, distort, and modify” meaning (Latour, 2005, p.39). Rephotography (a term sometimes used in art worlds to describe the practice of photographing the same site at two or more points in time) is an action, in the sense that Latour describes, where a variety of agencies and affordances meet and combine in a new way. In addition to adopting rephotography, Taylor Jones’ project also began by migrating analog images to digital formats for dissemination online. Taylor Jones’ remediation of one type of photographic media (a print image) and its re-presentation in another type of media (a digital file) is a common practice; therefore, this technique is not unique in the Dear Photograph initiative.

Rephotography has been used both as a tool for research-creation by photographers for documentary and creative purposes and by social scientific scholars

87 Recall that Bolter and Grusin describe immediacy as the effort of “ignoring or denying the presence of the medium and the act of mediation” (1999, p. 11) and hypermediacy as the effort of drawing attention to the medium itself.
to track and record both incremental and abrupt variations over time. With the increasing availability of and access to low cost photographic and communicative technologies like digital cameras and photo sharing websites, rephotography has also grown in popularity as a popular artistic and vernacular practice. One famous early practitioner was Ansel Adams who used the technique to communicate concerns about environmental issues (Chisholm, 2011). Rephotography is well recognized as a method for documenting and analyzing the changes in landscapes (Webb, Boyer, & Turner, 2010), it is also used by social scientists to study changes in social practices and communities over time (Rieger, 2011). Alongside these scholarly uses of rephotography, individuals interested in historical photographs have also created and juxtaposed images of the present with images of the past. For example, Russian photographer Sergey Larenkov uses software to blend photographs made during the Second World War with present day scenes and display them on a social networking platform, his LiveJournal website (Sorrel, 2010). In Amsterdam, historical consultant Jo Teeuwisse does the same, using Flickr to share her rephotographed images that superimpose contemporary scenes in France and Holland with historical negatives, also made during Second World War (Reynolds, 2012). Individuals with mobile camera phones can contribute to crowdsourced rephotography projects. For example, in Australia and in Scotland, individuals are invited to use digital cameras or mobile phone applications to rephotograph landscapes, historical sites, and urban settings to document continuity and change (Savvides, 2013; “Scotland’s Landscape,” n.d.). In this context Dear Photograph may be considered indicative of a popular fascination with reusing and repurposing historical photographs.

One of the most extensive rephotography projects in recent decades is Mark Klett’s Third View: a Rephotographic Survey of the American West that is displayed online and in print. Klett’s (2011; 2004; 1984) work and publications feature longitudinal rephotographs of the American West based on archival images from nineteenth-century survey photographs and provide important insights into how historical images are remade using contemporary photographic practices. Klett has produced hundreds of photographs that capture the transformations and endurance of landscapes over more than a century. When presenting an historical image with a contemporary photograph of the same scene, Klett notes, “the two images together form a new whole […] creat[ing] a new context in which neither photo exists in its time alone” (2004, p. 3). The juxtaposition
of photograph within a photograph offers those “gaps and exit points” that Langford describes as providing the viewer with the possibility of “travers[ing] space and time” by calling on the individual’s memory and imagination (Langford, 2007, p. 103). Rephotography draws attention to a simultaneous overlapping and separation of the past and the present. Photographing a photograph in the present means that the historical image covers part of the contemporary scene. The contemporary image surrounds the historical image, but we do not see the contemporary scene that lies hidden behind the historical photograph. The past partly obscures the present while the present frames our perspective on the past. The contemporary image is “an extension, amplification, contradiction, and/or modification of the original photographer’s perceptions” (Klett, 1984, p. 21). Like the photographs that Klett describes in his musings on rephotography, the images contributed to Dear Photograph are made by contemporary photographers who stand where earlier photographers once stood. Revisiting particular places and the photographs that were made in these places fosters present day reflections on memory.

Dear Photograph images recontextualize vernacular photographs that exist in personal and family collections and revisit them through rephotography in an approach that may be considered a particular type of memory work. Here, it is useful to recall Annette Kuhn’s definition of memory work as

an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory. Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as ‘truth’ but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities. Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory.

(Kuhn, 2000, p.186)

Making and sharing a Dear Photograph image is such an occasion where there is a “conscious and purposeful staging of memory.” While Kuhn has in interest in how
memory work may challenge or confront existing understandings of the past, her description of memory work emphasizes that it is an active practice. Individuals who submit images to Dear Photograph are active mediators who have a desire to stage and share their memories with others. The contemporary photographers who create the Dear Photograph images “transform, translate, distort, and modify” (Latour, 2005, p. 39) memories in order to present them in a particular format with certain conventions. Evidence of these conventions are seen in Figure 21 where a contemporary

![Figure 21. Rubin, “Ten years have flown by,” 9 February 2013, rephotography web posting. Dear Photograph, accessed 29 January 2014](image)

photographer positions himself or herself in the footsteps of an earlier photographer and holds the image produced by that earlier photographer. The hand that holds the

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88 Kuhn’s interests here lie in how multiple and alternative meanings can be created through reviewing photographs. In her work with Kirsten McAllister, Locating Memory: Photographic Acts, Kuhn suggests that photographs may provide ways of disrupting existing narratives about identity, gender, citizenship, ethnicity, and social belonging (2006, p. 7). The edited collection assembled by Kuhn and McAllister brings together different “innovative strategies for reading photographs” that “trace the movement of the images across time as they pass between family and community members and between different audiences, accruing meaning and affect” (p. 1). In Locating Memory, and in her other works, Kuhn examines questions of how photographs reveal and conceal through processes of remembering and forgetting and who benefits from these acts of memory and omission.
historical image draws attention to the present-day photographer’s presence and the staging involved in this act of rephotography and memory work. The hand of the photographer in the *Dear Photograph* image also attunes the viewer to the making of the image. From the viewer’s perspective, it is easy to imagine the photographer with one hand on the photograph and one hand on the camera. While the viewer does not see the work involved in finding and choosing a particular image – the work of flipping through photo albums or removing a photograph from its frame and the work of researching and locating the site of the original photograph – the photographer’s hand in *Dear Photograph* contributions is a reminder that the making of the images is itself an active and interpretive process made possible when a variety of actors (people, media, and technology) come together.

It is impossible to identify all of the different influences that shape each individual contribution to *Dear Photograph*. However, in considering methods to investigate the different layers of meaning that might be created when photographs are revisited and repurposed, Annette Kuhn’s discussion of memory work provides some insight. Kuhn outlines a four-step procedure for interpretatively engaging with photographs: 1) beginning with a consideration for the subject(s) depicted in the image (including having the viewer imagine himself or herself as the subject(s); 2) moving to a consideration of how the photograph was produced; 3) reflecting on the technologies and aesthetic influences that supported its production, and; 4) concluding with a reflection on how the photograph may have been received by other viewers in other contexts over time (Kuhn, 1995, p. 8). The steps that Kuhn describes resonate to some degree with the type of memory work that contributors to *Dear Photograph* have undertaken. However, unlike Kuhn’s (2007) model, which was first developed for facilitated and collaborative group work, visitors to the *Dear Photograph* website are privy to the results of memory work without being present during the memory work itself or bearing witness to the processes involved. However, the *Dear Photograph* website offers a space of exchange where a record of one’s memory work may be preserved. While the communicative dynamic of an in-person group workshop, of course, differs markedly from individuals’ contributions to a website that are shared and viewed asynchronously, in both cases there may be opportunities to recognize and appreciate a familiarity that exists with vernacular photographs.

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Kuhn notes that memory work may be used by groups where individuals support one another in the communication and performance of memory (2007, p. 285). When people observe and acknowledge how others are communicating memory in a workshop (which in itself is a space of exchange), Kuhn comments that there are often two central aspects to how participants may experience this sense of exchange: “First, a sort of eye-opening takes place because of this unfamiliar context for, and fresh approach to, something that is very familiar and ordinary and which yet may very well also carry some emotional weight. Second, there is a shared fascination with – and a quest to understand – others’ memory” (2007, p. 285). The contributions to Dear Photograph are familiar in that they tend to depict memorable moments of both everyday life and special occasions that are commonly seen in vernacular photographs. Sharing and viewing these contributions on a publicly accessible website places vernacular photographs in an unfamiliar context, though. These vernacular photographs are decontextualized from their places in home mode exhibition practices and recontextualized through creative remediation and through memory work that may encourage ongoing reflection and response. While the contributions to Dear Photograph feature reflexive framing where a picture from the past is rephotographed in the present, the exhibition of these contributions offers a type of communicative framing where visitors to the Dear Photograph website can acknowledge and comment on the emotional weight of the contributions and express their fascination with how others’ have communicated their memories. The rephotography of an existing photograph creates something new.

Framing rephotography – features of the Dear Photograph website

When Jones uploaded his first rephotographed images to the Internet in 2011, he chose the social media platform Tumblr. Unlike other social media and photo sharing websites that can highly constrain and structure how content is presented,89 Tumblr allows for a relatively high level of individual customization; users can create their own blogs, post different types of content (including text, photographs, video, GIFs, and

89 Facebook and Instagram, for example, have standardized profiles. Users of these sites can upload photographs and content in a number of categories that will appear in a limited number of ways. However, users cannot alter the website’s design or change the templates that frame their photographs.
sound files), chose from a variety of themes to frame their content, and edit the HTML (HyperText Markup Language) that controls the appearance of their blogs. There have been a number of iterations of the Dear Photograph website since its launch. As the site developed over time, elements have been added and removed, and the overall appearance of the website has changed. Reviewing how features of the Dear Photograph website have changed provides insight into how this online exhibition space has accommodated and ordered opportunities to communicate memory with and through vernacular photographs. Examples of previous iterations of the Dear Photograph website that are discussed in this section were located by using the Internet Archive Wayback Machine.

On May 31, 2011 a visitor to the Dear Photograph website would have found a homepage dominated by photographs in a scrolling column on the left-hand side of the website. On the right side of the page, a navigation menu offered a series of links to the following subpages: Ask, Archive, Credit, The Story, and Submit (see Figure 22). By September 2011, the website’s orientation had changed slightly with the scrollable photographs on the homepage shrinking in size, navigation links moving to the left of the screen, and information on how to submit an image included both on the homepage (with details on licencing and use of submitted images) and available via a subpage (Figure 23). Incremental changes between 2011 and 2014 saw the addition of a variety of links on the Dear Photograph website, including a hyperlink to purchase the Dear Photograph book and another to sign up for daily emails from DearPhotograph. Between

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90 Figure 23 also shows how Tumblr removed a photograph for violating the service’s community guidelines. On September 11, 2011 two photographs attributed to Mark Yokoyama were posted to the Dear Photograph website. One image remains available for viewing (discussed in chapter seven) and one image has been redacted. While it is difficult to locate Tumblr community guidelines for 2011, in 2015, the guidelines mention twenty specific categories of content, the majority of which outline the lawful use of material, the importance of correct attribution, and elimination of spam and bot accounts that mislead users or post disingenuous links. The first six categories though, specifically state that Tumblr is not for: malicious speech; harm to minors; promotion or glorification of self-harm; gore; mutilation; bestiality; or; necrophilia (extending to the display of human remains); unflagged NSFW (not suitable for work) blogs; or uploading sexually explicit video (Community Guidelines, 2015). While Jones was reviewing and posting the daily images to the Dear Photograph website, one or more individuals who were a part of the Tumblr community reported the image attributed to Yokoyama to the Tumblr support team. As a space of exchange, the Dear Photograph website is influenced by the conventions of the larger Tumblr community and held in check by the service providers.
November 2013 – March 2014 when I conducted my review of more than 800 Dear Photograph contributions, the Dear Photograph homepage included a horizontal header with the sketch of a hand holding a print – the ‘icon’ used consistently on the Dear Photograph website from its earliest iterations through April 2014 (see Figure 24). When reviewing contributions, I would regularly visit the homepage and click the “Archive” link to access thumbnails of contributions organized by month stretching back to 2011. In April 2014, the “Archive” link was removed from the website and navigation changed dramatically (Figure 25). Since April 2014, all Dear Photograph submissions are accessible directly from the homepage; to review earlier submissions a visitor must scroll
Figure 23. “Homepage,” 13 September 2011, webpage. Dear Photograph, accessed 23 January 2016
Figure 24. “Homepage,” 1 March 2014, webpage. *Dear Photograph,* accessed 23 January 2016
down through hundreds of submissions arranged in reverse chronological order from their time of submission. This change makes it difficult to return to individual contributions. While the URLs for individual contributions have remained the same, the formatting of the contributions has changed as well.

When I reviewed individual *Dear Photograph* posts in the winter of 2013-2014, contributions to the website where displayed as seen in Figure 26. Each contribution has an individual webpage with a distinct URL. During my review these webpages featured a list of ‘notes’ on the right-hand side of the page. When a Tumblr user reblogs material onto his or her own Tumblr website or ‘likes’ a post on a Tumblr website, these actions are noted on the same page as the contribution. In Figure 26, the list of Tumblr visitors who have shared and liked this particular post shows dozens of individuals on the right-hand side of the page. What captured my particular interest in thinking about the possibilities of *Dear Photograph* as a space of exchange was the option to leave written comments on a person’s post via a Facebook plugin that was incorporated into the *Dear Photograph* website. As I discovered, in these comments, people offered a variety of remarks on posts that spurred them to reflect and remember (in chapter seven, I include examples and offer a discussion of some of these Facebook comments related to specific contributions shared on the *Dear Photograph* website). In some cases, the Facebook plugin that provided the commenter’s name also included the commenter’s location. Tracking comments and the commenter’s location alerted me to the fact that people from around the world had the opportunity to interact in this online space. At the end of 2016, the format of individual *Dear Photograph* webpages differs and the Facebook plugin is no longer a part of the website. Visitors to *Dear Photograph* are still able to ‘reblog’ or ‘like’ contributions, but with the Facebook plugin, the comments (and locations associated with commenters) no longer appear on *Dear Photograph* webpages and were only accessible to me by using the *Internet Archive Wayback Machine*. 
Figure 26. Carolyn, “It’s been many years,” 22 August 2013, rephotography web posting with Tumblr and Facebook comments. Dear Photograph, accessed 27 January 2016

I describe these changes to the Dear Photograph website, in part, to illustrate the paradoxical opportunities and challenges of exhibiting vernacular photographs in online
spaces. The dynamic exhibition styles and easily changeable website appearances mean that an online space can quickly accommodate the creative and communicative desires of both the people who contribute material and ‘internet artists,’ like Jones, who work to shape and present that material to the public. Studying any type of vernacular expression over time is like attempting to track a moving target. The different versions of the Dear Photograph website show how the vernacular can be thought of as a curious combination of persistence and change. Photographs made as part of everyday activities and during special occasions are revisited and rephotographed in the contributions to Dear Photograph. This work of rephotography puts memories into motion by drawing on images and text and involving them in creative acts of communication. While the website is the primary space of exchange for the Dear Photograph project, the rephotography contributions have also appeared elsewhere. In the next section, I focus on one of these spaces – a gallery exhibition at a photography festival in Switzerland.

Spaces of Exchange – from Website to Gallery Wall and Beyond

In 2012, Jones selected contributions from the Dear Photograph website to display as prints at Images, the Images festival des arts visuels de Vevey in Switzerland. Held every two years since 1995-96, the festival and photography competition began as a way to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the school of photography at the Centre d'enseignement professionnel de Vevey. The Vevey festival runs for nearly a month, traditionally in September, and draws over 100,000 visitors to indoor and outdoor exhibitions throughout the city. In 2012, Jones’ selections from Dear Photograph were one of 64 installations on display. A little more than a year had passed since Jones sat in his basement in Kitchener, Ontario and first uploaded images to the Tumblr website. Now, the rephotography and memories that people had shared with him were being showcased as art in Switzerland. Locating information on how Dear Photograph was exhibited at the Images festival is a challenge, as available documentation about the temporary show is sparse. However, Jones’ comments on attending the exhibition in Vevey and the connection between Dear Photograph and other exhibitions and activities associated with the festival highlight the interest in and desire to use vernacular photographs to share memories while presenting them as an aesthetic creation in the
context of contemporary art worlds. It also allows for a reflection on the connections between spaces of exchange in the online world and in art gallery spaces.

The online program for the 2012 edition of Images describes the Dear Photograph exhibition:

Dear Photograph is a contribution based project grounded on a simple idea: a cherish [sic] photo from the past is held in the photographer’s hand in the exact spot where it was originally taken. He then takes a snapshot so it blends in perfectly with the décor, before posting the picture on a blog. Although the image within an image is not a new concept, Jones also incorporates a written element, allowing the owner of the photograph to add a personal history under their reborn hand-held montage. Despite the diversity of photographic contributions, his body of work contains an aesthetic that remains consistent and evokes a certain sense of nostalgia.

("Taylor Jones," 2012)

The consistent aesthetic noted above is achieved, in part, through the affordances of the Tumblr website and the shared approach of rephotography whereby contributors ‘take a picture of a picture from the past in the present.’ Tumblr users are able to choose amongst hundreds of ‘themes,’ or create their own themes, that offer different ways of organizing and exhibiting material with coordinated font choices, image sizes, and background colours and patterns. The consistent method of rephotography on display with a contemporary photographer holding an existing print and revisiting the site of the original photograph also helps to instil a sense of consistent aesthetic. When visitors view contributions to the Dear Photograph website, they view other people’s memory work productions. Viewing existing examples of memory work on the Dear Photograph website may influence how people choose to conduct their own memory work when taking a picture of a picture from the past in the present, in effect creating an ongoing cycle of inspiration, production, and communicative sharing.

The Images description of Dear Photograph also underlines the fact that the rephotography approach is not a novel one, or one available exclusively to Jones. To coincide with the exhibition of Dear Photograph in Vevey, the Images festival opened a contest modeled on Jones’ project inviting people to submit their contemporary
rephotographs made in Switzerland and to add a short caption with each image beginning with the phrase “Chère image...” (“Images 2012 Vevey: Wettbewerb «Chère image»,” 2012). People who contributed to the competition between September 1 and 28, 2012 had the opportunity to have their work included in the Dear Photograph gallery show and exhibited on the Dear Photograph website. In one instance, an image contributed to and shown at the Chère image... exhibition in Vevey in 2012 was also included on the Dear Photograph website on 10 September 2012. As part of Chère image, the contributor, Clélia includes the text, “Chère image, j’ai remplacé mes patins par un vélo, mais je continue de filer le long des quais” alongside an image of a little girl wearing roller skates (Clélia, 2012). When the image appeared on the Dear Photograph website in September 2012, Clélia’s words were in English: “I may have swapped my rollers for a bike, but I still have the same wind on my back as a race through the lakeside.” Encouraging locals to participate in memory work with rephotographs and then share the results of their work with others helped to situate the Dear Photograph exhibition as part of specific vernacular practice. Recall Margaret Lantis’ definition of vernacular as “culture-as-it-is-lived appropriate to well-defined places and situations (1960, p. 203). The Images festival brings internationally renowned photographers and their works to Vevey. Holding the Chère image contest allowed people who may normally never have an opportunity to enter photographs in an exhibition to have their work displayed and shared with a wider public. Focusing solely on rephotographs of Swiss scenes, the Chère image initiative provided a way for people to use vernacular photographs to communicate their memories about life in Switzerland. Including these Swiss contributions with images from the Dear Photograph website, Jones selected rephotographs and a format – exhibition prints – to create a gallery space where people could reflect on and share their own memories that were spurred through viewing the memory work of others.

Jones describes the Images exhibition as one of his favourite accomplishments associated with Dear Photograph (Jones, “Episode #18 - Internet Artist”, 2014). While

91 This image contributed by Clélia was available when I reviewed the Dear Photograph website on January 16, 2014 where the text appeared in English. I copied this text into my notes and reproduce it here. However, this particular contribution was no longer included in the images displayed when I returned to review it on the Dear Photograph website in early May 2015.
the *Dear Photograph* website receives thousands of contributions, Jones has very little interaction with contributors or visitors to the website – they connect and share virtually, but rarely (if ever) share the same physical space. Recalling the exhibition in Vevey, Jones comments that the experience of being in the gallery was a profound one for him:

> it was really cool to see the work up on the walls compared to on a computer screen that I would upload everyday because that way [in the gallery] you see people’s reaction to [the photographs]. And although it was in Switzerland and a lot of the people that were talking were [speaking] French, you can see people. I saw people crying in front of the photos and it [sic] was photos that a friend of mine – his dad passed away – and people don’t know that it’s me, I mean my face isn’t up on anything anywhere, but seeing someone crying in front of a photo I’d cried in front of seeing – being across Europe and not having any connection with this person and seeing someone get emotional about it – it was pretty powerful.

(Jones, “Episode #18 - Internet Artist”, 2014)

Jones’ comments here illustrate the layers of mediation and communication at play in spaces of exchange where vernacular photographs are used to share memories. They also shed light on the double logic of remediation at work. Above, Jones refers to the novelty of seeing *Dear Photograph* contributions in print. At first, he is struck by the hypermediacy of the works hanging on the wall and how they provide different ‘windows’ into material that he has regularly seen on a computer screen (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 34). Then, there is the immediacy of a particular photograph that shows a friend’s late father. The print hanging on the wall in Vevey is almost certainly a different version of the *Dear Photograph* contribution than the image that first affected Jones so deeply, but Jones’ description of how a viewer is moved to tears points to the resonant power of vernacular photographs that is translated across media. The format supporting the image may change, but the affective impact of the image persists across those different media formats.

In the online program for the *Images* festival, the entry for the *Dear Photograph* exhibition makes mention of the collective exhibition *Passé recompose* also on display at the 2012 festival. Here the program draws connections between the contributions of ‘amateurs’ featured in the Jones’ exhibition and the work of four artists whose work, “each in its own way… take[s] existing images and reinsert them into their original
setting. The artist then photographs the picture to create a story within a story” (“Passé recomposé,” 2012). The program also notes that the “photographic principle” of making a photograph of a photograph “recently became hugely popular on the internet thanks to Taylor Jones’ contribution-based Dear Photograph project, which will also be presented at the Festival” (“Passé recomposé,” 2012). Both exhibitions showcase works that make use of a similar method of rephotography. Both exhibitions remediate vernacular photographs with this method of rephotography – making photographs of photographs that were originally made as part of everyday activities (or made to be consulted as part of everyday activities). The mention of popularity when discussing Jones’ work though emphasizes another aspect of vernacularity. As described in chapter two, the notion of vernacularity suggests a series of registers that encompasses high and low forms of cultural expression, contemporary and historical trends, as well as novel and conventional endeavours. The vernacular shows itself in the social interactions and movements between these registers (Abrahams, 2006, p.12).

At the Images festival, the Dear Photograph installation and Passé recompose were not shown together; Dear Photograph works were displayed in a contemporary gallery setting (Figure 27) while the photographs included in Passé recompose were shown on temporary free-standing displays in a park, ten minutes away from the EX-EPA building where the Dear Photograph images were (Figure 28). These are very different exhibition spaces. Each space affords and constrains a particular type of engagement with the photographs and also influences the type of reflective and communicative memory work that may take place. The choice of exhibiting the contributions by the Swiss public outside the main exhibition site for the festival may also indicate that curators or exhibition organizers considered this initiative to be more akin to a public outreach activity to engage audiences rather than as authentic works of contemporary photographic art in the festival. In Jones’ testimony (above), he observed that visitors to the Dear Photograph exhibition had powerful reactions to the contributions on display. These deeply affective and meaningful responses to remediated rephotography are important. However, the accounts of reactions to the exhibit are challenging to examine as communicative acts after the fact, not least because it is impossible to seek testimony from the audience members about their reactions. The individual reflections that may take place in a gallery or in a park and
Figure 27. Céline Michel, “Installation view of Dear Photograph by Taylor Jones at the EX-EPA building,” 2012, photograph. Images festival des arts visuels de Vevey. © Céline Michel. Used with Permission.

Figure 28. Céline Michel, “Installation view of Looking Into the Past by Jason E. Powell, part of Passé recomposé at Parc du Panorama,” 2012, photograph. Images festival des arts visuels de Vevey. © Céline Michel. Used with Permission.
those conversations that may happen between one or two people when viewing remediated vernacular photographs are rarely documented or recorded. As a spaces of exchange, the temporary exhibitions in the gallery at the EX-EPA building and the displays in Vevey’s Parc du Panorama are transitory. Once the Images festival closed, the exhibitions could not be revisited. While a website is transitory in its own way, content changes, entire websites can disappear, a website as a space of exchange for communicative memory work allows people to interact and share with one another even if they are separated by time and geography. Contributing the results of one’s rephotography memory work to Dear Photograph and being able to share one’s own work and comment on the work of others means that websites can sometimes offer opportunities for ongoing exchanges and communication across space and time.

**Turning Points**

The creation and development of the *Dear Photograph* website and the gallery exhibition in Vevey are some of the key actions in the story of the project that Jones began in 2011. The future, though, of *Dear Photograph* is somewhat uncertain. *Dear Photograph* has had long periods where no new contributions were posted, for example between September 12, 2014 and July 15, 2015. The interruption in posts corresponds with the start of Jones beginning a new job at the Lake Louise Ski Resort as Marketing & Social Media Supervisor in October 2014 (Jones, Twitter, 2014). Watershed moments in Jones’ life, like the start of a new job in a new province, have influenced the shape of *Dear Photograph*. Recall that Latour describes action as “a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies” (2005, p. 44). *Dear Photograph* is such a node – a set of surprising different agencies. A shift by any one of the actors involved in a node may influence an action. While Tumblr is popular today with millions of users, the future of any social media platform is hard to predict. For example, social media websites like myspace and Friendster that were started in the early 2000s have steadily declined in use and popular interest in the past decade.
constrained by the website though. As a concept and an action, *Dear Photograph* has taken on different media forms including a book publication and a gallery exhibition. Online spaces of exchange speak to a concern of the present moment to communicate quickly across time and space by using media in creative ways. Where, when, and how these spaces might be made possible in the future is not entirely clear. However, where spaces of exchange are possible, they form as nodes of action where people, media, and technologies meet and interact.

When *Dear Photograph* (and *Collected Visions*) are displayed in variety of media formats – online, in exhibition, and as publications – those media influence one another and shape how the work is shared. Bolter and Grusin remind us that “no medium today... [does] its cultural work in isolation from other media” and “what is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (1999, p. 15). Each rephotographed and remediated vernacular photograph that is contributed to *Dear Photograph* is a refashioning of media and a refashioning of memory. The challenges and opportunities of new media extend to exhibition and communication as well. *Dear Photograph* was not developed as a critique or condemnation of museum and gallery practices related to exhibiting vernacular photographs. Creating a website to share his memory work made it possible for Jones to combine his interest and expertise in new media communication with his curiosity and concern for vernacular photographs. Through a series of reassocations and reassemblies, to borrow Latour’s language describing sociality (2005, p. 7), the node that is the *Dear Photograph* website is unique and cannot be replicated in a gallery space or in a book. A website, an exhibition, and a book are different actions. While the same actors or actants (people, media, and technologies) may participate in all three, the ways in which they mediate and serve as intermediaries among various elements constitute different spaces of exchange that make different meaning-making activities related to memory possible.
Chapter 7.

Microstories: Contributions to *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*

In this chapter, I look closely at contributions to *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* to analyze the types of exchanges that take place in the two online spaces. People who share remediated vernacular photographs in *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are participating in memory work practices that communicate and acknowledge ways of understanding and organizing the past in and for the present. The four key concepts discussed in chapter two – vernacular photography, remediation, mnemonic practices, and spaces of exchange – are present in the following discussion of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* as online spaces of exchange. The range and variety of images included in *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* highlight how photographs are used to document and commemorate events and experiences across the multiple registers of vernacularity. Vacation photographs, studio portraits, wedding pictures, images of new babies, photographs made at funerals, identification cards – these are just some of the kinds of images that have been remediated, digitized, or born digital and uploaded to the two websites. In the narratives and comments that accompany the photographs, people describe, reflect on, and imagine the circumstances facing those who are depicted in the images as they celebrate, memorialize, and commemorate the past in the present. Many of the photographs and narratives shared in *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are deeply affective. However, some of the contributions, particularly those included in the *Collected Visions* exhibitions, express a sense of improvisation and a playful defiance for the practice of selecting and remediating vernacular photographs to share with others. These types of contributions are a reminder that spaces of exchange where photographs provide opportunities to ‘see through’ particular images to remember and imagine the past are sites of possibility rather than certainty.
In this dissertation, I explored how different actors borrow from one another and from existing display practices to communicate memory through remediated vernacular photographs. The introduction of new media forms – whether it be tintypes in the mid-nineteenth century or digital photography in the late twentieth century – does not necessarily constitute a distinctive break with existing practices of documenting, organizing, and communicating memories. New media do not disrupt fixed practices of meaning-making. Meaning-making practices, like the networks that support them, are never fixed, but are constantly in the process of assembling in different formations. Actors in networks of meaning-making are dynamic. As actors shift, networks take on different shapes and actors influence one another in different ways. Actors contribute to spaces of exchange where layers of meaning and memory intersect “to be traced anew” according to the travels of those actors (Latour, 2005, p. 132). In the origin stories in chapters six and seven, I explored how two specific websites where vernacular photographs are remediated to communicate memory are spaces of exchange. Now, in chapter seven, I present microstories on individual contributions to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph that illustrate a) how people have used media and technologies as part of personal memory practices, and b) how those individual efforts at meaning-making are situated as part of communicative and exhibitionary platforms, which provide the possibility for spaces of exchange. In the case of Dear Photograph, in particular, social media interactions that take place via the website document exchanges among visitors in online spaces and provide insight into how these visitors describe experiences of ‘seeing through’ and imagining themselves in situations similar to those depicted in the rephotographed contributions. Examining individual contributions to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph allow for a consideration of what people are sharing in these two projects and how remediated vernacular photographs are used to recollect and creatively imagine the past.

The descriptive and analytical microstories that follow in this chapter relate my attempts to sift through layers of meaning and memory in the contributions to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. They are descriptions made possible through interactions that include calling up webpages on my personal computer, relying on Internet connections, and using software in order to keep notes on the different posts as I surveyed the contributions to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. One of the
challenges of reviewing webpages, as discussed in chapter six, is that online formats and structures can change dramatically. The content – the photographs and text of a particular post or webpage – may remain the same, but the presentation of the content or the way the content is accessed, through page structure, for example, may change. While it would be difficult to repeat the observational survey of contributions to *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* in the way that I conducted my examination (as *Dear Photograph* in particular has been significantly reformatted since I began my work), potential changes to *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* are a reminder that actors are constantly evolving. Tracing remediations of vernacular photographs across different devices on different occasions will lead to different conclusions. However, with the goal of examining the types of exchanges in order to reflect on how spaces of exchange are possibilities rather than certainties, the fact that other researchers may draw different conclusions from reviewing the same material stresses the notion of spaces of exchange as potential opportunities, not guarantees, of connection and engagement with vernacular photographs through imagination and memory.

*Collected Visions: Describing Moments of Resonance and Wonder*

As described in chapter five, contributions to the *Collected Visions* website are organized in a variety of ways including a searchable archive of contributed images, the CV Galleries that contain exhibitions of photo essays drawn from workshops conducted by Lorie Novak in the United States and in Mexico, submissions to the *Collected Visions* project via kiosks at installation exhibitions in Arizona and New York, and online submissions contributed to the *Collected Visions* website “Create Essay” tool where visitors select images from the archive of crowd-sourced vernacular photographs. The exhibitions and galleries were curated and uploaded over the course of nearly a decade in the late 1990s and the early 2000s by Novak and her colleagues. In the sections that follow in this chapter I analyze selected photo essays that appear in the CV Galleries. These analytical discussions reveal the kind of memory work that people share in the online spaces of *Collected Visions* and how these spaces might be considered spaces of exchange. In this chapter, I consider how particular contributions draw on and remediate existing media forms. I describe some of the submissions, how they communicate
memories and memorable moments, and then discuss how they reference different forms of media and communication.

**Refashioning and Reconsidering Media Forms**

When Bolter and Grusin discuss remediation, they note that “digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honor, rival and revise” existing media forms and formats (1999, p. 15). Online forms of exhibition and communication involving vernacular photographs do not simply replace existing media; rather, they often mimic, challenge, and/or enhance communicative forms that already exist. One of the exhibitions on the Collected Visions website, *Exhibition XII*, provides an opportunity to investigate the online format of *Collected Visions* that borrows from, builds on, and remakes different types of vernacular photographs. *Exhibition XII* includes contributions, “submitted during collection days at the International Center of Photography Midtown in New York City in conjunction with the Collected Visions computer-based installation” and those “submitted via the Web with [the] create essay tools” (Novak, “Welcome to Exhibition XII of the Collected Visions Gallery,” n.d.). The computer-based installation referred to here was *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak*, exhibited at the ICP in late 2000. The opening webpage of *Exhibition XII* organizes 24 submissions into two groups. In the first group, many of the submissions offer personal reflections on a range of vernacular photographs that includes family photographs, images from driver’s licenses, trading cards made for children’s baseball teams, grade school and family portraits, and pictures from photo booths. In the second group, photo essays, some with more personal reflections and some with more imagined musings, were selected from online visitors from Michigan, Ohio, Washington, Philadelphia, and New York.

The first submission in *Exhibition XII*, “2 Beautiful People Wanted A Child...,” attributed to Shirley Binin, presents three photographs: a child, the child with a woman, and the child with a man (Figure 29). A few lines of text accompany the photographs and relate the story of the “2 Beautiful People” who adopted their now 16-month-old daughter from China and are thrilled to share their excitement with family and friends. The desire
to document and share the experience of bringing home one’s first child is common. As Richard Chalfen (1987) notes, the first pictures of a baby (often associated with the birth of a child) are an important photographic marker in the “human topography of snapshot collections” (p. 75). Binin’s narrative that accompanies the photographs offers additional context for the photographs: the little girl does not at all look like the adults who embrace her and the information that the couple visited homes in China suggests that the girl may have been orphaned. Lacking ‘newborn’ photographs of their daughter, the photographs selected and shared in “2 Beautiful People Wanted A Child...” relate the story of how a couple became a family through the arrival of a long-hoped for child.

“2 Beautiful People Wanted A Child...” also calls to mind a birth announcement that might be printed in a newspaper to celebrate the arrival of a baby. Birth announcements have their own media and social conventions. Sociologist Anne McGuire, drawing on the work of social justice educator and scholar Tanya Titchkosky, notes

The newspaper birth announcement, like the obituary, announces something more than simply who happens to be born and to whom (Titchkosky, 2007). Weaving together cultural assumptions about the desirable body and the viable life, the birth announcement restricts who must be born. Birth announcements serve as acts of welcoming. Most commonly, we read: “It’s a girl!”, “It’s a boy!”, “healthy!”, “happy!” and so on.

(McGuire, 2010, para. 33)
McGuire addresses these conventions and assumptions to draw attention to who and what are left out of these types of public messages that are shared via popular media. “2 Beautiful People Wanted A Child...” pairs vernacular photographs with a narrative to situate an adopted child as ‘one of the family.’ While the story related in the photo essay follows a somewhat conventional framework of relating the details of a child’s arrival, the fact that Binin has shared this information via Collected Visions also provides insight into how digital media has expanded opportunities for people to document and communicate events and experiences worth remembering. Through the circulation of print media, newspapers where birth announcements may have been published, the desire to share memorable life moments, like the arrival of a child, publicly has not. Online spaces provide opportunities for people to use photographs (and text) to announce and share life milestones. Mnemonic markers like a birth announcement are now more apt to take the form of digital photographs that can be (re)presented across a variety of social media platforms. In the early 2000s, when Exhibition XII was taking shape, sharing photographs online was still very much a novelty. The types of photographs that people were willing to share in Collected Visions and how they shared them demonstrate an enthusiasm to experiment with the opportunities afforded by new media platforms to share important memories in ways that allow others to reflect, remember, and imagine.

One of the other media forms reconsidered and refashioned in Collected Visions photo essays is the family photo album. While many of the photo essays included in the exhibition and galleries feature one image and an accompanying story, there are some that include multiple images. Steve Hagensicker’s contributions in Gallery 15 and in Gallery 16 echo the longitudinal record a family photo album can provide. In Gallery 15, Hagensicker’s contribution, “When Little Girls Grow Up,” features 15 photographs of a young woman, from her infancy in the 1980s to adulthood in the early 2000s (Figure 30). Hagensicker identifies the young woman as his daughter, Shawna, and shares his story of Shawna’s life beginning her birth in 1982 when he notes that he and his wife first wondered, “Would we keep her?” he then offers a brief reflection on parenting and expresses pride at the person his daughter has become, noting that
Although parenting is a hard thing to do, you have to be solid in teaching your young ones right from wrong. This has to be done in a fair and firm way, but always with love and honesty. We must have done something right, because she has grown up into a most beautiful person, and I mean her heart and soul. Hagensicker concludes his written reflection by describing Shawna in the present – a high school graduate, taking courses for a career in health care, and a lover of German Shepherds. In this photo essay, the viewer is given an account of a young person from a proud parent’s perspective. Like the family photo album assembled by a mother or father, “When Little Girls Grow Up” offers a summary of young life in progress near the time when a young person begins to take on a larger responsibility for his or her own
narrative in the family albums by deciding which events and experiences are worth including and how photographs should be arranged (Chalfen 1987).

Hyperlinks within Hagensicker’s photo essay provide insight into curatorial decisions when assembling an online exhibition. Just as the physical space of a gallery exhibition can be creatively partitioned to lead visitors on a particular route through an exhibition, online exhibitions can also be organized to emphasize particular connections between the material on display. “When Little Girls Grow Up” includes a hyperlink at the bottom of the page titled “Read More About Shawna.” This leads to a page not included in the directory on the Exhibition 15 homepage. “Read More About Shawna” connects to a page called “More about Shawna,” a complementary photo essay to “When Little Girls Grow Up” authored by Hagensicker that includes seven additional photographs of Shawna and a poem by Susan Polis Schutz (Figure 31). Clicking on the hyperlinks at the bottom of the “More about Shawna” page leads the visitor to the next photo essay or back to the gallery directory. “More About Shawna” is adjacent to Exhibition 15, outside the gallery directory, but is still connected to the exhibition. To ensure that Hagensicker’s contributions are not overly represented in Exhibition 15 Jody Warden, Novak’s colleague who assisted with Collected Visions in 2001 when “Exhibition 15” was assembled and curated the contributions in the exhibition has used the affordances of digital media to include Hagensicker’s multiple contributions in such a way that they do not overwhelm the visitor or overwhelm the spaces taken up by other contributors.

Hagensicker has embraced the opportunity to share his story of his daughter through vernacular photography photo essays and in Exhibition 16 a new collection of vernacular photographs and a short description of Shawna’s life in 2001 and 2002 is included in the contribution titled “The Update on Shawna.” “The Update on Shawna” includes 11 images of Shawna and her groom, Jesse, on their wedding day. While Hagensicker’s other photo essays are compilations of vernacular photographs that illustrate his daughter’s young life, the images used in “The Update on Shawna” focus more on a particular moment in time. Like “When Little Girls Grow Up,” “The Update on Shawna” also features hyperlinks at the bottom of the page, one that leads to the next photo essay and one that leads to “a poem for Shawna” where three photographs of Shawna (showing her as a small child, as a teenager, and as a bride) appear beside a
poem called “My precious little girl.” Hagensicker’s contributions in Exhibition 15 and Exhibition 16 show how one individual has taken advantage of the opportunities available through Collected Visions to develop his own method of memory work that makes use of remediated vernacular photographs – digitized family photos – to share
important memories and events with others. Echoing the carefully assembled family album as well as the scrapbook that may include clippings of popular texts, like poetry, for example, Hagensicker’s contributions draw on earlier and existing ways of displaying vernacular photographs and using them to share his memories with others.

In the list of occasions and experiences that Richard Chalfen describes as common for the American family’s photography album, specific moments and events in one’s life worth documenting with a camera steadily decline after marriage – there may be children who come to dominate family albums, but personal photographs featuring adults tend to be fewer and farther between (1987, p. 75). Hagensicker’s contributions cease to appear after Exhibition 16 and the ongoing story of Shawna is left to be imagined by the visitor based on the memories shared in the photo essays. In Collected Visions, the visitor can review the different photo essays featuring Shawna by selecting hyperlinks. In this way, the visitor can choose amongst Hagensicker’s photo essays one after another with successive clicks of a button or the visitor can move through the galleries as organized by Novak (or one of her curatorial colleagues) so that Hagensicker’s contributions are one amongst many. Choosing one’s own route through the vernacular photographs and associated stories creates multiple opportunities for interpretations and multiple entries points for engaging with and reflecting on the material that is shared through Collected Visions.

The photo essay that follows “The Update on Shawna” in Exhibition 16 is a contribution by an individual named Roger and features a picture of Shawna and her husband in the moments after sharing their first piece of cake as a married couple. While neither Shawna nor Jesse are identified by name in this photograph, they are immediately familiar for the viewer who views Roger’s contribution, “Picture Perfect – Isn’t it?” following “The Update on Shawna.” Unlike Hagensicker who describes his relationship to the people pictured in the photographs, it is not clear if Roger has a relationship with Shawna or Jesse. The story that Roger includes with the photograph in “Picture Perfect – Isn’t it?” (Figure 32) relates how the young couple have known one another for several years and poses the question, “Doesn’t looking at this make you wish you were older and married?” However, Roger’s question is far from straightforward – is
Love is great - don't you think? These two have been together with an 8 year commitment. They started as childhood sweethearts. They grew into teenage lovers and then finally after all the years got married. Doesn't looking at this make you wish you were older and married? Let's hope that these two have the best years to come.

submitted by
Roger
Canada

Figure 32. Roger, “Picture Perfect - Isn't It?,” ca. early 2000s, photo essay. Collected Visions, accessed 10 March 2016

the question addressed to the Collected Visions visitor? Or is it addressed to the young couple in the photograph who are invited to imagine their future? While it is uncertain who is expected to reflect on this question, the sentence that closes the written contribution, “Let’s hope that these two have the best years to come,” optimistically (or perhaps cynically) anticipates what could happen in the future.

Different meanings can be inferred from “Picture Perfect – Isn't it?” and the photo essay that Roger contributes offers a variety of opportunities for reflecting on the Shawna and Jesse’s particular wedding day, and, more generally, the marriage of a young couple and the possibilities that may lie ahead of them. Interpreting the content of Roger’s contribution focuses on the immediacy of the digital image and text that brings the experience of a wedding day to the viewer – if the viewer is busy imagining the future of this young couple, it is unlikely that the viewer is simultaneously considering the
software and hardware affordances that make it possible for the photograph of Shawna and Jesse to appear on a personal computer. Shifting to focus on the hypermediacy of “Picture Perfect – Isn’t it?” turns our attention to how this contribution, like many others created with images drawn from the Collected Visions archive is the result of an “interplay of forms that have been detached from their original context and then recombined” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 39). Beginning with the Collected Visions “Create Essay” tool, we can attempt to trace the potential steps involved in creating “Picture Perfect – Isn’t it?” in order to identify some of the diverse actors involved. Different combinations of search queries entered on the “Search Collected Visions Archive” webpage will return the photograph of Shawna and Jesse seen in Figure 32. Clicking “couple,” “wedding,” and/or “Early 2000s” leads to a result page that includes the image of Shawna and Jesse. It is also possible to conduct a search for photographs using the name of the person who donated the images, thus, “Hagensicker” as a search term will also return the image of Shawna and Jesse. There are a variety of paths that could lead to the particular photograph used in Figure 31.

The search results page offers opportunities for a visitor to take a closer look at images. Clicking on one of the thumbnails returned in the search results opens a pop-up window featuring a larger version of a photograph and a caption that includes information provided by the donor of the image, which often notes the approximate date when the picture was made and where it was made. For Collected Visions contributors like Roger and others, using the “Create Essay” tool is akin to working with an interface [that] is automatic in the sense that it consists of layers of programming that are executed with each click of the mouse. Its interface is interactive in the sense that these layers of programming always return control to the user, who then initiates another automated action. Although the programmer is not visible in the interface, the user as a subject is constantly present, clicking on buttons, choosing menu items, and dragging icons and windows.

(Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 33)

While Bolter and Grusin’s discussion of ‘control’ in the above quote emphasizes the software or website user’s agency, it is an agency that is influenced by a number of different actors, including but not limited to the computer hardware used to access the
software or website and the programmer who selected or contributed to the development of different features of the interface. The photo essays on display in the *Collected Visions* online galleries are each a complex “node” or “knot” of action that is the result of a “vast array of entities” that come together at a particular moment in time (Latour, 2005, p. 44, 46). Contributors to *Collected Visions* consciously and unconsciously draw on existing practices of using vernacular photographs to share memories with others. In both Hagensicker’s and Roger’s contributions, there is an oscillation between memory and imagination as the selected vernacular photographs lead to narrative reflections on what was, what is, and what might yet be. Creating a photo essay, whether through uploading one’s personal photographs (as is the case of Hagensicker and his photo essays about his daughter Shawna) or identifying a particular image, or set of images, that may resonate with an individual for any number of reasons (as is the case with Roger’s contribution) shows how *Collected Visions* can operate as a space of exchange where memory work occurs. Creating a photo essay both constrains and enables users to chart their own journeys through media and memory.

**Memory Triggers**

Some of the photo essays displayed in the *Collected Visions* galleries include accompanying stories that relate how a particular photograph, or set of photographs, in the *Collected Visions* archive prompted the recollection of a personal memory. Contributors need not necessarily have a personal connection to or knowledge of the photograph that triggers memory. A vernacular photograph that prompts the recollection of powerful memories, even if there is no previous relationship between the viewer and the photograph, makes possible the “seeing through” that Martha Langford describes as memory teaming up with imagination (2007, p. 102). By describing how they have ‘seen through’ particular vernacular photographs, contributors to *Collected Visions* provide insight into how others may similarly interpret and see through the photographs. Sharing their stories of resonance and wonder through photo essays, contributors reveal how vernacular photographs are valuable ways of organizing memories and how vernacular photographs can be used to situate events and experiences of the past in relation to the present.
An example of this is Laura’s contribution, “my red shoes,” on display in *Exhibition XIII* (see Figure 33). The photograph in the photo essay shows two children

**my red shoes**

![Photograph of two children, one wearing red shoes, facing the camera as a woman looks on.](image)

i actually have an older sister, not brother, but these pictures remind me of looking through my own photo albums. often times these photos are the only windows looking into my childhood. i don't remember anything before i was four years old, when it was just me and my sister and my little brother wasn't born yet. but one of the most vivid early memories i have is when i went to the store with my mom to buy shiny red shoes. i don't know how old i was, but i remember that i wore the shoes all the way home after we bought them. i wish that i had a picture of me wearing those shoes. i'm glad that my family took a lot of pictures of me when i was little, because most of my memories were not as vivid as my red shoes. these pictures help me recreate memories of the innocent simple life as a child.

submitted by
Laura, age 18
West Bloomfield, Michigan USA

**Figure 33.** Laura, “my red shoes,” ca. early 2000s, photo essay. *Collected Visions*, accessed 14 March 2016

facing the camera as a woman looks on. In the narrative that accompanies the photograph, Laura writes that “these pictures remind me of looking through my photo albums,” and even though her own experience does not match up entirely with the picture she finds in the *Collected Visions* archive (Laura has “an older sister, not [an older] brother”), the photograph prompts the recollection of a personal memory. Laura’s
narrative in the “my red shoes” photo essay describes the process of seeing through that allows a person to “traverse time and space,” connecting a photograph that captures a moment that may be entirely foreign to the viewer who, through reflective remembering and imagination is able to recall or envision other times and other places and use them to make meaning in the present (Langford, 2007, p. 103).

In Laura’s description, memory and imagination meet up, as do resonance and wonder. The red shoes in the above photograph captured Laura’s interest, “convey[ing] an arresting sense of uniqueness” and “evok[ing] an exalted attention” (Greenblatt, 1991, p. 42). While the narrative that accompanies the photograph begins by describing that sense of wonder and connection between the red shoes worn by the girl in the photograph and the red shoes associated with one of her earliest memories, as Laura continues, she engages in multiple layers of reflection that connect her present with her past. Rather than focusing just on the red shoes, Laura considers the role that photographs have played in her own remembering – helping her to “recreate memories of the innocent simple life as a child.” When Stephen Greenblatt discusses the role of resonance and wonder in museum exhibitions, he comments that “resonance, like nostalgia, is impure, a hybrid forged in the barely acknowledged gaps, the caesurae, between words” that are used to categorize objects on display (1991, p. 48). Some of these words include terms like ‘personal,’ ‘traditional,’ ‘historical,’ or ‘modern’ that encourage the viewer to consider particular relationships between the past and the present and the viewer’s own relationship to exhibited material (Greenblatt, 1991, p. 45).

In “my red shoes,” Laura both describes her wonder at finding a child in red shoes and offers a resonant reflection on how she has used vernacular photographs, in this case family photographs, to reimagine what her life was like as a child. Laura’s contribution to Collected Visions shows that vernacular photographs can be deeply meaningful, even if a viewer has no knowledge or connection to the people or event depicted in the image. The red shoes in the photograph included in “my red shoes” do not necessarily ‘stand in’ for the shoes that Laura had as a child. Instead, the red shoes shown in the photograph are an entry point into an online space of exchange where Laura has an opportunity to engage in memory work and to share that work with others.
Another example of how a contributor to *Collected Visions* has ‘seen through’ is a photograph, made in Maine, selected from the *Collected Visions* archive, and used as the basis of a photo essay set in Nova Scotia, is the contribution developed by Rhiannon, “Grandma’s visit to Nova Scotia” (Figure 34). In the photograph included in

![Grandma's visit to Nova Scotia](image)

*Grandma’s visit to Nova Scotia*

Grandma had just met Shorty. She wanted to introduce him to all the kids so they visited my mom and all of us one summer in Nova Scotia. We took Grandma and Shorty to Peggy’s Cove, or near there, at a place we liked to hike. Grandma insisted on bringing a picnic lunch and I was so glad. Shorty died before he met the others in the family. I liked him, but I hardly remember what he was like. I only remember how happy grandma was.

submitted by Rhiannon
Vermont USA

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**Figure 34.** Rhiannon, “Grandma’s visit to Nova Scotia,” ca. early 2000s, photo essay. *Collected Visions*, 6 April 2016

the photo essay, a couple sits on a rocky outcrop smiling for the camera while they pause from what appears to be a picnic. Clicking the photograph opens a pop-up window that notes the photograph was made in Maine, United States of America in the early 1990s. Rhiannon’s narrative tells a different story. In her photo essay, Rhiannon describes how her grandmother brought her friend Shorty to visit Rhiannon and her family in Nova Scotia, Canada one summer. Writing about that visit, Rhiannon recalls a hike that she took with her grandmother and Shorty and, with fondness, the picnic lunch that her grandmother brought along. Like the red shoes in the photograph that Laura selected, the picnic – the picnic cooler, the brown paper bag, and the bottled drink – in the photograph Rhiannon selected, is an entry point into a memory that can be reimagined.
Rhiannon’s narrative also describes how her grandmother’s acquaintance with Shorty did not last very long, she writes, “Shorty died before he met the others in the family. I liked him, but I hardly remember what he was like. I only remember how happy grandma was.” It may have been the picture of a couple with a picnic on that rocky landscape familiar to Nova Scotia that caused Rhiannon to ‘stop in her tracks’ in wonder at a particular photograph (Greenblatt, 1991, p. 42). Resonance can follow this moment of wonder when a “series of implied, only half visible relationships and questions” begin to take shape for the viewer. Rhiannon’s comment that she can “hardly remember what [Shorty] was like,” perhaps reveals the types of questions that formed in her mind, questions like, “how long were Grandma and Shorty together? Are there any pictures of them from the Nova Scotia trip? Where did we go hiking – was it Peggy’s Cove or somewhere nearby?” The sentence that closes Rhiannon’s narrative, “I only remember how happy grandma was,” speaks to the opacity and fallibility of memory. The clarity of the picnic lunch as an entry point into Rhiannon’s memory leads to a reflection on what elements of an event or an experience may actually be translated, transported, and/or transformed when memory is mediated. Who Shorty was and what he was like is information that Rhiannon is not able to access through the vernacular photograph she selects from the Collected Visions archive, nor is that information easily recalled from her own memories. However, Rhiannon’s memory of her grandmother and Shorty’s trip to Nova Scotia is not impoverished by this uncertainty. What is present for Rhiannon during the creation of her photo essay is the memory of her grandmother’s happiness. Using a vernacular photograph that she has no personal knowledge of or connection to – a photograph that has travelled far from its creation in Maine in the late 1990s, has been digitally remediated as part of its inclusion in the Collected Visions archive, and creatively reframed in a photo essay – Rhiannon contributes to Collected Visions as a space of exchange by sharing her own memories (partial and imperfect as they may be) with others.

Recall that Nancy Van House, in her discussion of memory, digital photography, and ANT, stresses the fact that photographs can and do “‘take the relay’ of action and relationships across space and time” and that meanings associated with photographs change as photographs come into contact with different viewers and different contexts (2011, p. 133). Memories too, like photographs, are part of complex relationships where
meaning is “produce[d] and reshuffle[d]” according to a variety of interactions between “objects, subjects, human beings, machines, animals, ‘nature,’ ideas, organizations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements” (Law, 2009, p. 141). With an approach informed by ANT, the focus is not on predicting outcomes and grouping types according to pre-existing categories. Van House’s and John Law’s discussions of ANT here emphasize the notion of a movement in progress – ‘taking the relay,’ ‘producing,’ and ‘reshuffling.’ Examining contributions to *Collected Visions* while keeping ANT approaches in mind, the veracity of the stories included in the photo essays is never a key concern. Ultimately, it does not really matter if Laura had a pair of red shoes as a little girl or if Shorty ever visited Nova Scotia. Laura and Rhiannon have selected vernacular photographs from the *Collected Visions* archive and developed stories about a past, possibly an imagined past, in and for the present. Despite having no professed knowledge of the people or situations depicted in the photographs they selected, Laura and Rhiannon were able to ‘see through’ the photographs in the online space, “effectively re[making]” the images so that “imagination furnishes the characters, the setting, and the plot” (Langford, 2007, p. 145). The online space fosters this “purposive imagining” (Langford, 2007, p. 105) that emerges from the meeting of different actors – people, media, and technologies – that are able to interact as mediators that “transform, translate, distort, and modify meaning[s]” (Latour, 2005, p. 39).

**Other People’s Photographs, Other People’s Memories**

Laura’s and Rhiannon’s photo essays provide insight into how other’s people’s vernacular photographs can be used to (re)imagine personal pasts, in the present. In *Exhibition XI* an untitled photo essay from a contributor named Caroline relates how other people’s photographs may be used to (re)imagine personal pasts in a different way. Caroline’s photo essay (Figure 35) includes six photographs, four black and white images and two colour images. In the story she offers, Caroline relates how she grew up in Switzerland but moved to Israel as an adult. Returning to visit her parents in Switzerland, Caroline describes how she found family photo albums put out on the street to be recycled. She notes, “I immediately felt a connection to them and went to look for
Mrs. Huerlimann, according to Caroline, “was pleased to have me adopt her very Swiss memories.” Unlike Laura’s and Rhiannon’s photo essays where a particular object or a particular moment (the red shoes, the picnic) shown in a photograph offered an entry point into remembering and imagining, the entry point that Caroline describes here has little to do with any specific element in one of the images. Here, the collection of memories that accompanies Caroline’s photo essay reveals the imbrication of memory and identity. Caroline writes:

I was born and grew up in Switzerland. Three years ago I left Switzerland and immigrated to Israel. While visiting my parents in summer 1998 I found a couple of old family albums thrown away in the streets to be recycled with the old newspapers. I immediately felt a connection to them and went to look for the photographer. I found her in an old people’s home. Her name was Mrs. Huerlimann. She was pleased to have me adopt her very Swiss memories. According to her, she had no one that was interested in her life. Mrs. Huerlimann died shortly after our meeting. Growing up in Switzerland I had a lot of friends who had this kind of family-albums at home. Mine looked different. A lot had

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93 The text that accompanies Caroline’s photo essay reveals the imbrication of memory and identity. Caroline writes:
photographs is an entry point, not because they prompt the recognition of similar collections or similar images in Caroline’s own past, but because they are the types of images that Caroline seemed to long for at one point in her life. Mrs. Huerlimann’s photographs provide space for Caroline to reflect on how her own personal and family memories have been (re)mediated through photography and how this process has been hindered by missing pieces. Caroline writes that her “family-albums at home,” looked far different than the albums of her Swiss friends and the albums she found in the street, owing to the losses of “the second world war [sic], while [her] grandparents where [sic] busy running away.” The unmentioned inference made in this photo essay with Caroline’s reference to the Second World War and her decision to move to Israel, the place from which she submitted her photo essay, is that Caroline’s family were survivors of the Holocaust.

Scholars have taken up the subject of photography and the Holocaust in a variety of important, critical, and creative ways. In Susan Sontag’s writing (1977), she describes how viewing photographs of the Bergen-Belsen and Dachau concentration camps elicited a rending that she never recovered from, “When I looked at those photographs,” she writes, “something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying” (p. 20). While ‘seeing through’ may be possible with the types of photographs that Sontag describes, Alison Landsberg’s (2004) discussion of prosthetic memory more directly addresses how memories of the Holocaust may be mediated when she explores how objects and photographs are displayed at the American Holocaust Museum. Prosthetic memories are “not natural, nor the product of lived experience […] but are derived from engagement with a mediated representation” (2004, p. 20). Mediated representations, Landsberg argues, can make it possible “To experience – if only for a flash – the way it feels to have one’s personhood or agency stripped away” (2004, p. 137). Even though a person may have no personal knowledge of or connection to the Holocaust, it is still possible for that person to make deeply

been lost in the second world war, while my grandparents were busy running away. After leaving Switzerland I finally got the family album that goes with being Swiss. Today I don’t consider myself Swiss anymore. I’m Israeli. But I have a swiss past, I even have the albums to prove it. [sic]
affective and resonant meanings from engaging with photographs related to the event and its aftermaths. Marianne Hirsch, a close colleague of Novak, suggests that the trauma suffered in the Holocaust touches the descendants of survivors who were born, in some cases, long after the event. Hirsch contends that “postmemory” is a way that memory is “mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” that “characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (1997, p. 22).

In Caroline’s contribution, the inferences to the Holocaust are ‘gaps,’ almost pauses, in her story: when she was growing up, her family photo albums looked very different from those of her peers, photographs and memories were lost during the Second World War. Because these gaps are not explicit in their reference to the Holocaust, they do not necessarily prompt an immediately arresting or wondrous reaction. When one spends time with Caroline’s photo essay, looking more closely at the photographs, and taking the time to read the accompanying story, questions begin to emerge: what does Caroline’s family album look like? Where did her grandparents start their flight? How and why did they journey to Switzerland? Viewing Caroline’s photo essay, one may be prompted to reflect on one’s own family albums, the omissions and silences in those albums, and how they came to be. The format of the Collected Visions photo essay provided Caroline with an opportunity to tell her story of memory and imagination at a particular point in time during the late 1990s. Caroline’s photo essay relates how she has used the Huerlimann photographs to create a relationship to an imagined past, but at the time of her contribution that imagined past does not seems as important to her as it once might have when she comments “After leaving Switzerland I finally got the family album that goes with being Swiss. Today I don’t consider myself Swiss anymore. I’m Israeli. But I have a swiss [sic] past, I even have the albums to prove [sic] it.” Caroline’s reflection here points to malleability of memory and its important role in how individuals (as well as groups) construct and reinforce notions of identity by calling on different types of media. Digitizing some of the photographs in the Huerlimann album allowed Caroline an opportunity to review what was, and possibly remains, an important collection of photographs that helped her make sense of her past.
In sharing her story through *Collected Visions*, she has engaged in memory work and offers the result of this work to be displayed in an online exhibition. In this online space of exchange multiple pasts (Caroline’s past, her family’s past, and the Huerlimann’s past) are present.

**Intervening in Memory: Remediation and Creative Repurposing of the Past**

Some of the photo essays contributed to *Collected Visions* contributions feature photographs that have been physically or digitally altered. At least one submission includes rephotography. These photo essays offer insight into how *Collected Visions* as an online exhibition provides opportunities to reflect on and redefine spaces of communication and exchange. In some of the photo essays discussed below, contributors offer varying degrees of context for the memory work they do. “Spirit Generation,” contributed by ICP curator Edward Earle during the *Collected Visions: An Installation by Lorie Novak* exhibition in 2000, includes four seemingly incongruous photographs selected from the *Collected Visions* archive (Figure 36). Clockwise from top left, the photo essay features a black and white photograph of a little girl that includes difficult to decipher handwriting at the top of the image; a hand-painted photograph of a man in a suit; a composite photograph of children in Halloween costumes where one image overlays another – clicking this image reveals a pop up that includes the statement “Two snapshots were combined so everyone looked good,” and finally; a photograph of a sink that acts as a backdrop for a projection of a woman and a child in a bath. Each of the photographs selected for this photo essay are altered images in one way or another. “Reworked photograph(s),” Bolter and Grusin suggest, have a complex relationship with the past and can be considered ‘second order’ images that “comment on a photograph or on photography itself” (1999, p. 111). In the photographs that Earle has included in his photo essay, the images capture a particular moments in time, but show the traces of media interventions to draw attention to certain aspects of the photograph and to deemphasize others.

In the photograph of the little girl, top left, while some of the writing is hard to make out, part of the phrase appears to read “used to be me… imagine.” Clicking the

photograph reveals the information included when the photograph was submitted to the Collected Visions archive: this image was made before 1920 in New York. The photograph of the man in a suit comes from Texas and was made in the early 1930s and looks to be a black and white image that was hand-coloured. At bottom right in the photograph of children dressed for Halloween, the seam where two photographs have been carefully spliced together to create single image cuts through the door frame and the child carried in the young woman's arms, not distractingly so, but still noticeably. Bottom left, the projected image of mother and child stretches and bends as it ripples across the water filling the sink. My experience of using the features of a web browser to enlarge the photographs in hopes of discerning greater detail about the photographs
emphasizes the hypermediacy of this particular type exhibition space, highlighting its mediated nature. Clicking an image to open a pop-up window can make a photograph bigger, but it also pixelates it and obscures details. Instead of being able to draw closer to the photograph and share a sense of immediacy with it, the media and technology that make it possible to view *Collected Visions* photo essays on personal computers reveal their limits of representation; they do not offer a window to the ‘real,’ but they do make it possible for different types of media – in this case vernacular photographs and personal stories – to come together in novel ways and tell a story with the found mementoes of others. Separating Earle’s photo essay, “Spirit Generation,” into its component parts (the individual vernacular photographs) and searching for greater insight in the individual images can distract from the photo essay as a whole and the reflection on memory that Earle offers by juxtaposing these four photographs.

In the narrative that accompanies the four photographs in “Spirit Generation,” Earle writes, “The generation of the spirit, a spirit within, can be felt within the assemblage of history. The woman, once a girl, then a grandmother, then a mere memory conjured from the album while viewed by a new generation.” Brought together, these four seemingly disparate photographs encourage the viewer to think about the relationships between images and how different assemblages of media can suggest a series of ongoing connections between the past, the present, and the future. Earle’s title, “Spirit Generation,” also calls to mind the how photographs might have an auratic power despite their reproducibility. Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” engages with issues of authenticity, art, tradition, and technology. Aura, Benjamin notes, is the accumulated and accumulating value of a unique object linked to “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be… [and] the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence” (1936/2006, p. 20). If an object, image, or artwork is reproducible, it can be uncoupled from the singularity of aura so that the value of a particular object, like a photograph, does not lie in its unique history, but in how it is situated in relation to other images, other perspectives, and multiple interpretations. Earle’s “Spirit Generation” is a type of memory work that may leave a viewer with more questions than answers. “Spirit Generation” does not reveal information, recalled or imagined, about the people or the events depicted in the photographs. Earle’s accompanying text, however, prompts the
viewer to consider how these photographs, and others like them, have been part of ongoing stories and lived experiences and will continue to be part of stories and lived experiences as they move between different media formats (the physical photography album and the online exhibition).

Antonio Prieto’s untitled photo essay in Gallery 16 offers a different reflection on media formats, memory, and vernacular photography in a composite image he created to insert himself into a family portrait made in 1917 (Figure 37). At first glance, the photograph appears to be an early twentieth-century family portrait made at a photography studio. More than a dozen people have gathered here. Looking more closely at the middle of the photograph, a man stands out, as he seems to be wearing a more contemporary jacket, perhaps a windbreaker, in contrast to the suits and high-collared shirts of the other men in the photograph. In the text that accompanies the photo essay, Prieto first describes how the formal family portrait may not necessarily reflect the realities of life in revolutionary Mexico in 1917. In the second paragraph, Prieto states that he has literally put himself in this picture, using technology to “insert [himself] in the middle of this imprint of the past” behind his namesake, Antonio Prieto Trillo. Reflecting on this memory work that has allowed him to remediate a historical family photograph and step into the scene, Prieto describes how working with media and technology to create this image is like taking part in a “Spectral and mimical [sic] game, time machine that allows [him] to dialog with [his] ancestors before violence and exile marked their lives forever.” From Prieto’s position in the present, he knows what will happen to his family members who have gathered at the photographer’s studio to record this moment. Viewing his family portrait, Prieto “fills in what the picture leaves out,” and is able to recall and imagine what his ancestors will face (Hirsch, 1997, p. 21).

Prieto engages with and reflects on his family portrait in an imaginative and creative way – two elements, imagination and creativity, that Hirsch names as critical mediating factors in postmemory. Imagination and creativity certainly shape memories and the expression of memory, but they are not nebulous forces or inherent qualities associated with particular photographs or specific individuals. Imagination and memory can and do team up if given enough time (Langford, 2007, p. 102) and this is made
1917 year of utmost importance during the Mexican Revolution. My grandfather, second from the left, plays chess with his brother, taking a break from fighting with the zapatistas and his militancy with Alvaro Obregon. This scene may very well could have been set up by Stravinski for a Chekhovian drama, and here the Prieto family poses with the attitude of the middle class the comfortably acclimates politically in the midst of the revolution that fiercely resounds elsewhere.

With the aid of technology, I insert myself in the middle of this imprint of the past, towards the right and behind my retranslate, resting my arm, with an attitude of formal intimacy, in his chair. My face is directed towards the strange luminosity that bathes the scene, making a performance of genealogical mimetism. This imaginary encounter with my retranslate, bearer of my name (Antonio Prieto Trillo), and the rest of this ancestral phantasmagoric family produces in me mixed feelings. Who is really a ghost and who is really living? Spectral and mimical game, time machine that allows me to dialog with my ancestors before violence and exile marked their lives forever. I am son of immigration, of exile, of violence, but I am also son of dignity and the resistance of these people whom I live with in this imprint of re-invented memory.

Figure 37. Antonio Prieto, Untitled, ca. early 2000s, photo essay. Collected Visions, accessed 30 May 2016

possible through the people, media, and technologies that comprise a networked web of actors. From the glass-plate negative in a Mexican portrait studio, to the twenty-first century media tools that allowed Prieto to insert himself into the image, to the digital photo essay on the Collected Visions website, a wide variety of mediators influenced the actions that made it possible for a 1917 family portrait to journey from its production as a print in a darkroom to its place as a digital image in an online gallery. In its current role as part of a photo essay in Collected Visions the ability for Prieto’s remediated family
portrait to exist across multiple times and spaces is exponentially expanded. The double logic of remediation that Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe is very much at work here. The tools and technologies that make it possible for Prieto to put himself in the picture are not necessarily the first actors that come to mind when viewing the image, but when one spends time examining the photograph and the photo essay, the traces of mediation and media interventions become more and more apparent. While digital imagining has made it relatively easy for him to stand amongst his ancestors, Prieto acknowledges that this work is one of imagination informed by recollection – an “imprint of re-invented memory” – where past and present coexist through the work of mediating actors.

*Collected Visions* photo essays are memory work. Submissions to the website also allow contributors to reflect on the process of memory work. While Prieto says very little about the process of creating the composite digital image, the untitled contribution from Shelia McLaughlin in *Exhibition XI* includes a brief description of how McLaughlin made the photographs used in Figure 38. McLaughlin relates how she projected family photographs in different spaces and onto her own body to create new images. She also describes “experiencing fear when [she] composed and exposed the film,” recalling the creation of these photographs as a powerful affective experience while mentioning the different steps of setting up the scenes and capturing the images with a camera. McLaughlin reveals little about the people in the projected images, noting only that they are immediate family members, many of whom have died. McLaughlin’s photo essay is one of three in *Exhibition XI* that were created in a workshop Novak led at a 1999 San Francisco Camerawork workshop called “Creating Cultural Memory on the Web” (Novak, “Welcome to Exhibition XI of the Collected Visions Gallery,” n.d). Remediating them for online display by digitizing her photographs, McLaughlin, revisits the memory work that she did in 1984-85 with new media tools and technologies. However, McLaughlin does not disclose the processes involved in remediating the photographs from print to digital images. Some of the ‘traces’ of these processes are more visible than others if the viewer takes the time to consider how McLaughlin’s photographs have come to be exhibited online; McLaughlin points out that her images were first made as film exposures and therefore there have been many mediators between these initial productions and McLaughlin’s online photo essay.
Some of the processes that led to McLaughlin’s photo essay in *Exhibition XI* are visible on different pages of the *Collected Visions*. In her photo essay, McLaughlin relates that she composed the projected scenes and captured the remediated vernacular photographs on film in 1984-85. Fifteen years later, the prints were revisited in the 1999 workshop facilitated by Novak, and then were remediated again, becoming digital files and included in a *Collected Visions* exhibition and in the *Collected Visions* archive. As part of the *Collected Visions* archives, McLaughlin’s images can be selected and used in other visitor’s photo essays, for example Edward Earle’s “Spirit Generation” described above, where the projected image of the mother and child is included with three other photographs submitted by different contributors. The same photograph being included in different photo essays in *Collected Visions* exhibitions is not necessarily unusual. Contributors who make photo essays may or may not be aware that others have used the photographs that they have contributed or selected for their photo essays.
Contributors and visitors to Collected Visions each bring different perspectives to their use and viewing of the website. When Annette Kuhn describes photographic memory work, like the work Collected Visions photo essayists, she notes that what is recalled can be considered “material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 186). Kuhn’s description here seems to suggest that closer and closer inspection of material developed during memory work, can reveal new meanings. In Collected Visions, rather than interrogating or mining images – the material contributed to and used in photo essays provides opportunities to build on the photographs and cultivate moments of memory and imagination. Earle’s use of McLaughlin’s image does not detract from or misconstrue the memory work that McLaughlin contributes in her own photo essay. Instead, it demonstrates how the same image can be (re)purposed in different media and different contexts. The same photograph can inspire different types of memory work where memory and imagination meet. However, the outcomes and types of exchanges between people and between media are never assured, only possibilities. McLaughlin’s photograph being used in two photo essays helps to convey the sense that the photographs exhibited in Collected Visions encourage reflective considerations of the past – looking back – as well as creative reinterpretations of existing photographs with online tools – looking forward.

Earle’s “Spirit Generation,” Prieto’s photo essay, and McLaughlin’s photo essay show some of the possibilities for creative interventions in Collected Visions photo essays. Photographs in the contributions from Prieto and Earle include composite photographs made digitally, in Prieto’s case, and physically cutting prints, in the images selected by Earle. These photo essays include photographs that have been remediated before being submitted to Collected Visions. McLaughlin’s photographs too are remediated and are composites in their own way. Multiple layers of remediation, from the projected images used to create the film exposures, to their digitization for inclusion in Collected Visions, are visible in McLaughlin’s photo essay. Contributors to Collected Visions can submit and choose photographs that are have already been remediated and they can choose to (re)purpose them in creative ways. In the three photo essays discussed in this section, the photographs selected by the contributors emphasize the way that Collected Visions photo essays make it possible to detach photographs from
their original contexts, recombine them in new ways, and share the result of their memory work with others.

Imperfection and Play: Novelty and Unexpected Actions

Contributors to Collected Visions reflect on and describe a wide range of memories and experiences that cross the multiple registers of vernacularity and reference repeated daily events, specific recollected or imagined occasions, and everything in between. While the tools and options available to people who chose to make and submit photo essays to Collected Visions do help to shape these creative contributions, the ‘imperfections’ – for example, faded photographs or images that show signs of wear and spelling and grammatical errors in the short stories that accompany selected photographs – are reminders that memory work often allows for blemishes and flaws to be incorporated into contemporary understandings of the past in a variety of ways. In previously discussed photo essays in the sections above, the spelling and grammatical errors have been reproduced in this dissertation as they appear in the online exhibitions. The photo essay tool of Collected Visions does not include a spell check function. These errors are minor distractions (if they are noticed at all) that do not necessarily obscure the meaning that a person may want to communicate when sharing his or her memories. When asked if there were particular photo essays that were not included in Collected Visions online exhibitions, Novak replied that there two types of submissions that she has not shared: photo essays “that make fun of the [selected] photograph[s]” and incomplete, “half finished” photo essays (personal communication, June 19, 2013). Novak went on to state, “if [the photo essays are] boring, I put them up, because that's part of what the project is, it's just this kind of multitude” (personal communication June 19, 2013). Novak’s commitment to including virtually all of the photo essays submitted includes space for those contributions that might, at first glance, only have been contributed in jest. Regardless of the contributor’s motivation for sharing a particular photo essay, the submissions discussed in this section provide insight into the playfulness and potential subversion that may be present in memory work.

In “Gallery 18, the photo essay, “A Korean Controversy” submitted by a contributor named Molly actually has very little to say about the black and white portrait
of a Korean child in traditional costume (Figure 39). Clicking the photograph opens the

![A Korean Controversy](image)

I chose this picture because I thought this chubby Korean girl was really cute. I was going to make up a memory about when I was a little Korean girl, but my computer teacher said we couldn't make up a memory. Apparently, me being a little middle eastern girl who got captured by Arabian Horse traders wasn't good enough to be a memory. Well, I went back to the picture archives and I clicked every box in hopes of finding a picture worthy of my memories. Unfortunately my memory is so bad, my entire life consists of about 10 different events. So, obviously I was unable to come up with a sufficient picture. So, I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I decided to write about a memory in the making. Years from now, I will look back on my grade 9 computer class, and probably wont remember this at all. But that is besides the point. I am making a memory. I typed that last phrase just a second ago. I remember that, it is in my memory. And because it is in my memory, be it short term or long term, I can write about it!!! No one can stop me from writing about a chubby Korean girl! Because she is in my memory! You just try to stop me! You cant! Because I have a memory of her! Yes! I may have made it up, but who cares. I'm finished! So there!

submitted by
Molly
Age 14
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Figure 39.   Molly, “A Korean Controversy,” ca. early 2000s, photo essay.  
Collected Visions, accessed 26 April 2016

image in a new window and includes information about when (the early 1970s) and where the photograph was originally made (Korea). As Molly begins to reflect on the picture she has selected for her photo essay, she reveals her frustration with the process and the circumstances that she finds herself in while searching for a suitable photograph to reflect on: “I was going to make up a memory about when I was a little Korean girl, but my computer teacher said we couldn’t make up a memory.” Molly’s photo essay here is
one of several in Gallery 18 submitted by contributors who identify themselves as being from Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Gallery 18 also includes a number of submissions, from Calgary and beyond, where teenage contributors have indicated their ages. It is not difficult to imagine Molly, a fourteen-year-old annoyed by a school assignment, clicking through the “Create Essay” tool of Collected Visions to complete her task. However, what may have begun as a lacklustre response to an assigned task in Molly’s ninth grade computer class actually reveals itself as a commentary on the (re)created nature of memory and memory work. Molly writes, “I thought a bit, and I decided to write about a memory in the making,” and then goes on to describe her process: “I am making a memory. I typed that last phrase just a second ago. I remember that, it is in my memory.” Molly’s commentary here is a reminder for the Collected Visions visitor that each photo essay exhibited on the website is the result of a series of mouse clicks and keyboard strokes. The photo essay contributor works with software and hardware tools available to her to communicate her thoughts and reflections on a particular photograph or set of photographs that she has shared or selected from the Collected Visions archive.

In Molly’s case with her contribution of “A Korean Controversy” creating a Collected Visions photo essay provided an opportunity to think about the future. While perhaps flippant in its first impetus, Molly’s photo essay that describes “a memory in the making,” can encourage the Collected Visions visitor who reviews “A Korean Controversy” to consider the many different actors that influence the activity of memory making and memory work. As Latour reflects on ANT in Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory, he poses a series of questions to frame an investigation of what he describes broadly as ‘social,’ the uncertain heterogeneous collection of materials; this ‘stuff’ is what social ties are made of (2005, p. 43). The questions that Latour poses: “When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present? How come I never do what I want? Why are we held by forces that are not of our own making?” form, he suggests, the basis of social science inquiry (2005, p. 43). In Molly’s photo essay, one of these questions – how come I never do what I want? – seems to have played an important role in shaping the narrative contributed with “A Korean Controversy” and the action involved in developing the photo essay. Recall that action, in ANT terms, can be considered “a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many
surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled” (Latour, 2005, p. 44). With Molly’s photo essay, the teacher determining the parameters of the class assignment is one actor, the keyboard where Molly types her narrative another. Actors also include the remediated photograph of the Korean child from the *Collected Visions* archive as well as the hardware and online web browser that allow the image, submitted to a project facilitated by a New York artist, to appear on a computer screen in a school classroom in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. Each of these actors, in turn, is linked to series of agencies that influence the making and exhibition of a *Collected Visions* photo essay.

Molly’s memory work on display in “A Korean Controversy” is somewhat of a ‘novelty’ in the exhibition of *Collected Visions* photo essays. Latour suggests that novelty - something that appears to “interrupt the normal course of action” (2005, p. 80) – draws attention to mediating actors that transform and modify meanings. When reviewing “A Korean Controversy,” or any online *Collected Visions* photo essay, a visitor can participate in the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy, drawing close to the material displayed and recognizing the media that supports that material (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 19). This oscillation can be interrupted though when the focus shifts to, and then lingers, on the media tools that allow a viewer to interact with material. “A Korean Controversy” includes elements that can interrupt a viewer’s oscillation between material and media. The online interface of the exhibition space in *Gallery 18* brings Molly’s photo essay close to the *Collected Visions* visitors with the pretext of immediacy – providing insight into Molly’s memories and imaginings as if Molly herself was present to share them. However, the novelty of Molly typing about her typing, “I typed that last phrase just a second ago,” reminds the *Collected Visions* visitor of the layers of hypermediation creating a photo essay. Molly tells the viewer, “I clicked every box,” documenting the process involved in selecting a digitized photograph from the *Collected Visions* archive. When the oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy slows down, the viewer may be reminded of multiple actors that influence the creative memory work on display in *Collected Visions*. While the photo essays on display on the *Collected Visions* website do show particular conventions – they each contain one or more photographs and include a short narrative – the actions involved in creating a photo essay do not necessarily lead to pre-determined outcomes that demand that memory be expressed, described, or discussed in certain ways. “A Korean Controversy” is a
reminder that actions involving people, tools, and technologies are opportunities for
surprise where different agencies may meet and interact in unanticipated ways (Latour,
2005, p. 45).

**Dear Photograph: Transporting Memory**

Contributions to *Dear Photograph*, like the images shared in *Collected Visions*
include scenes from special occasions: weddings, graduations, and other life milestones.
However, many of the photographs in *Dear Photograph* feature what appear to be
casual situations of everyday life, like children at play or people with pets. While some of
the photographs date back to the 1930s, the majority of images rephotographed for *Dear
Photograph* submissions appear to have been originally made in the later decades of the
twentieth-century.\(^4\) In the first few months of posts on *Dear Photograph*, from May to
September 2011, the text that accompanies the rephotography submissions is minimal –
a sentence, or two, at the most. By the beginning of 2012, the text that accompanies the
rephotography submissions increases and contributors regularly share a few hundred
words to describe the photograph, recall and reflect on the scene depicted in the
historical photograph, and speak to how their memory of the past informs their
contemporary understandings. Below, I describe and discuss selected contributions to
reflect on how the *Dear Photograph* website can be considered a space of exchange.\(^5\)

As described in chapter six, the first posts shared on the *Dear Photograph*
website are drawn from photographs in Taylor Jones’ family albums. These contributions
are the beginning of an accumulating archive of contributions that creatively
rephotograph historical images and offer an opportunity for viewers to reflect on and
engage with memory. The format of addressing the image with “Dear Photograph,”

\(^4\) During my survey of *Dear Photograph* submissions, I made rough estimates of the age (by
decade) of the image being rephotographed. Some photographs included a date, hand written
onto an image or date-stamped during the printing process, and I used these dates in my
notes. With other photographs, I took into consideration the appearance of the photograph itself
– if it was printed in black and white or in colour, as well as the size and shape of the
photograph – and the clothing and hairstyles of those in the picture and any décor in the image
to estimate when the original photograph might have been made.

\(^5\) I reviewed 861 contributions to *Dear Photograph*. The handful I describe in this chapter provide
some insight into the wide range of subjects, memories, and sentiments that people have
communicated.
including a short piece of writing to accompany the rephotographed submission, and closing with the contributor’s name (or initials, or in some cases “Anonymous”) suggests a communicative interaction with media that is ‘overheard’ by visitors to the Dear Photograph website. Literary scholar Clara Brant (2000) uses the term ‘overhearer’ when describing her archival research with sixteenth-century letters; reviewing the collected correspondence of individuals who never intended nor could likely imagine a researcher perusing their letters positions that researcher as an outsider, yet someone who may be granted a unique degree of intimacy with the concerns and hopes of the letter writers. Visitors to the Dear Photograph website who review the rephotography contributions and the narratives that accompany them are overhearers of an imagined conversation between the rephotographer and the historical image, but it is a conversation that the rephotographer is willing to have overheard and expects to be read by others.

Each brief letter that accompanies a submission is addressed to “Dear Photograph,” but the exchange that follows, what an individual shares with the addressee, varies greatly across the contributions. For example, some individuals address their past selves, family members, or friends depicted in the original image and sometimes relate changes that have occurred in the time since the photograph was made. Other ‘letters’ express a longing for the moment or time captured in a photograph. Some individuals provide specific details in their written accounts. In the contribution posted on September 13, 2012, a submission from Kyle (see Figure 40) illustrates this desire to share context for the rephotography and memory work. Kyle’s submission also captures a sense of memory work in action. When a personal photograph, drawn, for example, from a family album, is presented for public viewing, Martha Langford notes that in this public presentation, “memory is transporting” (2007, p. 24). Langford’s use of the present tense and gerund (“transporting” rather than “transports” or “transported) stands out here and resonates with the notion that memory work is an action constantly in progress among multiple mediating actors. Kyle’s submission features a rephotographed image of two people overlooking a lake. The two individuals seem to embrace each another with a jovial awkwardness and smile back at the camera. Were they encouraged by shouts from the photographer to hug? Is the woman closest to the
Figure 40.  Kyle, “I was only 12 years old,” 13 September 2012, rephotography web posting. *Dear Photograph*, accessed 16 January 2014

camera mimicking choking an unruly adversary? This is not a candid photograph. The story that accompanies the rephotograph begins with Kyle describing a watershed event in his young life, his mother’s cancer diagnosis. The description happens in the first person: “I was only 12 years old…. I had no idea what [this diagnosis] meant.” In the last three sentences, Kyle shifts from sharing his story with the *Dear Photograph* audience to addressing his mother: “I am and always will be so proud of you Mom. I miss you more than anything in this world.” Memory is transporting here. The movement from public
sharing to the expression of an intimate longing crosses registers of experience and meaning.

Spaces of exchange allow for and encourage memory to transport by prompting a sense of familiarity. With Dear Photograph, the WordPress formatting of the website means that each submission is framed in a similar style. On the individual webpages of the submissions, the headers remain the same, the submission appears in the centre of the screen, and a standardized font and text size is used throughout. In the rephotographs themselves, there is a common composition style where the rephotographer’s hand (usually the person’s left hand) holds a photograph in the centre of the newly made image. The images and stories change, but the framing and presentation remains consistent. For memory to transport, “repetition is crucial” and when a presentation format “builds familiarity through its networks of generic gateways; it lets the spectator in. Thus generic personal memories share certain aspects of public, of collective, memories. These two types of memory are also mutually reflective” (Langford, 2007, p. 25). In the case of Kyle’s submission above, the love of one’s mother is a commonly shared sentiment and often linked to important personal memories. Regrettably, the loss of a cherished loved one is also common. When I review submissions like Kyle’s, the hypermediacy of Dear Photograph – the hyperlinked headers and website framing and the trappings of my laptop screen and keyboard provided by my computer – fades, not disappearing entirely, but taking a subordinate position to the immediacy of the “thing represented” (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 6). The network of actors that make it possible for me to examine Kyle’s submission on my personal computer are part of a dynamic process of remediation that offers opportunities for the ‘seeing through’ where memory teams up with imagination to take place (Langford, 2007). There are multiple oscillations in play here: the movement between hypermediacy and immediacy, between memory and imagination, between personal and public, and between past and present.

A submission like Kyle’s may touch on strong emotions and recollections, but spaces of exchange need not necessarily be spaces of nostalgic longing tinged with loss. In Scott’s submission (see Figure 41), a black and white photograph of a young girl reading beneath a tree is rephotographed in colour. The tree in the background of both
images appears broader in the rephotographed picture suggesting that the girl is now older. While the story that accompanies Scott's submission is brief ("Please keep her happy stories coming..."), it entreats the addressee, “Dear Photograph,” to continue the work of memory making. There is limited context for this rephotograph – it is not clear what relationship the submitter (Scott) has with the girl who is picture in the photograph. Scott does not reveal much about the occasion that led to the original photograph or what prompted him to return and make a rephotograph. Despite the limited context here, there is the possibility of memory teaming up with imagination for the Dear Photograph visitor reviewing this submission. In Scott’s submission, the rephotography and memory work being shared illustrates how vernacular photographs help to organize contemporary understandings of the past. The photograph of the little girl reading beneath a tree is not used to mark a watershed moment; instead it is configured as part

Figure 41.  Scott, “Please keep her happy stories coming,” 4 January 2012, rephotography web posting. Dear Photograph, accessed 2 January 2014
of an ongoing series of ‘happy stories.’ Instead of only looking back of what was, the submission also anticipates a future where the girl’s stories will continue. There are oscillations here between what was, what is, and what will be. The ‘seeing through’ that may take place with this submission can prompt the viewer to reflect on and imagine how vernacular photographs may be used as part of stories about how we organize the past in such a way that it connects directly to the present.

While many of the submissions to Dear Photograph relate stories of loss or offer memorials for departed loved ones, some of the submissions display a witticism that is light-hearted, but complex. One of these submissions, Figure 42, features a

![Figure 42](image)

Dear Photograph,
ROSEBUD!
Stephan

Figure 42. Stephan, “ROSEBUD!,” 29 September 2011, rephotography web posting, Dear Photograph, accessed 26 December 2013
rephotograph of a child on a sled waving at the camera. The contemporary scene that frames the original photograph shows the same hillside, but instead of snow, grass grows long beside the roadway. The contributor, Stephan, offers one of the shortest written accompaniments of any Dear Photograph submission; the text reads, “Dear Photograph, ROSEBUD! Stephan.” In this submission, “ROSEBUD!” is an enduring popular media reference to 1941 film Citizen Kane. In the film, reporter Jerry Thompsonendeavours to find the meaning behind a media mogul Charles Foster Kane’s dying declaration – “Rosebud.” Media plays a key role in Citizen Kane and not just because Kane was a newspaper baron. The story of Citizen Kane and the film itself weave together a variety of media: A newsreel announcing Kane’s death opens the film, Thompson attempts to trace what “Rosebud” might mean by reviewing archives (Walter Parks Thatcher’s diary), Kane’s hand-written ‘Declaration of Principles’ is preserved for many years by his friend Jed Leland, and a collection of vernacular photographs clutter Susan’s Alexander’s dressing table when Kane is invited into her apartment. At the end of the film when Thompson and his colleagues visit Kane’s Florida estate and wander amongst the overwhelming multitude of objects that Kane acquired in his lifetime (art, statues, furniture, his mother’s stove sent from Colorado, puzzles). The viewer of Citizen Kane has particular insights into some of these objects that have appeared in the vignettes relating Kane’s past and may be able to appreciate how particular objects provide an entry point that leads to a greater understanding of Kane himself. Thompson and his colleagues, who are not privy to the history that viewers are, have no such insights and are unable to understand the significance of “Rosebud.” Ultimately, “Rosebud” is revealed to be the name of a sled that Kane had as a child during a time of simplicity and innocence, a simplicity and innocence far removed from the corporate titan Kane becomes. At the conclusion of the film, a sled bearing the name “Rosebud” is cast into a furnace. While the viewer can make the connection between Kane’s last words referencing this childhood toy, for Thompson and his colleagues, the past is unknowable.

The child pictured in Stephan’s contribution is depicted in a moment of play. What becomes of this child and who he might be today is never hinted at. The allusion to Citizen Kane crosses decades as it is likely the child pictured in the faded coloured print photograph was born many years after the film was released. In Stephan’s written
contribution that accompanies the rephotograph, personal memory teams up with popular memory in a reference to a well-known film. What first struck me as witticism in Stephan’s memory work led to deeper reflection about the place of media and mediated memories and how people share their own memories and vernacular photographs. Historian Alison Landsberg suggests that particular mediated spaces, like the movie theatre or the museum, afford a sense of ‘prosthetic memory’ where a “moment of contact” take place such that “an experience occurs through which the person pictures himself or herself in a larger history” (Landsberg, 2004, p. 2).

Like Langford’s (2007) assertion that memory is dynamic, Landsberg’s discussion of transportable memory explores how information and communication networks are continually in the making. Landsberg argues that “the very notion of global flows challenges the idea of stable shared frameworks” (2004, p. 10). Stephen’s submission to Dear Photograph provides an opportunity to reflect on how people, as actors in complex networks, influence and are influenced by the media in their environments. Knowledge of existing media – both in terms of form and content – helps to shape the way we make sense of the past and share our memories with others. The reference to Citizen Kane in Stephan’s submission opens up an entry point, framed by popular media, for a viewer to engage with the rephotographed image and the memory that is offered.

Recurring Narratives in Dear Photograph

The chronological nature of Dear Photograph, with contributions being posted on an almost daily basis from May 2011 – August 2014, provides a calendar of sorts. Rephotographs posted at certain times of the year correspond to seasonal themes like Christmas (with pictures of families gathered around presents and Christmas trees), Easter (showing children with baskets and eggs), graduation (featuring images of young people in caps and gowns), and Halloween (with children in costumes). Dear Photograph is a “social timeline” where historical cycles repeat (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 28). Recent social events, like Movember, the North American campaign to increase awareness of men’s health issues, are also included in the Dear Photograph timeline.
The inclusion of more recent happenings highlights how commemorative practices may expand (or contract) to accommodate relevant events and issues.

On each September 11 from 2011-2014, *Dear Photograph* posted a submission commemorating the September 11, 2001 attacks. In 2011, two contributions from Mark Yokoyama were shared. One of the submissions is no longer accessible through the *Dear Photograph* archive or via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine owing to the image violating one of Tumblr’s community guidelines. The submission that is still available for viewing shows the rephotographer holding an image of New York City’s World Trade Center towers made shortly after passenger airplanes hit the buildings on the morning of September 11, 2001. Aligning this picture of the past in a contemporary moment a decade later, the construction of the skyscraper at One World Trade Center is apparent in the background of the new image (Figure 43). While there is now a dedicated memorial and museum located on the former site of the World Trade Center towers that commemorates the September 11, 2001 attacks, the discussion about and development of a permanent memorial for the events that took place was lengthy and contentious (Haskins & DeRose, 2003; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2003; Simpson, 2006; Sturken, 2007). Vernacular photographs played a critical role in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001 as people sought information on missing loved ones by posting flyers with photographs and identifying information at different sites in Lower Manhattan. When it became clear that there would be few survivors of the attacks, these informal postings provided opportunities for family members and friends of those who were killed to express their grief and publicly mourn for the lost (Novak, “I Took Pictures: September 2001 and Beyond”, 2003; Olin, 2012). Sharing vernacular photographs, in this case by physically posting them in public spaces, allowed people to document and communicate their feelings in the immediate aftermath of the event. The quick production of flyers and photographs, their reproducibility, and the relatively ephemeral and inexpensive material used to make them meant that people could create and circulate multiple copies of these space-based tributes to acknowledge both their individual losses and to participate in and contribute to a community that was forming and working to determine how September 11, 2001 should be personally and collectively remembered.
Figure 43.  Mark Yokoyama, “I was astounded,” 11 September 2011, rephotography web posting. Dear Photograph, accessed 23 December 2013

In Mark Yokoyama’s Dear Photograph contribution of September 11, 2011 there are no identifiable individuals: people in the original photograph face away from the camera to gaze upward at the burning towers and in the contemporary rephotograph, the hand of the rephotographer and the blur of a taxi cab obscure anyone who might be passing in the street. The original photograph in this submission is hauntingly familiar.
Television coverage on September 11, 2001 offered viewers around the world a live account of what was taking place in New York and footage of burning buildings in New York as well as at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and images of airplane debris in a Pennsylvania field were shown over and over again. Media and technologies played an important role in shaping how people perceived the event as well as how people remembered the event. Memory scholar Marita Sturken argues that the wall-to-wall media coverage of September 11th contributed to an eventual sanitized framing of the events – kitschification – that endorses “a particular kind of prepackaged sentiment…conveying the message that this sentiment is one that is universally shared. When this takes place in the context of politically charged sites of violence, the effect is inevitably one that reduces to simplified notions of tragedy” (2007, p. 22). Rather than a space of exchange with the possibility for engagement and reflection, kitschified media productions “restrict emotional registers” and encourage a sense of comfort in the face of challenging and difficult events and memories (Sturken, 2007, p. 26).

Yokoyama’s September 11, 2011 contribution is framed, as are all Dear Photograph postings, to correspond with the website’s selected Tumblr template. In terms of the way it is displayed, Yokoyama’s contribution does not look different from the postings for December 8, 2011, March 22, 2012, or any other of the dates included in the Dear Photograph collection. The repetition of this framing may reduce the shock value of Yokoyama’s image, but as noted earlier, the repetition of framing can also allow for a sense of familiarity and an entry point into engagement with a photograph and through this engagement with memory work.

Yokoyama’s rephotograph that first appeared on September 11, 2011 was also posted on September 11, 2014 (Figure 44). The only difference in the two postings is the referential textual framing that brackets Yokoyama’s story that accompanies the image. This reframing and reattribution of the image to Dear Photograph is one of the few occasions I found when a particular submission is repeated. Used to commemorate September 11, the reposting of Yokoyama’s image may suggest a particular endorsement of this rephotograph as the appropriate expression of memory in the archive and calendar of Dear Photograph contributions. However, Yokoyama’s contribution was not the only submission posted on September 11, 2014. A submission by Stephanie features a photograph of the World Trade Center towers with a date stamp
Figure 44. Mark Yokoyama, “I was astounded,” 11 September 2014, rephotography web posting. *Dear Photograph*, accessed 11 February 2016

in the lower corner: “9 ’10 ‘01,” September 10, 2001, the day before the towers were destroyed (Figure 45). The pair of submissions for September 11, 2014 brings together the familiar and the new. Reproducing the Yokoyama submission suggests a cycle of remembrance; a particular image is repeated to commemorate September 11. The new submission from Stephanie though, is a reminder that there are multiple images and
multiple perspectives on how vernacular photographs have been used to remember September 11. While Yokoyama’s and Stephanie’s photographs are similar to each other, in that they depict aspects of the New York City skyline, they provide different kinds of space for the viewer. Yokoyama’s submission captures a moment of tragedy in progress; the viewer need not imagine what the burning building looks like. Stephanie’s contribution shows the Twin Towers the day before they were brought down; the original image depicts Lower Manhattan shortly before a watershed event that, for many, signifies a distinct break between “cultural, political, and moral identities” (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 85). Stephanie’s submission invites the viewer to imagine what was, to consider what might have been, and to reflect on the present where the events of September 11 have influenced understandings of concepts like freedom, security, and nationalism. Yokoyama’s submission offers more of an immediate appeal to the mediated memories of September 11; viewers can recall where they were when watching the television
coverage of an almost unimaginable event. Stephanie’s and Yoyoyama’s contributions provide different opportunities for ‘seeing through’ in spaces of exchange.

As mentioned earlier, when Martha Langford describes ‘seeing through,’ she focuses on the way that a photograph can elicit recognition despite the fact that a viewer may not have “personal knowledge of the subject” (2007, p. 102). “Memory,” Langford notes, “teams up with the imagination if given enough time” (p. 102). Memory and imagination, like vernacularity, cross different registers of experience and understanding. Trying to anticipate when and where memory and imagination might meet up is a challenge because of the myriad of mediating actors that influence the “transform[ation], translat[ion], distort[ion], and mod[ification]” of meaning that is (re)created through memory and imagination (Latour, 2005, p. 39). The accumulating archive of Dear Photograph contributions can be revisited repeatedly and mediated anew with each viewing. As time passes and with repeated visits to Dear Photograph, memory and imagination may enrich each other and encourage new mediations and (re)organizations that attempt to make sense of the past in the present.

The September 11, 2013 rephotograph shared on Dear Photograph, like the submissions posted on September 11, 2011 (and 2012) feature the World Trade Center towers and the Lower Manhattan skyline (Figure 46). Kevin’s contribution references a number of dates: April 14, 2013, September 11, 2001, and February 15, 1998. In the text that accompanies his submission, Kevin notes that February 15, 1998 was “the first of many firsts” including his first date and his first trip to the Empire State Building. In the rephotographed contribution, a more recent date – “4.14.13” is written on the hand that holds the original image from 1998. In the rephotograph and in the story that accompanies it, there is not necessarily an explicit reference to September 11, 2001. However, it is relatively easy for memory to team up with imagination here and recall that the contemporary skyline, hidden by the photograph from 1998, no longer includes the two towers of the World Trade Center. In the story that appears with the rephotograph, Kevin comments that he “will let this photograph serve as a memento that eternalizes [a] brief fraction of time that has been deeply buried in the back of [his] memory.” This description suggests that Kevin may use this particular photograph of Lower Manhattan as a placeholder of sorts to help him organize his understanding of the past. This past is
Dear Photograph,
On February 15, 1998, to celebrate Valentine’s Day (belated), I went to the top of the Empire State Building in Manhattan with a girl. It was the first of many firsts. It was the first time I went on a date. It was the first time I visited the Empire State Building. It was the first time I saw, with my own eyes, the unmistakable Twin Towers that stood for everything we’ve loved.

The landscape of Lower Manhattan has drastically changed since then. But I will let this photograph serve as a memento that eternalizes this brief fraction of time that has been deeply buried in the back of my memory. Now as I revisit the Empire State Building again more than a decade later, I understand, for the first time, that it is only amidst fragility, chaos, and uncertainty we can see the best in the human spirit. And now I understand, for the first time, why I love photography.

-Kevin

This post is posted on Wednesday 11 September 2013.  
Currently has 2,800 notes  
Tagged as: dear photograph  september 11th  film  photography  memories  nostalgia  never forget

**Figure 46.** Kevin, “On February 15, 1998,” 11 September 2013, rephotography web posting. *Dear Photograph*, accessed 13 March 2013

personal and specific – recalling his first date – but also publicly recognizable and shared. Kevin’s contribution goes beyond the personal because the scene he has captured is widely recognizable and also because he offers a reflection on how photography, even the most innocuous tourist snapshot of a landmark, can be used to construct and prompt memory. Revisiting those memories can bring the past into the present in imaginative ways. Sharing one’s imaginative reflections, as is the case with *Dear Photograph* contributions, invites others to engage in their own reflections.
‘Note’-worthy Submissions: exchanges between Dear Photograph viewers

As a Tumblr blog, visitors to Dear Photograph with their own Tumblr sites can choose to review the Dear Photograph website while logged into their Tumblr accounts. This means that viewers can choose to ‘like’ or ‘reblog’ material from Dear Photograph (or any other Tumblr site). When ‘followers’ of Dear Photograph, Tumblr users who have elected to have Dear Photograph posts appear on their own ‘dashboards,’96 click the appropriate icon to indicate that they ‘like’ a particular submission or to ‘reblog’ (reposting the submission on their own Tumblr weblog), this activity is registered as a ‘note.’ In Figure 46 above, Kevin’s submission that was shared on September 11, 2013, there were 2,800 notes recorded at the time of the screen capture. 2,800 individual Tumblr users have ‘liked’ or ‘reblogged’ this submission. During my data collection, the number of notes associated with any particular submission varied widely from a few dozen to more than one million. In January 2013, then director of outreach for Tumblr, Mark Coatney, described the relevance of the reblog among users, “To me,” Coatney noted, “the primary metric of success for any Tumblr blog is the reblog – it shows you’ve published something so great that one of your followers has said, ‘This is so cool; I want to be associated with this and reblog it’” (Chen, 2013, para. 4). Reblogging provides Tumblr users the opportunity to remediate content instantly and (re)present it on their own weblogs. Recall that when Bolter and Grusin (1999) describe remediation they suggest that it takes place in an oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy. The instantaneous borrowing of media multiplies that media. The reblog brings media and content closer to users, onto their own blogs, and at the same time allows users to share media with wider and wider audiences. All of this is made possible through the online Tumblr software platform.

‘Notes’ related to Dear Photograph submissions provide a record of how certain Tumblr users have interacted with material. This interaction takes place in the online space, but is made possible through the software as well as the computer hardware

96 A dashboard is the Tumblr homepage that registered users see when first signing in. The dashboard is akin to a bulletin board that shows posts from Tumblr blogs that a user has followed. Clicking a particular post takes the user to the originating Tumblr blog.
where a user is offered a variety of options. Bolter and Grusin describe how a user may navigate these options, again, as a type of oscillation:

The multiplicity of windows and the heterogeneity of their contents mean that the user is repeatedly brought back into contact with the interface[.] 

... She oscillates between manipulating the windows and examining their contents, just as she oscillates between looking at a hypertext as a texture of links and looking through the links to the textual units as language.

(Bolter & Grusin, 1999, p. 33)

When Bolter and Grusin mention ‘looking through,’ this is not necessarily synonymous with the ‘seeing through’ that Langford (2007) writes about. Looking through captures the action taking place when a viewer can simultaneously perceive certain media, recognize that they are linked to networks of other types of medias (through links), and then make meaning with that media. For example, a single Dear Photograph contribution presents a viewer with a rephotographed image and an accompanying story. On the surface, this a single webpage, but it is connected to an ever expanding multitude of webpages. ‘Looking through’ brings the media to the viewer so that ‘seeing through’ might take place.

Tumblr suggests that the work of reblogging is intuitive, reminding users that “You already know how this works. [...] See something great? Reblog it on your own blog. Add commentary if you like. Make it your own. Other people will do the same to your posts. That's how you meet people here” (“What is Tumblr?,” n.d.). The first part of Tumblr’s entreaty to reblog material echoes Kodak’s promotional slogan of “you press the button, we do the rest,” reminding users that their interactions with media and technology need not require specialized knowledge or technical proficiency. Tumblr’s advice also suggests that while users bring their own unique perspectives to reblogging, making it their own, users are enmeshed in a network of mediators who are actively sharing information and making meaning through the material they post, repost, and comment on. Complicating the network of mediators is the fact that Tumblr is not a closed system – external media, technologies, and experiences influence how and why particular material is ‘liked’ or ‘reblogged.’
Over time, the way that users have been able to show their interest in individual *Dear Photograph* submissions has changed. Using the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, it is possible to trace some of these changes. For example, the contribution from @jonathanstampf – a Twitter and Instagram username associated with an individual named Jonathan Stampf – that was posted on 26 June 2011 includes a rephotograph of a couple laughing together and sitting on a bench while the contemporary image that frames the photograph features a man (possibly the same man pictured in the original photograph) standing next to the bench in quiet contemplation. Figure 47, below, depicts @jonathanstampf’s contribution as it appeared on the *Dear Photograph* website on 30 June 2011. Figure 47 shows two examples of this commentary where Tumblr users who have reblogged @jonathanstampf’s contribution. The two Tumblr users, justkeepfighting and 57mannequins, have reblogged the *Dear Photograph* post from other Tumblr users, hillaryjain and loveyourchaos, rather than from the *Dear Photograph* website itself. ‘Looking through’ these two particular notes, in the way that Bolter and Grusin (1999) use the phrase, it is possible to recognize how these particular users have successfully manipulated layers of hyperlinks across various webpages to add their own commentary and that these users have engaged with @jonathanstampf’s submission as a type of communicative expression (Bolter and Grusin use the term ‘language’), experienced certain reactions, and developed their own meanings.

When I began reviewing *Dear Photograph* submissions in 2013, the way that people responded to contributions had changed from the way that notes appeared in 2011. In 2013, visitors to *Dear Photograph* could comment on a post using a Facebook widget embedded in each submission’s webpage. Figure 47 shows how @jonathanstampf’s contribution from 26 June 2011 appeared on 22 December 2013. In 2013, notes on the submission appear to the right of the image and comments linked to Facebook users follow below the image. Figure 48 is an excerpt from some of the Facebook comments. These comments provide a record of viewers’ reactions and responses to @jonathanstampf’s contribution. These comments are a record of the memory and meaning-making work that may be done with visiting *Dear Photograph*. Individuals responded to the submission as interlocutors expressing their condolences.
Figure 47. @jonathanstampf, “Thank you for everything we had,” rephotography web posting, 26 June 2011. *Dear Photograph*, accessed 22 December 2013
Figure 48. “Excerpt of Facebook comments on 26 June 2011,” 26 June 2011, social media. *Dear Photograph*, accessed 22 December 2013

for the perceived loss of a loved one and acknowledging the contributor’s willingness to share his experience. Individuals also described their emotional reactions to the rephotograph. In two cases, individuals have mentioned that they learned of this image and of *Dear Photograph* through television news programs (CTV News and ABC World
News). As mentioned earlier, Tumblr is not a closed system, neither is *Dear Photograph*. Visitors to particular websites may be spurred to follow a link they see posted online, open a URL sent by a friend through email or social media, or search out a website after learning about it from an offline source (such as a televised newscast).

Comments from the Facebook widget on the *Dear Photograph* webpages integrate two social media platforms – when a person uses the Facebook widget comment, that comment appears below the *Dear Photograph* contribution on the Tumblr page and in the individual’s Facebook feed. The indented comments in Figure 48 indicate that a person has responded to a comment. People have also ‘liked’ comments, shown by the ‘thumbs up’ icon that appears next to the date of the comment. Facebook encourages its users to indicate their locations and this information is then included when users post material and comment on other users’ posts. For this contribution by @jonathanstampf, people from Canada, Brazil, Germany, India, Italy, Pakistan, and across the United States offer comments. As shown in Figure 48, the most recent comment as of 22 December 2013 was made on 4 August 2012 – more than a year after @jonathanstampf’s contribution first appeared on the *Dear Photograph* website. Figure 48 also shows that individuals have replied to comments days, weeks, and months after later; in the last comment included in the Figure 48, Facebook users Kathryn Elizabeth and Sophie de Rave have replied to Michelle Andrus’ comment, in effect, picking up a conversation and having an opportunity to express their reactions to @jonathanstampf’s rephotograph.

The January 3, 2012 comment from Francis Bruno shows how a visitor to *Dear Photograph* has experienced a moment of ‘seeing through.’ While the comments and interactions described above point to how the affordances of *Dear Photograph*, at a particular time, encouraged a type of dialogue and exchange between visitors, this comment from Facebook user Francis Bruno illustrates that this online space can be a space of exchange where memory and imagination meet up not just for the people who make and contribute the rephotographs, but for those who view the rephotographs as well. Bruno writes, “We could remembers [sic] our old age, through the photographs someone can also think of...that the day may come to us also one day we will be like Oldman [sic].” Despite the errors in language here, the idea being expressed suggests
that even with no personal knowledge of the people or events depicted in a particular vernacular photograph, it is possible to examine an image and have it resonate in deeply meaningful ways that actually do call on personal memory and imagination. Presented with an image from the past, the future and its possibilities are imagined and remembered. When Bruno comments on @jonathanstampf’s contribution, he is articulating his process of “improvisational in-filling” (Langford, 2007, p. 107). @jonathanstampf’s contribution is open to interpretation – is the couple on the bench the rephotographer’s parents? His grandparents? Who does the “we” in the story that accompanies the photograph refer to, the couple? The entire family? – much remains unsaid, and there are many questions. Improvisational in-filling is not necessarily about determining answers to questions one might have about a photograph. Rather, the in-filling refers to how a viewer can occupy those gaps created by things unsaid or unexplained and use his or her imagination and personal memory and experiences to engage with the photograph. The fact that Facebook users from around the world took advantage of the opportunity to use the comment widget and share their thoughts on @jonathanstampf’s contribution is a reminder of how important memory work can be prompted by seemingly ordinary vernacular photographs, even one that depicts a couple on a park bench sharing a moment of laughter. It also points to the potential for the creation of a global network of actors through which memory is transformed and translated.

The ‘looking through’ and ‘seeing through’ that can take place when reviewing vernacular photographs like the rephotographs shared through Dear Photograph is also aided by the fact that digital images that appear across screens exist in a type of perpetual present. In the figures above that show how one contribution has been

97 This notion of space influencing creative expression and encouraging reflection on the future is articulated succinctly by Maori artist George Nuku when commenting on his site-specific work, Waharoa/Portal: Te Ao Marama – The World of Light, exhibited at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in 2013. Describing his process of working with traditional and contemporary materials (including feathers, shell, and plexiglass), Nuku states that the piece he developed, “The Waharoa[,] communicates to the people that the past is in front of us and the future we remember” (Mayer, 2013, p. 6). While the rephotography that is shared on a website like Dear Photograph differs in many ways from the type of installation work that Nuku describes, the resonant awareness of past and future in the present moment points to the role of mediators in “transform[ing], translat[ing], distort[ing] and modify[ing]” information (Latour, 2005, p. 39) in creative practices that draw on and communicate memory.
reframed as the website template for *Dear Photograph* has changed, the rephotographed remains consistent. While visitor analytics for tracking online views and popularity of certain posts is now highly advanced and can allow for detailed data collection on how often material is accessed and when access takes place, unless users leave a ‘note’ on a *Dear Photograph* submission, they will not necessarily encounter one another or recognize that other viewers have visited particular pages. The ‘notes’ linked to each submission can be thought of as traces that people, mediators, leave behind when they review the rephotographs. Now, as Latour notes, “if your actors don’t act, they will leave no trace whatsoever. So you will have no information at all” (2005, p. 150). As above, visitor analytics that track visitor data can reveal what type of material is accessed, when it is accessed, and even from where in the world it is accessed. However, this information is not openly available and even if it were, it cannot tell us much about how visitors use online spaces to communicate with one another. When visitors do leave comments, they can come into contact with one another and they do leave traces of the work they do together.

One example of how people have ‘met’ one another in online spaces offered by *Dear Photograph* is when an individual who has submitted a rephotographed vernacular, announces his or her presence through the Facebook comment widget or uses comments to respond to or offer context for a contribution. The *Dear Photograph* post on 16 November 2011 features a contribution from Doc that includes a rephotograph of an image depicting a pug named Freddie (Figure 49). During data collection in 2013 when the Facebook comment widget was included as part of each daily posting, there was a record of commenters expressing their sadness and condolences at what they believed to be a submission commemorating a beloved family pet who had passed away. However a Facebook commenter named Doc, the same name as the individual who contributed the 16 November 2011 post, responded to commenters noting that Freddie

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98 During data collection, I made notes on the number and types of comments that people shared via the Facebook widget. Accessing those comments again during the writing of this dissertation has proven difficult because, as noted, the formatting template and presentation of rephotographs has changed. While the Internet Archive Wayback Machine can provide records of some of the *Dear Photograph* webpages, the examples discussed in this section on interaction between commenters were not archived by the Internet Archive and are therefore inaccessible. Thus, information on these two examples is drawn from data collection notes.
was very much alive and a regular fixture at the breakfast table. There is nothing overt in the rephotograph or story that accompanies the contribution that might indicate that Freddie has passed on, but the overwhelming majority of submissions to *Dear Photograph* that feature dogs and cats, family pets, tend to show either elderly animals with graying muzzles or include stories that explicitly reference the declining health or death of the animal depicted in the original photograph. Concern for Freddie the pug speaks to how visitors to *Dear Photograph* may have made meaning from this particular rephotograph. Latour reminds us that mediating actors are not “simply transporting effects without transforming them,” but participating in social events where meaning is translated and (re)made (2005, p. 128). Commenters on Doc’s submission worked together to come to an agreement about Freddie, but when Doc appeared in the comments as a mediator, seemingly established interpretations of Freddie’s fate and Doc’s intentions in making and sharing the rephotograph could be reconsidered.

**Content and Style**

When the contributors of particular rephotographs participate in comment exchanges on their submissions, it can be tempting to view their contributions as ‘setting the record straight.’ Doc’s comment that Freddie is alive and well does not lessen the
deep sense of recognition and resonance felt by earlier commenters who viewed the rephotograph. This new information adds another layer of meaning that visitors to *Dear Photograph* can negotiate. Focusing on whether a particular interpretation of a rephotograph is ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ does not adequately account for the range of responses that are possible in a space of exchange when viewing a photograph. In some of the comments on *Dear Photograph* submissions, individuals do point out compositional strengths. However, these comments do not address the meaning of the rephotograph; rather, they discuss and debate the methods used to create the image. For example, a submission by Billy on 19 December 2011 features a black and white photograph of a child on a sidewalk (Figure 50). At the time of data collection, there were

![Figure 50](image.png)

Dear Photograph,

It’s been 50 years since I wore that snowsuit, and so much has changed. Yet in many ways, it feels like so little has... just the way it should be.

Billy

Figure 50. Billy, “It’s been 50 years,” 19 December 2011, rephotography web posting. *Dear Photograph*, accessed 31 December 2013
32 comments on this submission, many of which reference the rephotograph’s alignment with the original image and how the sidewalk, telephone pole, and cars match up. In their comments, people describe Billy’s rephotograph as “the best” and “perfect” and offer their congratulations on creating a contemporary rephotograph that seamlessly frames the original image. Discussing the aesthetic success of Billy’s contribution is, for some commenters, an entry point into talking about their experience of reviewing other Dear Photograph contributions. In an exchange between commenters below Billy’s contribution, an opinion on the aesthetic merit of the submission prompts a reply from an individual, Facebook user Sally-Ann Hickman, who relates her emotive response when reviewing images on the Dear Photograph website (Figure 51). Facebook user Mickey

![Facebook comments](https://example.com)

**Figure 51.** “Excerpt of Facebook comments on 19 December 2011,” 19 December 2011, social media. Dear Photograph, accessed 31 December 2013

Blumenthal’s hyperbolic response to Hickman, “if you go through two pages without tearing up you have no soul,” suggests that reviewing Dear Photograph submissions is not simple matter of scrolling through a “wide field of unconcerned desire” that elicits a “vague slippery [and] irresponsible interest” (Barthes, 1981, p. 28). Dear Photograph submissions, at the time of data collection, were exhibited in such a way that visitors to the website could reach out to others, communicating their reactions to images and their own experience with memory work. Some of the interactions that took place allow people to reflect on the practice of making rephotographs and the work of physically and imaginatively revisiting places where the original photographs were made.
The 17 December 2011 *Dear Photograph* contribution is a rephotograph by Leesha that shows a well-dressed couple, the woman and man sporting a corsage and a boutonnière, respectively, standing in front of a house (Figure 52). The story that accompanies the rephotograph reveals the original photograph to be a wedding picture from 1948, made at the bride’s childhood home. This vernacular photograph, more than half a century old, shows signs of wear with creases at the image’s corners and slight staining at the top of the print. This is a photograph that has travelled since its creation documenting the beginning of a marriage. Leesha’s words that follow the rephotograph celebrate the union of the couple and the family that they helped to create and express sadness at the loss of a beloved grandparent. In the Facebook comments that appear below the rephotograph there is an exchange between Leesha and a visitor to *Dear Photograph* who has viewed and commented on Leesha’s contribution (Figure 53). Leesha’s reply to Facebook user Julia Karen Hancock Jackson relates the story of how
the rephotograph was made: Leesha describes her moment of recognition when she noticed the posts in front of the house and relates how she shared her memories with the current residents of the house where her grandmother grew up. This exchange in the Facebook comments provides insight into part of the process that Leesha went through to create this rephotograph. Leesha’s Facebook comment reminds the viewer that the making of a rephotograph like any “memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory” (Kuhn, 2000, p. 186). With the immediacy of the digital image and its seeming simplicity, it is possible to imagine Leesha pausing briefly on her walk down the street to make this rephotograph; it can be easy to overlook the multiple actors that have influenced the creation of the image and the journey it has taken to be exhibited on Dear Photograph.

‘Notes’ on Dear Photograph contributions and Facebook comments that follow images ‘attach’ rephotographs to a greater number of actors and mediators. When Latour reflects on how ANT may be valuable for a sociology of art, he describes how existing paradigms of critical investigation attempt to locate meaning as a “zero-sum game” where meaning might reside in either inherent ‘inner qualities’ of a particular art work, or the socially ascribed value of the work (2005, p. 237). ANT, Latour notes, encourages researchers to avoid this balancing act between a work of art and social meaning when he states that in the “new paradigm you are allowed a win/win situation: the more attachments the better” (2005, p. 237). A vernacular photograph that has travelled far from the circumstances of its original making to be rephotographed and
submitted for exhibition on the Dear Photograph website is attached to a variety of mediators who cross multiple registers of memory, meaning, and action. These attachments connect media platforms, Internet connected devices that can call up images and text virtually anywhere in the world, photographic prints, digital cameras and mobile phones with photographic capabilities, individuals, and personal and shared memories. In short, these attachments make it possible for people, media, and technologies to work together to create meaning about the past in and for the present.

In this chapter, I have explored some of the attachments associated with contributions to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. The vignettes included here are only a small reflection of the hundreds of submissions and countless stories that have been remembered and imagined through the exhibition of remediated vernacular photographs on these two websites. Collected Visions and Dear Photograph offer people potential spaces to share memories through contributing, reviewing, reflecting on, and creatively imagining with vernacular photographs. The memory work that has been done in these spaces and the type of memory work that can be prompted when visiting these spaces show how vernacular photographs have been and can be shaped and reshaped with different technologies and media to relate understandings of the past in and for the present.
Chapter 8.

Concluding Reflections

Why do human beings choose at this time in our cultural history to communicate with one another by making complex artifacts out of electrical impulses? For the same reason that we couldn’t put down the stylus or the whittling knife. We are drawn to a new medium of representation because we are pattern makers who are thinking beyond our old tools. We cannot rewind our collective cognitive effort, since the digital medium is as much a pattern of thinking and perceiving as it is a pattern of making. We are drawn to this medium because we need it to understand the world and our place in it.

(Murray, 2003, p. 11)

The above quotation is drawn from Janet H. Murray’s 2003 essay “Inventing the Medium,” the opening chapter of Noah Hardip-Fruin and Nick Montfort’s edited volume, The New Media Reader. Written in the early part of the twenty-first century, Murray suggests that we need not be fearful of a future where digital media seems poised to blur what are assumed to be established understandings of space, time, and representation. In this dissertation, I have reflected on how these elements of space, time, and representation may influence our relationships with vernacular photographs and memory. The ways that vernacular photographs have been made and how they have been exhibited in both personal and public spaces depend on social relationships in the sense that Latour (2005) describes the social, “not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling” (p. 7). Murray writes that we are “pattern makers” (2003, p. 11), but we are not locked into our patterns and the patterns themselves change according to our desires to make sense of world and the tools we have to do this work. Joan Schwartz, in discussing the history of photographs in archives from the nineteenth-century to the present day, draws attention to changing patterns and changing
patternmakers when she invokes William J. Mitchell’s assertion that “we make our tools and our tools make us; by taking up particular tools we accede to desires and manifest intentions” (as cited in Schwartz 1995, p. 40). Similarly, recall that Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree write, “all media were once ‘new media’” (2003, p. 1). Continual re-associations and reassemblings might be the only constant in a world where new tools seem to appear at a faster and faster pace.

The Actor Network Theory approaches that inform this dissertation, in particular the ideas expressed by Latour in *Reassembling the Social* are sceptical of research that seeks to identify persistent patterns. However, Murray’s assertion that we are thinking beyond our existing tools aligns with Latour’s interest in how the social may be most apparent, most traceable, when supposed patterns are challenged – when there are moments of innovation, when what is taken for granted is drawn into the foreground, when there are breakdowns or re-creations, and when alternative understandings of the past are articulated (Latour, 2005, p. 79). At these moments when ostensibly established patterns reveal themselves to be series of assembling and reassembling associations between people, media, and technology, we can begin to reflect on how people, media, and technology enter into and influence one another as complex mediators in relationships of meaning-making.

In this dissertation I examined a particular type of meaning-making in two ways: 1) how vernacular photographs have been exhibited over time and how this exhibition influences current practices of online exhibition and circulation, and 2) how vernacular photographs are remediated and taken up in mnemonic practices involving two particular online spaces, *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*. While there were different parts to this dissertation including – a selected history of vernacular photography and exhibitions involving vernacular photography and the case studies of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* – the common theme between the sections is how vernacular photographs have been and are (re)made to help people make sense of the past in and for the present. As I explored this theme, I considered (in chapter two) how vernacular photographs, remediation, and mnemonic practices are part of communicative networks where memories and meaning are (re)created and shared. Chapter two began with a reflection on the definition of ‘vernacular’ and led to a discussion that challenged
definitions of vernacular photography that seek to ascribe exclusionary categories of photographs, which leave out images made by professionals and images those that may labelled as art. Chapter two also introduced Abraham’s (2006) notion of ‘vernacularity’ to stress the fact that what is included in the definition of vernacular must take into consideration the multiple registers of everyday life that include, for example, “the traditional and the innovative, the highbrow and the popular” and everything in between (p. 12). In chapter two I also examined how actions involving vernacular photographs, remediation, and mnemonic practices may provide the opportunity for spaces of exchange to emerge. These spaces of exchange are occasions that afford people the possibility of “seeing through” photographs in such a way that time and space may be traversed so that the past meets and influences the present in deeply affective and meaningful ways (Langford, 2007, p. 103).

In chapter three, I began to trace some of the associations between vernacular photographs, remediation, and mnemonic practices as they have been associated with the development, circulation, and exhibition of vernacular photographs. To do this, I borrowed from ANT approaches that emphasize how action takes place in nodes where different actors meet and influence one another. The actions involved in the exhibition of vernacular photograph from the nineteenth century to the present day offer a reminder, as Batchen notes, that photographs “exist only in a state of continual fabrication, constantly being made and remade within the twists and turns of their own unruly passage through space and time” (2001, p. 106). The history of exhibiting vernacular photographs that I offered in chapter three emphasized a select number of twists and turns made by vernacular photographs, but also the twists and turns of other mediators – people, media, and technologies – that have the agency to “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour, 2005, p. 39).

Chapter four described the methodologies employed for this research project. In order to reflect on how people, media, and technologies have influenced the way vernacular photographs have been exhibited in different ways, in particular in physical gallery spaces and in online spaces, I visited museum exhibitions and museum archives (both in-person and online), conducted interviews with individuals who have been and
are involved with the exhibition of vernacular photography, conducted interviews with artists who use vernacular photography in their work, and carried out an analysis of the *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* projects. These different methods of examination and analysis complemented one another and made it possible for me to present the different types of research undertaken in this dissertation as a type of ‘process-tracing’ where various kinds of data, including “histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources,” are examined to consider “the links between possible causes and observed outcomes” (George & Bennett, 2004, p. 6). Process-tracing resonates with ANT approaches as both can focus on the “tracing of associations” and “types of connection[s]” between diverse variables that influence observable actions (Latour, 2005, p. 5). Chapter four also helped to establish a framework for the descriptive ‘origin stories’ of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* that followed in chapters five and six.

Chapters five and six provided important contextual information on the two cases examined in this dissertation, *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*. Rather than stressing similarities between cases, the origin stories provided accounts of how similar variables – vernacular photographs, remediation, and sharing memories through different types of exhibitions (in gallery spaces and in online spaces) – are involved in the two cases and how the two projects developed. These origin stories related some of the many different influences, including individuals, media, and technologies, that influenced how *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* took shape.

In chapter seven I presented microstories about individual images and stories contributed to *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*. These microstories helped me to reflect on how contributors to the two projects creatively repurposed vernacular photographs to communicate memories about the past. These examples illustrated how it might be possible to view *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph* as spaces of exchange that allow people opportunities to ‘see through’ vernacular photographs and make deeply meaningful connections with other times and other places that they themselves did not experience. By selecting a variety of contributions to both *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*, I hoped to emphasize the fact that both projects, particularly in their online exhibition of remediated vernacular photographs, are spaces
where meaning-making and interaction with remediated vernacular photographs take place. The selected examples also reference existing types of communication and expression, like an entry in a scrapbook, a birth announcement, rephotography, and collages. The individual contributions are part of larger stories, situated in networks of people, media, and technologies where memory and meaning-making are ongoing processes. Digital media expressions such as the Collected Visions and Dear Photograph websites can bring the mediated past close to the present and help people make sense of that past in the present, in part, by drawing on the affordances of contemporary software and hardware as well as older forms of media that have shaped and continue to shape how vernacular photographs are shared with others.

**Challenges and Considerations**

One of the key challenges of this study was working with online content. Material that is shared online can vanish, almost without a trace, when a website changes formatting or goes offline altogether. In the case of Dear Photograph in particular, the contributions that I reviewed during my initial data collection remain online; however, the way that they are accessed and the way that they are formatted have changed dramatically. The archives page of Dear Photograph no longer exists, making it more difficult to locate or return to particular submissions. Responsive web design also means that content can appear differently across different devices, on different browsers, and different windows. While online material can give the illusion of stability through a persistent URL, each visit to a website is actually a new action. When examining online content, it can be easy to overlook the role of certain actors – perceiving them as intermediaries that seamlessly carry meaning without transformation, rather than mediators that can “modify the meaning or elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour, 2005, p. 39). Latour notes that non-human actors, in particular, “no matter how important, efficient, central, or necessary they may be, tend to recede into the background very fast ... and the greater their importance, the faster they disappear themselves” (2005, p. 79-80). The non-human actors involved in this study include, as mentioned, the computer hardware and monitors that make it possible for people to view and contribute to Collected Visions and Dear Photograph, and it also includes the actors that link personal computers to the Internet: cables, modems, and the different
technologies that make it possible for data in binary code to travel between devices virtually anywhere in the world.

Digital intermediaries that transfer data and meaning without transformation are not invisible actors, but they can be difficult to account for, as they do not readily leave traces that researchers are easily able to follow. When content, like a vernacular photograph, is ‘born digital,’ some of the actors involved in that content’s display and remediation may not necessarily leave easily discernable evidence of their involvement. In some of the earliest displays of photography, as described in chapter three, the actors involved in transporting the photographs inadvertently ‘left their mark’ on those photographs; recall Roger Taylor’s description of how photographs travelling by rail for a touring exhibition in Great Britain in 1852-1853 were damaged when being “manhandled from truck to carrier’s wagon with nothing more sophisticated than brute strength and a trolley” and, at some venues, exhibited with the marks of that wear and tear (2002, para. 11). When visiting archival holdings of vernacular photographs, and reviewing printed images, evidence of actors’ interventions is also visible in the dog-eared corners of prints, scrapbook, and photo album pages. These traces offer reminders of how meanings associated with vernacular photographs may change over time as they are displayed and consulted in different ways. Tools such as the Internet Archive Wayback Machine make it possible to look back at archived pages of websites, but these records are haphazard at best. While it can be challenging to reflect on the histories of digital and digitized vernacular photographs and the different intermediaries and mediators involved when people use these digital images to recall the past and make sense of it in the present, what does persist is a desire to use the media and communication tools at hand to do that work of recalling the past and making sense of it in the present.

As discussed in chapter seven, recalling the past for use in the present is not seeking an absolute truth about historical events. Instead, recalling the past in and for the present is a type of memory work. In her essay “Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory,” José van Dijck asks “is it memory that manipulates pictures, or do we use pictures to create or adjust memory?” (2008, p. 71). van Dijck’s question here is rhetorical. She goes on to suggest that the relationship between memory and photography is a reciprocal one, with each era determining the conventions
associated with mediated remembering and communication of that remembering. Vernacular photographs can show us the past, but the way that we use vernacular photographs to make meaning in the present always depends on how those images are situated within networks of actors, networks that are constantly in the process of assembling and reassembling. In my examination of specific historical exhibitions involving vernacular photographs and in my review of *Collected Visions* and *Dear Photograph*, one of the common threads that passes through many of the different examples I have explored in this dissertation is a desire to use photographs that capture the range of vernacularity in order to assemble an understanding of the past that helps people situate themselves in relation to other times and other places from their present position. While the ubiquity and diversity of digital media and digital recording devices now seems to promise the possibility of documenting and sharing almost every aspect of human experience, these new technologies and new media do not erase the tools and techniques used to capture events and experiences deemed worthy of remembering. New forms of imaging and (re)mediation related to vernacular photography do not erase earlier practices. Remembering, and the desire to shape the past for our contemporary needs with and through vernacular photographs “has to have its vehicle, its specific techniques, its conduits, its equipment[,] … Of course the medium will be different and so will be what is transported, but the general abstract shape will be the same” (Latour, 2005, p. 212, emphasis in original).

**(Re)assembling Memory, (Re)assembling Research**

*The apparatus of photography, its snapshot and studio cameras, albums, newspapers and magazines, archives, exhibitions, and more, helps members of contemporary society cope with the special, the festive, or the merely unusual. One learns social rules through observation and practice, and adapts them to new situations. The next generation will learn the rules differently.*

(Olin, 2012, p. 161)

In this dissertation I have explored how meaning-making and memory are ongoing processes influenced by people, media, and technologies. While this dissertation has been assembled in a linear fashion with an introduction and successive chapters that present the research activities I conducted, the work of assembling this
dissertation has been concerned with negotiating multiple layers of meaning in an attempt to balance my own awareness of hypermediacy in the cases that I have studied and my own immersion in experiences of meaning-making with different vernacular photographs and the stories that accompanied Collected Visions and Dear Photograph. Incorporating ANT approaches into this work helped me to be open to following up on moments where I was struck with resonance and wonder (when encountering vernacular photographs, archival material, websites, individuals who have worked with and exhibited vernacular photographs, artists, scholars, curators, and existing research) and to investigate where the actors involved in these moments could lead.

The above quote from Margaret Olin's Touching Photographs (2012) resonates with a conclusion that Latour makes near the end of Reassembling the Social (2005). Latour writes that we must look to “controversies” where innovations, and in the case of this dissertation that may include, for example, digital photography, online exhibitions, and social media communication, raise uncertainties (2005, p. 249). Tracing how actors respond to and stabilize themselves in the wake of these uncertainties illustrates how “format, standards, and metrologies” come into existence and “can renew our sense of being in the same collective” (2005, p. 249). While Olin’s comments can be read as presuming that ‘social rules’ persist and are preserved through generations, the fact that she names a wide variety of media suggests that these different actors may all be called upon, in a variety of ways, to help make sense of both everyday occurrences as well as “the special, the festival, [and] the merely unusual” (2012, p. 161). Through observation and practice, human actors influence and are influenced by media and technologies that can be used to help make sense of the past in and for the present. The actual ‘rules’ of how actors are presumed to influence one another does change over time; however, what remains is a desire to reflect on and communicate about the past. This reflection and communication happens through networks of actors that allow people to make connections to other times, other places, and other people interested in sharing memories.

The formats and the materiality of the vernacular photographs that we make and share today differ greatly from the earliest photographic images that were part of everyday experiences. The shift from print to digital photography and the introduction of
digital communication networks introduces new actors into the creation and circulation of photographs that we use to document and preserve memory. These new actors do not necessarily replace old media and technologies; instead, new networks take shape. Important and complex meaning-making occurs in these networks because individuals are able to appreciate that photographs are, in the language of ANT, ‘well-attached.’ Vernacular photographs are now made, viewed, and shared across mobile devices, online platforms, and saved (if they are saved) on microchips, hard drives, and in cloud storage. In describing the shift to digital photography, Joanna Sassoon draws attention to the potential change in how photographic meaning is determined. She writes, “the digitising process translates what was once a complex multilayered laminated object into something much more ephemeral. Where once materiality and meaning were bound up in a complex, synergistic and symbiotic relationship, the resultant digital object is an ephemeral ghost whose materiality is at best intangible” (2004, p. 208). Historical vernacular photographs from the nineteenth-century ‘live’ on in museum, archival, and personal collections. Once digitized, Sassoon suggests that these photographs are only shadows of their material selves. Applying Sassoon’s reasoning to photographs that are ‘born digital,’ the everyday images we make and share with our mobile devices may be viewed as ephemeral ghosts from their inception. Materiality and meaning are still bound up in complex and influential relationships when we use digital devices to view and circulate images. Albums of images can now fit in our pockets and be accessed at will. Ephemeral ‘ghosts’ they may be, but vernacular photographs that are digitized or ‘born digital,’ provide valuable reminders that the associations we see between actors and how we engage in meaning-making with vernacular photographs are never stationary.

With Sassoon’s comments in mind, and reflecting on ANT approaches, the vernacular photographs that are shared via Collected Visions and Dear Photograph can be imagined as well-attached ghosts. No longer tied to discrete material objects housed, for example, in picture frames or photo albums, visitors to these two websites navigate images at their leisure, in their own time, on the devices of their choosing. Discussions about the materiality of photography are significant in helping us trace associations between people, media, and technologies. Indeed, scholars who focus on the materiality of photographs stress the fact that photographs “occupy spaces, move into different spaces, following lines of passage and usage that project them through the world”
While “thinking materially about photography encompasses processes of intention, making, distributing, consuming, using, discarding and recycling, all of which impact on the way in which photographs as images are understood,” (Edwards & Hart, 2004, p.1) focusing on the actors involved in these processes also leads to important and critical reflections on how photographs are understood. Rather than viewing the shift to digital photography as a rupture in terms of creative and meaning-making practices, this dissertation illustrates that spaces of encounter – whether they be the gallery space or online space – are always spaces that are shaped (or perhaps haunted) by actors that condition how the past is made sense of in the present.

The future of vernacular photography is anything but certain. The ubiquity of recording devices means that more and more of our everyday experiences are documented in photographs. However, the material precarity of these images as they are stored on chips, drives, and clouds, means that they may not be accessible in a decade, let alone in a generation. The challenges of preserving digital images are being taken up by museum and archival professionals (see, for example, Bushey, 2014). As research continues in this area, recognizing technological change is critical, but so too is acknowledging how meaning-making practices adapt and evolve.

Existing research that focuses on how changes in media may damage memory and memory practices can overlook the iterative and networked nature of memory work. These types of research narratives tend to follow a linear narrative of decline (Zerubavel, 2003) where the supposedly enduring traditions of the past are overwhelmed by global flows of people, capital, media, and technologies. Considering network approaches when conducting research into memory and media helps to keep an open perspective – the shape of the research narrative is not pre-determined before the researcher begins his or her work. While there are, of course, subjective influences that temper a researcher’s interactions with material, being open to following actors where they lead can and does allow for enriched understandings of a topic, field, or subject. Following actors can make the construction of a research narrative more difficult as plotting the trajectories of those actors based on their traces does not necessarily correspond with a story that has a distinct beginning, middle, and end. However, with network approaches,
a researcher can consider which gap or exit point to begin his or her own research story with the knowledge that his or her story is just one of many that could be told. Rather than a pioneering individual making discoveries in a new field, the researcher who considers network approaches is himself or herself situated within assembling and reassembling networks of actors where meaning is continually being transformed, translated, and modified.
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Appendix.

Interview Guide Example – Lorie Novak

For each interview I conducted, I developed an interview guide that included specific questions based on the individual’s experience, publications, and interests. The interviews themselves were intended to be topical accounts of practice lead by the interviewee’s personal interests prompted by the interview questions (Bertaux & Bertaux-Wiame, 1981; Swidler, 2001). With this in mind, I developed interview guides with questions and prompts that I could refer to in order to encourage the interviewee to share their thoughts and experiences. While not all questions on the interview guides were addressed in the interviews owing to time and the individual interests of the participants, the interview guides were valuable tools in preparing for the interviews and ensuring relevant research topics were emphasized. Having specific questions as prompts helped me to engage with interviewees and allowed space for interviewees to explore their own areas of interest rather than following a prescriptive list of questions. Below is the interview guide created for Lorie Novak’s interview.

Lorie Novak Interview Guide

Project

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today – I very much appreciate it and I know that the insights you might be willing to offer will help me reflect as a continue to work on my project. What I’m working on right now is trying to investigate how historical vernacular photographs – primarily those made before the digital era – circulate today and how they might be used in contemporary artistic and memory project. I’m particularly interested in your work on Collected Visions, the process of exhibiting it at the International Center of Photography as well as its continued online life following the exhibitions in the early 2000s. My interest in vernacular photography, and in particular contemporary creative memory projects, I think lies in the fact that vernacular images are both ordinary and extraordinary – present but not present in formal archives and such, but treasured privately and cautiously shared publicly. I’m really interested in vernacular photography projects that accumulate memory and can be used in the future. So while certain types of media allow for important and affective engagement during their exhibition or circulation, I’m trying to understand and describe what I think is a contemporary trend in memory projects of thinking about how memory might be opened for the future – how particular projects are presented as possible exchange spaces and site of possibility.
**Background Information & Post-Memory**

To start today, I was wondering if you could say a little about your background as a photographer and an artist.

You’ve mentioned how you’re work and thinking is influenced by writing that Marianne Hirsch has done on memory and her writing about your work. One of Hirsch’s most important contributions is the idea of ‘postmemory’ and I’m wondering how you define post-memory in your work and practices?

Similarly – what does vernacular photography mean to you?

When I look at your extensive body of work, I sort of see a trend from working with your own family images and personal images, incorporating other people’s family images, and now more public media. Could you talk about the relationship you see between the private and the public when it comes to memory and I think more specifically about sharing memory?

**Projects**

In some of your work in the early 1990s (like *Fragments*) you’re sort of playing with ideas around collage and composites, whereas now, I sort of see a trend towards maneuvering through different creative practices as a way of contending with an accumulating archives – projects like *Reverb* and *Random Interference* and Photographic Interference.

Could you talk about how your work bridges or blurs boundaries between private and public memory?

I’m also very interested in the way that you are documenting *Random Interference* – so it’s move from your studio to *Photoville* and the sort of the material and physical performative aspects of this work.

**Process**

Much of your work draws on collages and composites of historical images – both public and personal. How do you identify, collect, organize these images? Make decisions about what to include in your projects?

Your work also draws heavily on your own family archive – are you the caretaker for these images? Do you organize, consult these images differently than the public/historical archive you’ve created/developed? Are there certain images you that you return to (like the image of you as a child on the mantel)?

You have worked quite extensively with projected images and projection – could you talk about how you make decisions around particular media? Here I’m thinking about when and how your choose particular media as an idea develops for you?

Are there particular media that your prefer not to work with? Media that you would like to work with but haven’t yet had the opportunity to?
Collected Visions

This project that is now approaching two decades, when you first began this project could you talk about your expectations for it at the time and your inspiration for the project? How did you identify the people that contributed images and oral histories?

How did the Collected Visions I, 1993-94 show in Houston – it was a commission? Act as a precursor to the 1996 web project and the 2000 exhibitions at ICP and elsewhere?

You’ve described Collected Visions as interactive storytelling. Can you talk about storytelling and narrative in your work: what benefits are there, what limitations are there to thinking in narrative ways?

Do you see or conceive of particular boundaries between the different iterations of the project – the Houston show, Collected Visions on the web….

Can you talk about the experience of working with the International Center of Photography? What was it about this venue that seemed appropriate for your work?

Can you talk about the importance of sensory experience in developing this exhibit – here I’m thinking about the decisions around sound and music. What was the impetus to work with Elizabeth Brown?

How does working in a particular space affect the way you develop an exhibition? Is it lead by the media you produce and adapted to fit a particular space or do you consider the space first that condition how you will use certain media?

I’ve read the piece “Digital Technology Replaces Slide Projectors in the New Collected Visions Installation” – and that has been helpful thinking about the technical affordances of digital technologies. I’m wondering though if you could talk about what spurred your decision to shift technologies – was it the opportunity to collaborate with Jonathan Meyer? How did this come about?

With the software created for the work – were you present in the gallery manipulating the program to produce certain effects based on viewers? Were there people trained to use the software? What I’m interested in here are the performative aspects of this piece in its particular locations.

Collected Visions on the Web

Can you talk about the place of fictional stories in Collected Visions on the web, viewers/participants who selected different images and develop a narrative around these images – you have a section called: “Beyond Description”

With this possibility of imagined memories with Collected Visions, how important was it to allow anonymous submissions? Could you talk about how you decided to offer participants the opportunity to identify themselves versus remaining unidentified publicly?

How did you develop the different categories and keywords to search by on the Collected Visions site? Who tags the images with keywords? Can people who upload images do this when they submit or does someone review the images?
As you were working on the project did you have the intention to develop it into an exhibition? An on-line exhibition?

These two media expressions are very different – how did you make decisions about creative control (ie how you would manipulate images in the installation v. how people would be able to manipulate the images online)?

Are people still actively contributing? Do people ever want images removed?

Can you tell who is contributing and where people are from?

You note in several of the galleries that people are far more likely to use other people’s pictures to tell stories than to use their own. Has this changed over time as technology becomes more effective in terms of being able to (scan and) share digital photos?

Is the Collected Visions museum a way of documenting exhibitions that have taken place in physical galleries? What (if there are ways of documenting exhibition practices) do you use to record the process and exhibitions? Is this important to your work or do you focus on the experiential sense of being there?

You have school or community projects, for lack of a better term (from Calgary, Monterrey, etc.) Was there something specific that led to these “local” contributions?

This idea of collaborative, almost crowd-sourced storytelling, can you speak about how you know that an idea like this has run it’s course in a way, that you become more interested in working on different things? Now it seems like you’re really engaging with ideas less around collage and composite or overlapping images and more with ideas around accumulation and remembering….

I guess an underlying question I have here about Collected Visions: is it more of methodology than a particular exhibition or series of related exhibitions?

New Media

What is your take on (social) media platforms like Tumblr that allow for image sharing? Here in particular I’m thinking of the Dear Photograph site

With the potential of the internet to act as a new crowd source platform, do you think that these new opportunities to share photographs (like Instagram and Tumblr sites, for example: Dear Photograph and Of Another Fashion) allow for people to engage with images or does it instrumentalize the experience as in, you must create a certain type of file and fit it in a certain type of format?

With people increasingly capturing experiences and producing digital images, where do you think vernacular photography and memory might look like in the future? What are you watching as you anticipate these changes?