

**BEING AGAINST DISAPPEARANCE:
A PHOTOGRAPHIC INQUIRY THROUGH AN A/R/TOGRAPHIC LENS**

by

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I seek to understand how creative engagement with photo-based memory work might evoke meaningful experiences of teaching, learning, and making and provoke critical, contemporary conversations on ethics in photography and art education. Drawing on my experiences as a photo educator, art teacher educator, curator, and photographer, I situate this study as a photographic inquiry through an a/r/tographic lens, considering the ways photo-based memory work might be generative as an artistic, emotive practice and a pedagogical possibility with ethical implications.

I explore my research question alongside a creative community of practice, a group of artists and educators who came together after a course I taught at UBC in 2015, *EDCP 405 Visual Arts for Classroom Practice: New Media and Digital Processes*. To consider the potential of photo-based memory work and visual lifewriting, we participated in a group exhibition entitled *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*, an exhibit from May 20th – August 25th, 2016 at UBC's Liu Institute Lobby Gallery. This exhibition offered thirty-six photographs and one sculpture, highlighting a series of juxtaposed viewpoints on the concept of disappearance from eight unique visual perspectives.

As a/r/tographic artifacts, I studied closely the artwork and writing from the show and a series of generative conversations from focus groups and individual interviews for their nuance and narrative. Threading together my poetic observations, our artwork, artist statements, and conversational excerpts, I present the data in the creative form of a lexicon: a fragmented, alphabetical whole that gestures towards an emergent a/r/tographic language for photography.

In an extended act of *tracing pedagogy beyond classrooms*, my research suggests the vibrant potential of a/r/tography for bringing artists and educators together beyond coursework to engage in collaborative art making projects that materialize as significant experiential learning events. New a/r/tographic understandings emerge from this study in a series of artful propositions based on offerings around the notion of *trace*, expanding vocabularies of possibility for photo-based memory work. This study illuminates the lexicon and exhibition as promising artistic forms for photographic theory, practice, and creation and highlights the potency of a/r/tography as a creative research methodology of potential.

Lay Summary

In this dissertation, I seek to understand how creative engagement with photo-based memory work might evoke meaningful experiences of teaching, learning, and art making and provoke critical, contemporary conversations on ethics in photography and art education. Drawing on my experiences as a teacher, artist, and curator, I present this research as a photographic inquiry grounded in a/r/tography.

Alongside a community of artists and educators who met in a photography course, this study explores artistic possibilities emerging from our 2016 exhibition, *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory* at UBC's Liu Institute Lobby Gallery. This exhibition offered thirty-six photographs and one sculpture, highlighting eight viewpoints on disappearance. The data (interviews, artwork, and observations) are presented in the creative form of a lexicon. This research suggests the vibrant potential of teachers and artists collaborating through a/r/tography, offering new ideas and language for photo-based memory work, including a series of eight artful propositions.

Preface

Author & Original Artwork

This dissertation is an original, unpublished, and independent contribution by the author and artist, Blake E. Smith. It includes original artwork in a series of digital photographs presented in the dissertation with permission.

I conceptualized, designed, and carried out the research with support from my committee and was responsible for the analysis and writing of this dissertation, which was completed with thoughtful guidance from my supervisor, Dr. Rita L. Irwin. Additionally, I received support for interview transcription from Rev.com and Amber Lum.

In addition to myself, seven research participants contributed to the content of this dissertation through research conversations and their participation in an exhibition, including: *Paul Best, Hari Im, Niloofar Miry, Kathleen Nash, Matthew Sinclair, Andrew Smith, and Joanne Ursino*. They have all granted permission for the reproduction of their artwork and interviews and have reviewed this dissertation.

Publications

A version of the writing in Chapter 6 is published, for the lexicon letters V & W in the section entitled “Visual Lifewriting as Memoir | *Collecting Photographs in the Wake of Lived Experience* | *The Work of Blake Smith*,” in Smith, B. (2018). Revisiting *The Visual Memoir Project: (Still) searching for an art of memory*. In A. Lasczik Cutcher & R. L. Irwin (Eds.) *The flâneur and education research: A metaphor for knowing, being ethical and new data production* (pp. 63-92). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan. An adapted version of that chapter was first published in the *Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education Journal* (see [Smith, 2015](#)) and was reprinted with permission. All photographs by Blake Smith in both publications and the dissertation are original artworks by the author who retains copyright. Other images by research participants in the dissertation are also original artworks and are part of the study.

Ethics

This research was conducted with the approval of The University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board under certificate # H15 – 00327 and was granted a Minimal Risk status.

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A huge caffeinated thank you to Turks Coffee (and their baristas) on Commercial Drive in Vancouver where much of my early dissertation drafts were written, usually in the evening hours over a rooibos fog or decaf Americano. Thank you for providing the music, ambiance, space, conversations, and warm chocolate banana bread to write part of this dissertation.

Thank you to all of my extended family members who have shown your support over the years, especially to my aunts, Susan Corbin and Donna Thomas, for your generous love, laughter, and care for my spirit. A special thank you to Dr. Angela Shiflet for your advising towards my dissertation. A very loving thank you to my wonderful grandparents watching from above: Nana, Pop, Bob, and Nanny. I wish you were still here. A cuddly thank you to three sweet, silly doggies who made the journey so much more fun and endearing: my beloved Kaylah, Sandi, and Riley.

Last and most certainly not least, my family. A heartfelt thank you to my sister Lindsay Smith for your wisdom, understanding, and care for my endeavors and dreams. You have been there through it all, showing support not only for me as a graduate student but always as a sister.

With grace and deep gratitude, I extend *the most important thank you of all* to my loving, caring parents, Robert and Cindy Smith. You have stood unwaveringly by my side since the beginning and to the very end. Along with Lindsay, this accomplishment is shared with both of you. A special thank you to my mother for reading parts of my dissertation, for inspiring me to become a teacher, and to my parents for allowing me the time and space to finish writing my dissertation from the comfort of home. Your unending support, impactful life teachings, encouragement, laughter, and great love are etched upon my heart in ways words cannot fully express. *Thank you.*

Dedication



Fig. 1 | By Blake Smith, *Pop's camera, photographed inside a 'DIY' diffusion box in the course EDCP 405*

To the memory of my beloved late grandfather, **Richard J. Sturm**, who passed away October 18th, 2018 in Atlanta, Georgia. Pop was a beautiful influence on my life and wanted to see me graduate. We had a special bond through photography and vintage cameras. He shot Polaroids of us when we were little and gave me the oldest camera I have, possibly used by him in WWII (pictured above, Fig. 1). The memory of his kindness, love, sense of humor, and encouragement left a lingering sense of hope as I wrote during the final mile, progress made in his honor. I dedicate my dissertation to him.

Pop is dearly missed. He is here in spirit, along with nine other individuals who passed away during my doctoral studies, to whom I also dedicate this work. They include: Don Smith, Barry Gray, Dr. Carl Leggo, Helen Morrison, Steven Morrison, Evelyn Burnett, Christopher Long, Dr. Don Krug, and Canadian artist Gordon Smith. It is my sincere hope that this composition is something they all would have found pleasure and pride in reading.

~

And finally, I offer a special, endearing dedication to all of the smart, talented, ambitious, fabulous, overworked, and fragile graduate students out there who may be writing and may be struggling right now. Know that, despite moments of self-doubt, often being alone, fatigue, and real challenges including mental health, incredible triumphs are possible if you have confidence, a supportive team, and can **just keep going the distance**. This moment is a marathon, a milestone, and a majestic mystery to unfold—one that requires great courage, writing from the heart, and rising when you fall. *Keep rising*. May you stay healthy, stay passionate, stay vulnerable, stay resilient, and always, always **stay you**.

Prologue



Fig. 2 | By Blake Smith, Untitled

*A photographic inquiry of loss and hope,
this project began a very long time ago
as a visceral longing for visual language
and a poetics of pictures.*

*Over time it has become
a durational portrait
of seeing, feeling, knowing, being, learning
and the tender breaths
that linger in-between.*

*An artistic offering towards
a pedagogy and poetry of images,
this dissertation is both breath and longing.
Through a series of gestures exploring creative possibility,
I share with you this extended field note on a photographic education.*

Chapter 1

On Photography: An Introduction



Fig. 3 | By Blake Smith, *Page spread from one of my visual journals, juxtaposing an image by a favorite artist (Ishiuchi Miyako) with a favorite quote by Piero Ferrucci:*

We will look at people's lives in motion – and see that their goal is the self. Each one moves forward in a different way, and each has a different path. The analogy of a path is accurate, for it reminds us that we are all in the process of becoming. We may of course, crystallize. At times, however, we move forward, make discoveries, and change. We venture into unknown territories, looking for something we long for without knowing – and yet recognize it the moment we encounter it. During our search we may come up against obstacles. As anyone who sets out on a long, arduous journey, we may lose our way, grow weary, become disheartened. And perhaps fail.

Piero Ferrucci, *Inevitable grace: Breakthroughs in the lives of great men and women: Guides to your self-realization* (1990, p. 6)

Birthplaces of an Inquiry: My Why

This research is born out of my years as a photographer, a high school photography teacher in the United States, and a university photography instructor in Canada. It draws on my experiences of being behind the lens and in front of the classroom. Both entail ways of seeing and shaping the world – one through pictures, the other through pedagogy. Bringing these two worlds together as an artist and a teacher means these roles have become beautifully and intricately intertwined: the making of art, the art of teaching, and the teaching of photography have become one. My life as a photographer comes alongside my life as a teacher to create a diptych, a single image of two parts – one woman walking with two different shoes. Thus, teaching becomes artful and art becomes pedagogical.

At times, themes and interests from my photographic inquiries have found their way into classroom assignments, and some classroom assignments have come to inspire new photography, including work in this dissertation. I admire and embrace this back and forth dance of teaching and art. I appreciate how they parallel, arc, and intersect. I enjoy how they share a language of creativity, emotivity, and self-expression, and how they have taught me to *see* and, as a teacher, have taught others how to see. This dialogic exchange of meaningful content and visual material has provided rich opportunities to bridge my teaching work with my artwork. As well, I explore similar topics across multiple creative spaces and media, sharing with my students that their teacher is also an artist, also still learning.

As evidence of ‘still learning,’ this dissertation seeks to deepen understandings around the educative potential of photography in the context of memory work.¹ This work brings forward both a teaching and an artistic practice alongside a research practice in a project of *a/r/tography* (Irwin & deCosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzaouasis, 2008). My writing tone and the contemplative manner of this work intentionally reflect and imbue narrative and lifewriting, aspiring to connect with readers with more intimacy and less distance (Karr, 2015; Leggo, 2008; Palmer, 2017; Roorbach, 2008). To commence this story is to begin at the end of another, a postscript for a journey made: the end of research, the end of a community coming together, the end of a photographer’s narrative. It is an end, a closure, shaped by a tender letting go, so that another moment can be held while appreciating what came before. It is also a heartfelt moment of long

¹ For projects and methods that involve returning to places, objects, or memories of the past, using memory as source material for artwork, or narrating the autobiographical self, be it past or present, this type of work might be considered a form of ‘memory work.’ There are many variations and likely other interpretations of this phrase which is broad yet not all-encompassing of what, artistically, the ‘work of memory’ might look like or be.

reflective pause, the time for new beginnings to emerge, and a chance to look back over my shoulder at a path travelled in order to tell the story as I have experienced it. In this case, in the company of seven others who meaningfully walked alongside. This photographer's narrative is also theirs.

As a way of describing to readers who I am and how and why I come to this research, I wish to share a key backstory – two, in fact – that shape the development and initiative behind this research agenda and illustrate some of the pulls that inspired the study. I do so to create a personalized frame around this dissertation and introduce myself as someone emotionally and subjectively invested in the research and what may come of it. Further, I position this inquiry as one that has been long in the making, as noted in the Prologue. It is a *living inquiry* (Irwin & deCosson, 2004; Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, & Belliveau, 2018; Meyer, 2010; Springgay, Irwin, & Wilson Kind, 2005), born from my experiences with pictures, pedagogy, practice, and pain. As such, it is quite personal, intimate, and autobiographical. At the same time, it seeks connections to the lives and autobiographies of others also involved in teaching, learning, and photography.

As I seek linkages from teaching and art to this research, I am reminded that certain through-lines are present from years of teaching as well as present in my own artwork, suggesting the significance of the things that never seem to leave us – ideas, desires, imagery, dreams, themes, and longings we wear like second skin. At the heart of this project is something I have stayed with for many years: *photo-based memory work*, or photographic inquiry that seeks to explore, document, creatively respond to, and/or invite memory as subject matter and inspiration for art making. From the projects assigned to my students to the learning gained from my own teachers to personal photographic inquiries, I notice there is a curious presence around and artistic commitment to this kind of work over time again and again – always photography as my anchor – suggesting the importance of such through-lines in the life of an artist who teaches. Here, that curiosity and commitment to photo-based memory work are brought into the realm and context of arts-based research in order to further explore its dynamics, potential, concerns, affect, edges, and reach.

Noteworthy influences upon this work are other artists whose artwork and practices have come to shape my own. Their names and sometimes their exhibitions are presented in different moments throughout the dissertation as a way of bringing them alongside. In most cases, I have hyperlinked their names and/or work² and other key references as a deliberate citational practice

² To support my citational practice and archive existing URL's (Uniform Resource Locator), see **Appendix A** for a complete **List of Hyperlinks** included in this dissertation. They are active links as of December 2020.

of sharing key information and as a way of enacting the artistic and scholarly act of tracing that I write of as important in this piece by way of *tracing and archiving pedagogy beyond rooms*.

In time, as I have found interest in certain artists³, artworks, exhibitions, or themes, they have influenced my decision-making, photographic inquiries, writing practice, research, and classroom offerings as sources of inspiration and assignments for students. As well, their influence on this dissertation is evident. Interested in photography as a form of autobiography (Adams, 2000; Miyako, 2005 a&b; Sinner & Owen, 2011; Smith, 2018; Weston, 2000/1990; Wolfe, 2007) and a visual expression of lived experience, the projects I tend to assign and enjoy taking on are of the storytelling, self-reflective kind. Some examples from my teaching include: *photo essays and poetry on home and beloveds*, *documentations of the urban and domestic landscape*, *everyday photography*, *self-portraits as extended images*, *photowalks with memory*, *still life photography of personal mementos*, and *The Visual Story Corps Project*⁴.

In addition to projects like these, in all levels of photography education, I invite students to explore and interpret their assignments through a variety of *themes* such as these mentioned or other self-directed themes they wish to explore, a method I found to be highly productive, generative, and freeing in its capacity for open-ended interpretation and creative control for students. This is a way I like working as well.

This study and the exhibition at its core take on a similar approach. As a teacher, I place a chosen emphasis on the artistry of photography alongside a mastery of technique, always urging the narrative and narrator to come through while pushing for creativity, originality, and risk-taking. The assignments I give ask students to dig deep, photograph with intention, and share (to their own level of comfort) aspects of their personal lives in the classroom to varying degrees, being

³ Three of those artists influenced my understanding and practice of photo-based memory work and are discussed as key inspirations throughout the dissertation: *Ishiuchi Miyako*, *Alfredo Jaar*, and *Byron Wolfe*. A more detailed list of influential artists is described in Chapter 6, under letter A, Artists of Inspiration.

⁴ I designed The Visual StoryCorps Project for my advanced high school photography students as a portrait assignment, inspired by National Public Radio's popular interview series called [StoryCorps](#), the largest oral history project in The United States. People interview important individuals in their lives, and the interviews are archived at The American Folklife Center in The Library of Congress. In my project, students were invited to create portraits of influential people in their lives and/or their loved ones along with conduct an interview to get to know their subject on a deeper level, presenting both the photograph and interview text* together as their final submission. This became a district-wide collaborative photo project and exhibition that I organized and curated in Peoria Unified School District in Peoria, Arizona for the participating local high school advanced photography classes. The final works were stunning and moving. *The idea of presenting interview text alongside the portrait (and combining interviews with photographs) was inspired by Palestinian American artist Emily Jacir's project [Where We Come From \(2001-2003\)](#). For her project, Jacir, who has an American passport and can move freely in Israel, asked exiled Palestinians the question: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" then went on to carry out those tasks for them, documenting her actions and experiences through photography. I encountered her work in that series in an installation at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), which included large-size color photographs alongside interview text printed in two languages side by side.

encouraged to explore photography's potential for visual narration, life telling, and showing what/how you see.

It seems students of mine were, at times, being asked to write their lives into pictures in a similar way that I write my own, something that directly reflects the photographic practice of visual lifewriting⁵ (Sinner & Owen, 2011), a key method in the study. As I look back and remember the pedagogical paths I have walked over the years, I can see that these projects I assigned often centered around memory, identity, and students' lived experiences, things I understood but had not fully explored or researched at the time, beyond the rich research of lived teaching experience. In a way, this became a kind of teaching philosophy – to seek out the meaning and memories that shaped students' lives, to use the camera as a way of expressing the soul, and to teach them how to see the world by first learning to see themselves. *I wanted to open their eyes.*

Reflectively, this perspective is most informed by two things: one, my own artistic practice which includes a multi-year personal photographic inquiry around memory, hope, and loss, entitled *The Visual Memoir Project* (Smith 2018/2015), presented in a series of everyday photographs as part of this study; and two, lived experiences of school, art, and life. These experiences include my own photographic education, starting with high school photography classes and marked by the influence of key photo teachers along the way⁶ who have continued to expand my understandings of what photography can be or might be. I share this to say that my ongoing love affair with and commitment to photography was sparked by influential others along the way. As great teachers tend to do, their love inspired mine.

⁵ Throughout the dissertation, I use the terms 'lifewriting' and 'visual lifewriting' without the separation of life + writing, following in the footsteps of my mentor Carl Leggo and how he spelled it [see Leggo (2019b) Lifewriting – A poet's cautionary tale (2010)]. In doing so, I acknowledge that throughout much of the literature, it is spelled 'life writing,' with the separation. As my first introduction to the method and practice, Sinner and Owen (2011) spell it: 'visual life writing,' separating all three words. I am unclear if one or the other is 'correct' and may one day change course. For now, I follow Leggo's lead.

⁶ The influential photography teachers I refer to include: Michelle Van Parys of the College of Charleston, Charleston, SC; Christian Widmer and Aaron Rothman both formerly of Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona; and Susan Staggs of Lakeside High School, Atlanta, GA, who first introduced me to the darkroom and my first 35mm camera. Furthermore, and although he was not my teacher, someone who taught me in other ways through his beautiful photography is [Byron Wolfe](#) of Temple University, cited throughout this dissertation as a key influence visually and conceptually, particularly in my own memoir series.

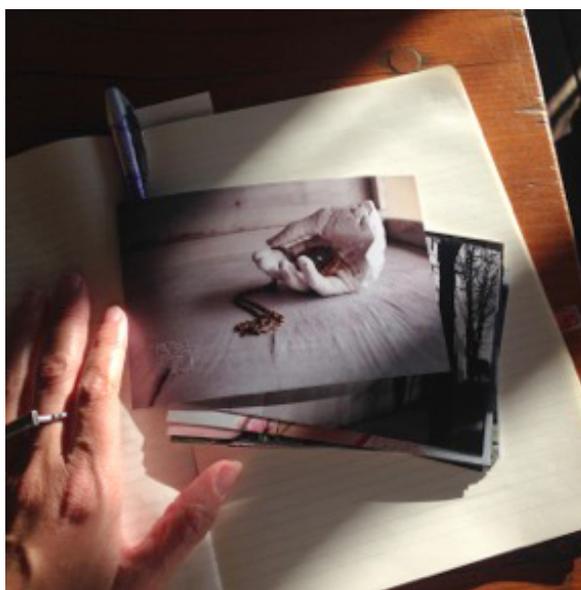


Fig. 4 | By Blake Smith, *Photograph of a photograph from my first a/r/tography series on loss: an image of my grandmother's locket held in a plaster cast of my hand at age 18.*

In my work as a photographer and adjacent to the work of memory, a significant theme that has stayed with me across all of my years is *loss*, finding its way into photographs, poetry (Smith, 2014), teaching, research, and curation and is an anchoring theme in this study. Drawn to loss for reasons both within and beyond my grasp, it is a concept and feeling that haunts my creative imagination and compels me to take pictures as a way of being against the loss of all that is loved and held dear. Like many others, I have experienced great loss and have grieved those losses over time and through photography, as pictures sometimes help to alleviate the pain. Lewko (2014), a teacher who has also experienced loss, writes compellingly about the contemplation of loss in the face of a student's death, speaking to the ways a teacher might carry it:

My students carry loss with them in their migration to new lands, and I also carry loss with me as I migrate from pedagogical landscape to heart landscape in my own teaching...I live with experiences of loss, which at times pulls my heart into unknown depths of despair and fear. The past and the present together form a more complete understanding of how living perceptively in loss will revive the will to tell the story in places far from apprehension. (p. 168)

As a kind of memory work, doing photography around loss upon, as Lewko (2004) calls it, the “heart landscape” (p. 168), is a tender and sometimes tearful process. Yet, it can also be healing as I am able to create an archive of remembrance that both honors and speaks back to loss. Each photograph is a holding on and a letting go, with a knowing that things photographed are no longer as they once were and in some cases are now gone and have disappeared. Photography extends *the memory of*.

I first began to address loss, memory, and displacement (Golparian, 2013) photographically in an a/r/tography course at The University of British Columbia with Dr. Rita L. Irwin. That course was a noteworthy moment in my learning journey that, in many ways, led to the research presented here. Through a series of photographs of personal mementos, I engaged in an a/r/tographic search for home as I sought to engage a poetics of loss through photography (see Smith, 2014). The significance of that course and my introduction to a/r/tography is important to note, part of my *why*, for it marked a shaping of an understanding about what research could be, how artistic practice could be integral to research creation, and why the heart of it matters.

Fresh to graduate school, my eyes and heart were opened in that class. I felt safe to dare, encouraged to create, and inspired to learn more. My work and experience as a teacher could come alongside my art and become research. All three practices were intertwined and intermeshed, yet each bore its own identity. This was so intriguing as a new scholar and so inspiring as an artist: the ideas of exploring education through artistic practice and writing about art by making art.

I identified both loss and the idea of engaging memory photographically as source material for art making as themes significant in my artistic work early on, which has led to continued thinking into photography's autobiographical capacity. That thinking is continued here throughout this dissertation. Over time, those themes have been explored through photography and poetry in numerous projects as my explorations and interpretations of this methodology.

Sharing all of this information is a way of building context – becoming as a teacher, being passionate about photography, and coming to understand loss – and is to say that this research represents a very personal project close to my heart that is intimately connected to my lived experiences as a teacher, a photographer, and a human being. In a way, this dissertation *is* a significant chapter in my visual memoir, including pages as the lives of others who became written into this story through their participation, artwork, and shared commitment to this work. To do qualitative, arts-based research of this nature means using experiences, understandings, memories, and challenges from my own life and vocation as a way of framing an inquiry that stems directly from it. I have lived this inquiry, in one way or another, for likely twenty-plus years, through various pedagogical wonderings and poetic iterations, almost all of them photographic. Over the years, it seems these themes and I (memory, loss) have never let each other go. As such, this study presented a unique opportunity to carry forward into research some of the lingering, nagging, and important questions I have had as both a teacher and a photographer, questions that intend to stay grounded in the work of teaching and the work of photography throughout this work.

Research Question

At the heart of this research is an inquiry about the creative and disruptive potential of photo-based memory work within a frame of disappearance. I address this inquiry by the following two-part research question towards memory work in the contexts of photography education, practice, and research:

*How can creative engagement with photo-based memory work, including visual lifewriting:
a) evoke meaningful experiences of teaching, learning, and making art; and
b) provoke contemporary, critical conversations about ethics in art and photo education?*

As described on the previous pages, my research question emerges from a trifold place of practice, teaching, and life experiences and attempts to explore further the themes aforementioned that continue to beckon my scholarly and creative attention. This study considers the research question from multiple practice-based viewpoints: *artist, teacher, researcher, as well as curator* (all roles I have experienced and roles some of my participants identify with as well). It also addresses some of the complexities, uniqueness, artistry, ethics, and pedagogical potential around memory work through photography. In my research question, I include teaching, learning, and making as three related practices in order to study the lives of teachers, learners, and artists who engage in all three practices. In this way, I consider them a/r/tographically meshed and in relation to one another. This move draws on the way my life as a teacher, learner, and artist is positively entangled and forever all three. As such, the study was designed to explore all of these practices in a way that might mirror and illuminate the bright, vivacious, and interlaced threads of this entanglement.

I addressed the research question by carrying out an a/r/tographic study over the course of one year and a half (from 2015 to 2016), as I worked with a group of seven adult artists and art educators, myself included, making a group of eight, who are all photographers and met earlier in a course I taught on photography and new media, discussed next. We formed a small creative community of practice, conducted interviews, shared stories, and broke bread, united by a shared commitment to and interest in photography, teaching, and learning. Our main accomplishment and the focus of this dissertation was the production of a group photography exhibition entitled *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*, held May 20, 2016-August 25, 2016. We presented our work in The Lobby Gallery at The Liu Institute for Global Issues on the Vancouver campus of The University of British Columbia, the place where all of us attended school and the gallery where I was a curator. The images and didactics (wall text) from this exhibition are presented in Chapter 5, and a creative analysis of the exhibition and study is presented in Chapter 6 in 'A Lexicon for *Against Disappearance*.' Alongside the interviews, both individual and group, each participant created and exhibited artwork and wrote an artist statement. These creations

represent the key visual data for the study and emphasize art making and the art exhibition process as the sharing and production of new knowledge *for* and *as* artistic research.

Through creative engagement, this a/r/tographic research study seeks to understand, deepen, and expand current notions of pedagogical and artistic possibilities around photo-based memory work through the vehicles of meaningful experience, research conversations, art making (namely photography), and the curation and production of a group photography exhibition. By exploring the educational value of an exhibition as both a professional and personal development opportunity for teachers as well as a significant learning event, I consider: 1) the creative and disruptive potential of photo-based memory work; 2) some of its artistic, pedagogical, and ethical implications; and 3) how this kind of work might be made meaningful to artists, visual researchers, a/r/tographers, curators, and teachers (and, therefore, potentially their students).

The methodology and approach of a/r/tography allowed me to study the ways art teachers and/as visual artists engage creatively with photo-based memory work, as I was interested in studying their creations as well as understanding their perspectives, processes, stories, and critiques. Doing so addresses both parts to my research question and helps to gain deeper insights into practicing artists' and art teachers' perspectives and lived experiences in Canada of teaching, learning, and making art, specifically digital photography. It also invites me to consider how and if they negotiate ethics in their practices and in what ways. As such, I sought to discover a unique photographic window into their worlds.

Another Backstory | The Course EDCP 405 Visual Arts for Classroom Practice:
New Media & Digital Processes

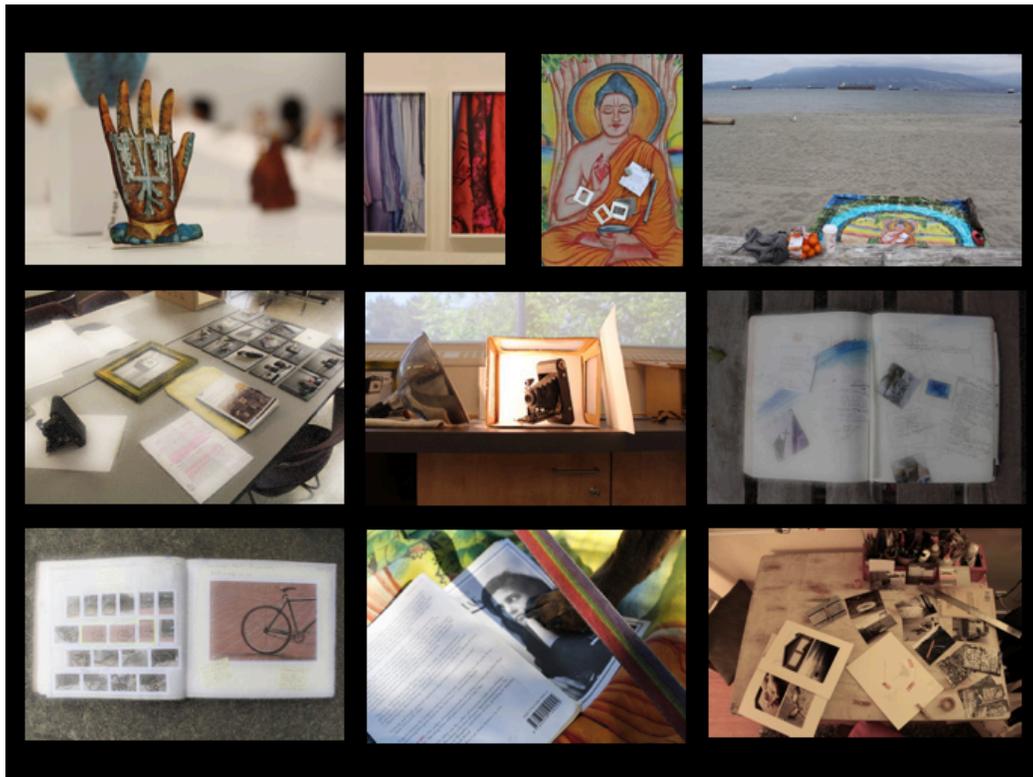


Fig. 5 | By Blake Smith, *A collection of images, including photos from the course EDCP 405 (July 2015)*

Before I proceed to a discussion of some of the relevant literature as another way of framing this study, it is important for readers to know the context in which the research group and I first met. It is a significant underpinning of note and gives way for a group to be born after a course has ended. Our research group first met in July in the summer of 2015 in a three-week course on photography and new media I taught at The University of British Columbia. Held in the Faculty of Education, it was entitled *EDCP 405 Visual Arts for Classroom Practice: New Media and Digital Processes*⁷. Situating this photography course as our beginning emphasizes the pedagogical nature of this study and highlights the shared duration of our journey as paramount. The course locates the place where our learning and relationships began, rooted in educational and photographic practice, as a significant context within this research backstory and marks a moment in the history of our making. This context also explains how a group of individuals with a shared love for photography came together after a university course to form a group that would later collaborate

⁷ A link to the online syllabus and course outline can be found on my current UBC teaching blog, [Awakening the Spirit](#) or by emailing me for a copy. [It is possible this blog may not be available post-graduation.]

on another project, this time a research study outside the classroom – *a photographic inquiry through an a/r/tographic lens*. As such, this study attempts to trace pedagogy beyond the bounds of the classroom where we first met and looks at an evolutionary process of learning, teaching, making, and becoming over time.

During those three weeks in the course, a group of photography students committed to evolving their practice as educators and artists explored the pedagogical and artistic possibilities of photography from multiple lenses, seeking connections from theory to practice. As a learning community, important foundational and relational groundwork was laid in the course that helped to shape the group that would later become research participants. Thus, it is important to share from the start the place where we began conversations on photography as a way to understand where we ended up. The experiences in the course in some ways informed our experiences of research, as both involve photographic inquiry and being part of a collective. Side by side and chronologically one just before the other, the course teaches learning and the research teaches learners, so they share a capacity for deepening understandings about the art and experience of a photographic education. Further, some of the themes (such as memory, loss, autobiography) and artists (such as Ishiuchi Miyako, Alfredo Jaar, and Byron Wolfe) from the course carried over into the research in a way that certain significant through-lines can be traced across both events, delineating a shared lineage of ideas, imagery, and intentionality.

These two experiences (the course and the research study) affected the relationships, project, and understandings that emerged, so it is fitting that one story is shared briefly before the other in order to situate a photography course context alongside a photography research context where both are concerned with the creative, transformative potential of teaching, learning, and making both with and through photography.

Looking at the notion of ‘Visual Arts for Classroom Practice’ (a phrase from the course title) as a doorway to possibility, in the course we considered how and in what ways to bring photography and new media arts into classrooms meaningfully, from elementary to post-secondary. We also considered together what topics, assignments, approaches, prompts, and artists might be relevant, creative, and promising for educators to engage with their students. For example, we read the work of Juan Carlos Castro (2007) on the fourth day of the course, given that his work considers “constraints that enable artistic inquiry” (p. 7). Further, we discussed some of the prompts he gives to high school photography students to encourage meaningful inquiry, such as: “*What would your self-portrait look like if you couldn’t include yourself directly?*” (p. 7), “*What places are significant to me?*”

(p. 12). And one I am quite drawn to for its connection to photography: “*If you were struck blind tomorrow, what vision of the world would you leave?*” (p. 9).

With a strong emphasis on photographic practice, we also spent time taking photographs, designing and carrying out personal inquiry projects, and going on photo-based excursions outside the classroom while embracing a hands-on, experiential, sharing-oriented, and self-directed approach. The offerings laid out to the students, including experienced teachers, teacher candidates, and artists included: rich classroom conversations and discussions, open studio time, hands-on demonstrations, photowalks, a scavenger hunt, learning bookmaking and visual journals from guest artist Joanne Ursino, photo-based memory work including a visual lifewriting project, introductions to the work of several artists, student-driven photographic inquiries, the opportunity to share their work with the class, and photo field trips to Spanish Banks and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Of important note are the two exhibitions our class saw together at the Vancouver Art Gallery that summer which, in some ways, later informed the shaping of this project. Together we saw: [*How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth? An Exhibition by Geoffrey Farmer*](#) from May 30, 2015–September 7, 2015 and [*Residue: The Persistence of the Real*](#) from June 12, 2015–September 27, 2015. Both exhibitions included memory, remembering, and photography as part of their offering, but addressed the topics in quite differing ways and media. As well as those activities, the course centered on a series of themes, relevant to this dissertation, including:

- ❖ Photography as a Practice: *Art, Teaching, & Research*
- ❖ The Photographer’s Currere
- ❖ Contemporary Issues for Photography Part 1: *The Ethics of Seeing/Being Seen*
- ❖ Contemporary Issues for Photography Part 2: *Teaching in the Era of the Selfie: Representation, Identity, & Online Exposure*
- ❖ Photography as Autobiography: *Exploring Pedagogical Possibilities for Visual Lifewriting & Memory*
- ❖ Photography Beyond School: *Participatory Photography & Community Art Projects*

The course themes, readings, and other assignments drew from contemporary literature⁸ as well as the emotional literature that emerges from lived experience. We exchanged tales of darkrooms and digital labs, teenagers, young children, and adults finding their way and learning to see, struggles and triumphs of teaching, the importance of nurturing creativity, what it meant as

⁸ Course readings for EDCP 405 included the following required and optional readings, included in my references. Further details and related activities are available on my course outline, linked in footnote 7: Allison (2009), Barrett (2011), Boyd (2007), Castro (2007), Cress (2012), [Dugan](#) (2012), [Durbin](#) (2014), Edwards (2007), Eldon & Eldon (1997), [Eldon](#) (n.d.), Green (2001), Gude (2010), Hart (2009), Hutzell (2007), Hyde (2005), Irwin (2018a), Jerome & Cran (2008), LeBlanc (2014), Leggo (2010), Levi Strauss (2012), Lykes (2010), Macdonald (2012), Michiko (2005), [New](#) (n.d.), O’Donoghue (2015), [PBS Art21 ‘Contemporary Approaches to Teaching’](#) (n.d.), Pinar (1975), Powell (2015), Purcell (2009), Rhoades (2012), Richmond (2004), Sontag (1977), Trafi-Prats (2012), Weston (2000), & Wolfe (2007).

adults to be in school/back in school, understanding the new B.C. visual arts curriculum⁹, and strategies for approaching curricula and teaching methods for both new and experienced teachers. We looked at photography as both a pedagogical endeavor and a vibrant creative practice for our students and for ourselves as evolving artists and educators.

In a beautiful shared learning experience, as their teacher I witnessed their growth, passions, and transformations over the course of three short weeks, being alongside each of their stories of coming to know the photograph and understand and embody their own photographic educations. I still remember standing on the beach at Spanish Banks on a field trip¹⁰ as each student embarked on a solo photowalk, camera in hand, as we practiced ‘walking our currere’ (Irwin, 2018a), some with bare feet. The sun was exceptionally hot that day, and together we basked in its golden light as the ocean tide rolled in, taking pictures, collecting found objects, and making memories in this expansive outdoor classroom by the sea. That day remains a cherished teachable moment from the course that I hold dear and marks a moment among many of impactful together-learning, evoked by photography and carried out in community.

~

The course came to an end in late July of 2015, and we parted ways. I invited everyone in the course and Joanne Ursino to take part in this study once the course was over and marks were submitted. My intention was to form a creative community of practice devoted to photography, centered on teaching, learning, and creation. Students were contacted via email with a ‘*Letter of Recruitment: Email Invitation*’ after ethics had been approved by the university. Six students out of nine in the course agreed to take part in the study along with Joanne and myself, forming a colorful group of eight¹¹. As reciprocity and incentive for taking part in the study, participants were invited to participate in a photography exhibition I was in the midst of planning at that time for The Lobby Gallery. This was an offering to create, collaborate, and exhibit our art (perhaps from the course or perhaps new work) in an on-campus interdisciplinary art gallery, which was a noteworthy motivating factor for participation and, later, became the main event of the study.

⁹ The new British Columbia Arts Education curriculum (specifically Visual Arts) can be viewed online [here](#).

¹⁰ The idea to walk and collect objects at Spanish Banks with my students was suggested to me by Canadian artist [Gordon Smith](#) (1919-2020) who used to take his UBC Art Education classes there, where students created artworks of found objects cast in plaster inside of shoeboxes. Although we did not use plaster, we did collect and discuss objects we found along the beach, including the ethics of taking things away versus leaving found materials behind.

¹¹ The eight participants included practicing art educators, art teacher candidates, art education graduate students, a visual art student, and students completing a diploma or other degree. They are further discussed in Chapter 4 in their biographies and under ‘Who-ness.’ All were students at UBC. All eight identify as artists and most identify as educators; during the course of this study we recognized and considered the many overlaps in these roles.

Set against tangerine summer skies above the Pacific Ocean, this story begins with the EDCP 405 course and ends with that exhibition, two bookends as significant creative learning events to a moving pedagogical experience about photography, centered around a group of photographers.

~

The next chapter presents a review of relevant literature in photography education and research in relation to this dissertation, presenting an expanse of perspectives, projects, and photographic endeavors, many engaged with youth. As an overview of the field, I present a collection of works by a selection of authors addressing six emergent themes. Together, these themes and the literature cited within each offer a unique, expansive view of how photography is being employed in schools, in research, in communities, and in other educative spaces and ways. The literature review in Chapter 2 accentuates photography from a practice-oriented perspective and intends to come alongside further theory and literature presented later in Chapter 3, which emphasizes a philosophically-oriented perspective towards the photograph.

Chapter 2

Photography in Educational Contexts: A Review



Fig. 6 | By Blake Smith, *Self-portrait in Gastown*

A Pedagogical & Practice-Oriented Perspective

To contextualize the value and relevance of the July 2015 course I taught, EDCP 405, and the significance of the photography exhibition within this study, I address some of the ways photography has been employed in existing and emerging literature from a pedagogical and practice-oriented perspective. Upon my review, I determined the need to address my research question in the form of an experiential study with art educators. In general, research in the field has not looked closely or specifically at the intersections of memory work, loss, autobiography, and ethics in the context of photography and/or photography education, specifically through the lens of practicing art educators and artists in a community of practice.

Thus, I conceptualized and carried out this research in order to attend to several noted gaps in the current literature regarding: 1) photo-based memory work and visual lifewriting being used in a photography classroom (Sinner & Owen, 2011), gallery, and/or research learning setting; 2) deeper understandings of ethics in art and photo education as well as photo-based research projects (Aldridge, 2012; Batsleer, 2011; Gil-Glazer, 2015; McAra, 2016); and 3) descriptive and narrative case studies of art teachers and artists learning, creating, and exhibiting together (Triggs, Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, & Xiong, 2011) – specifically around photo-based memory work. Using the exhibition as a dynamic pedagogical tool for co-learning, photographic inquiry, and the opportunity to address difficult knowledge in/through memory work, this study addresses these gaps through our collaborative endeavor.

As an original offering to art and photo education, this project centers the significant work and voices of eight art educators by highlighting our artistic contributions, distinct perspectives, and personal experiences in/as research. Furthermore, this research encourages and explores the possibilities of art educators and a/r/tographers exhibiting their work around critical, contemporary concepts (here, disappearance), another angle not widely addressed in the literature.

In order to appreciate the ways and reasons photography and photographic inquiry have been brought into classrooms, research agendas, and other educative spaces, I turn to the work of educators, researchers, and others who engage with the medium. As such, I consider photography's pedagogical capacities for knowledge formation in schools and elsewhere. By thinking through a literature-based and practice-based lens (Springgay, et al., 2008), I reflect on photography as an agent and archive of knowledge in the classroom (Furniss, 2019; Macdonald, 2012; Mitchell, Martin-Hamon, & Anderson, 2002) and other educative settings: as *agentic* to learning and part of the *archive* of one's understanding and creative expression, referring to both teachers and students. This consideration pairs nicely with the chapter that follows (Chapter 3). Some of the ideas carry

over, such as: how teachers might bring contemporary artists and contemporary ideas into the classroom and other learning/making contexts; what kinds of photo projects, methods, and subjects are prominent and under what umbrella themes; and if/how topics like ethics, seeing, loss, and memory are being addressed. Through this review, I frame ways photo educators, community pedagogues, researchers, and others have developed and engaged photo-based methods, curricular models, and practices in contemporary public educative spaces (such as secondary schools, alternative, and community-based settings). The literature referenced, in many but not all cases, is concerned with the education of youth.¹² This is a way of attending to my commitment to teaching and situating my interest in the relationship of young people to photography, which draws on my experience as a photo educator.

Finally, to address a noted stylistic and linguistic gap, the forms that make up the architecture of this dissertation address the need a more elaborate language for photography education, practice, and research. Through the exhibition (Chapter 5), lexicon (Chapter 6), and a series of offerings (Chapter 7) and propositions (Chapter 8) that end the dissertation, these forms offer poetic, thoughtful, and artistic research responses as an expression *of* and desire *for* new language. These forms expand and redefine current understandings of photographic inquiry, specifically in the vein of memory work and in the context of disappearance.

Literature on Photography

Photography and videography are both popular mediums being employed across teaching, art, community, research, and other platforms. Such employment involves various age groups and members. It also includes a wide variety of reasons and agendas in disciplines ranging from sociology to mental health and, here, in art and photo education. As well, there is ongoing interest in and gravitation towards what still and moving pictures can/not document, reveal, tell, archive, and show, particularly with regards to understanding and pictorializing lived experiences, using visual forms to narrate and visualize them. Youth and adults alike authentically engage in their own education and life narration in a number of ways, especially now on social media, as they and we explore, often through photography, the capacities, expressions, and constructions of identity via the 'self-portrait' (Dalton, 2010) in a number of interesting ways. Photography, then, is one

¹² For this inquiry, 'youth' is meant to encompass young people roughly ages ten to eighteen years old, in order to include middle and high school aged individuals – the primary age group I am interested in looking at in terms of their photographic education both inside and outside of schools and the group I have the most teaching experience with. Besides youth in that age range, a small number of models/practices with younger ages (below age ten) and older adults (over age eighteen) were reviewed but are not the main focus for this chapter.

compelling way *into* this process of coming to know, to see, and to share and understand the self and the experiences that shape and construct the self.

Understandably, the notion of participating and storytelling with/through image-making becomes a potential ethical area involving concerns around representation, power, and agency with regards to asking individuals to “give account of oneself” (Butler, 2005, p. 10), perhaps for the benefits or desiring eyes of others – teachers, researchers, public audiences, youth, communities, etc. In looking to how photo educators and visual researchers (Rose, 2012) develop, study, and engage photography as research, pedagogy, and visual methodology (Metcalf, 2016), we can see a range of directions teachers, researchers, and others have taken photography and a plethora of reasons why.

To garner a sense of this range, I studied some of the existing and emerging literature on the development of photography education and research as it has evolved from 2000-2019, reviewing abstracts and articles across eleven field-specific journals¹³. This review of literature was a highly personal exercise whereby I sought to make connections between my own research and teaching interests and the greater field of art and photo education.

I targeted writing that addresses three areas I suggest are linked or thematically adjacent to memory work. These areas align with my pedagogical values, present in this research study: *autobiographical projects* (the employment of personal life story/lived experience), *narrative projects* (the employment of story), and *participatory/relational projects* (the employment of others in social context). Further, these themes framed this collection of writings as well as informed the conceptual design of this study – a study that is autobiographical, narrative, and participatory/relational in nature. Further, in terms of a pedagogical trace, these three areas link back with the kinds of projects I assigned in my years of teaching, now present in this research. Another through-line emerged.

I look at the literature through the lens of a photography teacher and photographer interested in exploring the potential intersections of memory work and pedagogy (Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse, & Allnutt, 2012; Sinner & Owen, 2011). Committed to finding artful ways of “bringing memory forward” (Strong-Wilson, 2008, p. 4), I recognize and bear certain pedagogical commitments. These commitments include an appreciation for student autobiographical narratives and lifewriting, a belief in photography’s capacity to inspire visual literacy and evoke stories, the importance of expressing inner and outer landscapes, and last, the benefits of

¹³ In no specific order, the journals I reviewed include: *Art Education*, *Canadian Art Teacher*, *Canadian Review of Art Education*, *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, *International Journal of Education Through Art*, *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, *Journal for Artistic Review*, *School Arts*, *Studies in Art Education*, *Visual Arts Research*, and *Visual Studies*.

collaborative, public, and socially-engaged endeavors, particularly in art education. This lens includes an affinity for personal, narrative-based, and experiential projects and learning strategies, without a set outcome, that encourage multiple, self-directed, and open-ended entry points for sense-making, meaning-making, creative engagement, risk-taking, and experimentation. As such, this research study embraces the same lens. From my own experience and years of teaching high school photography, these kinds of entry points can invite photographic youth and others to document their lives by speaking in/with pictures and to make connections between their evolving art knowledge and practice with their everyday lives. That is, they may discover more about society and themselves through photography.

Six Emergent Themes from the Readings

I situate this review not as a summative all-encompassing statement about photography education and research, but rather a collection of voices in a continuation of an evolving and changing conversation already underway. Among those voices are photo and visual art teachers sharing lessons, artists, stories, experiential knowledge, and action research with their students. All are all invaluable gestures towards research on/in photo education. Further, looking at research and teaching articles by/about/related to photo educators and researchers supports the rationale for this study wherein I conduct research with educators and artists who work with photography.

The following six themes emerged from my readings of the collected abstracts and articles between 2000-2019 that are noteworthy to share in relation to this study:

Theme 1: Identity, voice, & lived experience

Theme 2: Social action & awareness

Theme 3: Collaborative partnerships & community engagement: Photography beyond schools

Theme 4: Ethics

Theme 5: Existing & new technologies

Theme 6: Photographers as inspirational entry points & Ways of engaging the photograph

These themes illustrate evident trends in and language around photo-based projects and research from my perspective. As aforementioned, many, but not all, address work with youth. Under each theme group, I provide a sampling of references discussing projects, photo-based methodologies, and new understandings across multiple sites (communities, schools, public spaces, etc.) in both education and research. This gathering of resources is an attempt to cover both the breadth and

depth of my discoveries¹⁴ while at the same time making sense of their emerging thematic groupings.

Theme I: Identity, voice, & lived experience

One prominent theme in the literature speaks to the voice behind the camera that emerges in photographs and through photographic inquiry. Works in this collection consider the nature of photography as a medium through which personal stories can be told and aspects of identity can be, or are believed to be, visually addressed, expressed, explored, and/or accessed. As such, there is a premium on understanding, hearing, and studying youth voice as a way of understanding youth vision and lived experience and inspiring their creative expression through photography. In terms of assignments for youth, or research projects on/with youth, the prevalence of invoking the camera to narrate one's self or story is evident. I group three concepts into one for this theme: identity, voice, and lived experience. They are closely related terms repeated across the readings. As well, my own interests in autobiography and narrative as part of memory work fall here. In some ways, they connect most closely with memory work, due to their thematic closeness and relationship to autobiography.

Many photography projects with youth focus on aspects of identity, such as: *what it is, how to reveal or construct it, what perspective are reflected, why identity matters, how lived experience impacts identity, and the personal viewpoint each of us speaks from*. The photographic voice and its potential as a storytelling vehicle appear to be powerful and significant in the existing literature, particularly around the research method PhotoVoice (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001; Wang & Burris, 1997). Opportunities become many when telling a life story, illustrating lived experience from one's own point of view photographically, learning about oneself through photographic inquiry, and engaging in the world via photography. Projects that ask youth to take or make photographs include the development and critique of photo-based narratives, visual diaries, images series, and other image-based projects, often looking at the work of artists as source material. These projects involve strategies for locating, narrating, and re/constructing one's individual identity and social identity with and through photography.

In most cases, identity and voice across these readings are addressed in two ways: self and other. Questions, either explicit or implied might include:

¹⁴ Further details and narration on these themes and individual references would most certainly deepen the conversation here. Due to space, I do not elaborate on them but recognize and appreciate the value in doing so, perhaps as a task for future writing.

*(Self) Who am I to myself? How do I perceive myself?
What is my story or what story do I want to tell? Where do I come from?
How can I tell my story to have it be heard and acknowledged¹⁵? and
What is it I want or need to say?*

*(Other) Who am I to others, to society at large?
How do others perceive me and how do I perceive them?
What is the story being told about me that may not be mine?
What is my story, and how do I want to tell it in relation to others? In pictures?
In what ways is my identity, voice, and lived experience understood/misunderstood in terms of current
historical or social representations? How can I resist, counter, heal, and be seen?*

Researchers offer invitations to label/unlabel common stereotypes using photography and pose questions around sexuality, gender, family, culture, race, ethnicity, and more. In several cases, participants are invited to record, represent, picture, or voice aspect(s) of youth identity or lived experience, including troubling experiences (Cress, 2012; Joanou, 2009; Sinner & Owen, 2011). Often, researchers are interested in the lived experiences of youth, describing those of interest with adjectives and identities such as: *urban, marginalized, at risk, vulnerable, in trouble, low-income, disenfranchised, underprivileged, homeless, refugees, native, Indigenous, and/or migrant/immigrant*. The use of these labels is complicated and complex, inviting further study and conversation. Their prevalence across the literature reviewed suggests a targeted use for photography with specific populations who are marginalized, highlighting both the creative potential and risk for photography to be useful as a storytelling tool. Photography appears to be a trusted vehicle of promise to reach, empower, or connect with youth in these categories (being identified by such adjectives and identities) as a way to invite their creative expression, resistance, and story, which may have previously been unheard or silenced and/or not yet studied. In addition, researchers encourage youth to respond photographically to current issues of relevance to youth or those who study/work with youth (Castro & Grauer, 2010; Mendez, 2013; Weber & Levy, 2011).

Within this theme, researchers often employ photography (and in some cases video) as a tool or method for autobiography, storytelling, and un/making layers of experience and identity. Examples in this line of thinking include: Allison, 2009; Castro, 2007; Chung, 2007; Cress, 2012; Durrant, Frohlich, Sellen, & Uzzell, 2011; Fontes, 2012; Golding, 2011; Madrid, 2012; Marshalsey & Sclater, 2019; Packard, Ellison, & Sequenzia, 2004; Peralta, 2010; Talusani, 2005; Trafi-Prats, 2009a;

¹⁵ I am grateful for the insight of educator-activist and my friend Elma Dzanic Bass on this topic. Her work in Bosnia, South Africa, and in Chicago Public Schools around restorative justice speaks to these same issues. She has suggested that a positive, often therapeutic use for photographs is their ability to tell a story and make visible something that needs to be told, heard, and witnessed in order to be validated and honored. For some, in witnessing and telling there is healing and justice, where storytelling offers agency in speaking one's truth and being seen and heard.

and Young, 2012, among others. Researchers use photography as a way of understanding lived experience of participants and visualizing personal stories. A powerful example from the literature by Sinner and Owen (2011) includes photography that traces oneself and one's past as a way of moving through the world and moving past pain. In a different kind of tracing, Bey's work (2012) documents mourning and memorials connected to one's identity that are rooted in a community that experienced significant loss.

A key aspect of one's identity and sense of belonging is place. Photography and place have a special relationship, as a kind of locational autobiography and a critical piece of selfhood and rootedness. This relationship is illustrated in works that address place, place-making, or the location of place/self in (a) place, including: Bey, 2013; Coats, 2014; Leblanc, 2015; Mendez, 2013; Gerdts, 2008; Joanou, 2009; Kushins & Brisman, 2005; Ozga, 2016; Trafi-Prats, 2012; and Pink, 2011. Researchers also invite youth to capture a certain public or private place/space important to them or where they spend time as well as places they have memories associated with, such as school and home (Fontes, 2012; O'Donoghue, 2007; Pardiñas & Lema, 2011).

Further studies under this theme explore a range of interesting topics and experiences, illustrating a mixture of perspectives on how photography can be engaged in/as research. For example, the work of Renwick, Romes, and Lam (2019) involves engaging young people through PhotoVoice to share their experiences of gardening while reflecting on their mental health. From South Africa, Thomas (2018) considers how Black consciousness has made a resurgence and is evident in visual images. Orzech, Moncur, Durrant, James, and Collomosse (2017) study the variation in age groups as to how digital identities are constructed. Also looking at digital identity, Bae-Dimitriadis (2015) explores self-photographic play through digital photography. Alkateb (2013) explores culture and heritage through photography, and the transcendence of cultural borders is addressed by Graham, Murphy, and Jaworski (2007). Radley, Chamberlain, Hodgetts, Stolte, and Groot (2010) use photography to consider the experiences of homeless people. Lastly, Joanou (2017) addresses how photographs provide an expressive vehicle to record and document the childhoods of street children in Peru and discusses how that humanizes them.

These examples support the theme of *identity, voice, and lived experience*.

Theme 2: Social action & awareness

The theme of social action and awareness highlights another prominent use for photography. The history of photography to affect social change via the documentary impulse is well known. Such desire continues in these projects and research, suggesting a strong lean towards

and commitment to social justice and socially-oriented projects through photography. In the reviewed selections, the camera is being used to record, intuitively see, teach, counter-narrate, speak back, historically document, and articulate unique personal and social statements as voice-giving, storytelling exercises in free speech, activism, creativity, journalism, and justice.

Researchers invite students, youth, and participants to use photography as an artistic and/or documentary tool to respond to injustice, be heard, make change in the world, critique social life, express themselves, and/or engage directly with certain stereotypes being laid against them. Studying these works, I find it promising when students are encouraged to speak up and use their photographic voices for hope and positive change. As such, this theme is connected to Theme 1 since taking action, raising awareness, or critiquing the world are connected to youth identity in terms of developing voice and documenting lived experience. In some cases, it was difficult to separate examples between Themes 1 and 2 due to their overlaps, which became an opportunity to study connections and a challenge of dividing findings and readings into established categories.

Within this theme, youth are encouraged to use the camera as a form of empowerment (Grauer, Castro, & Lin, 2012; Stanley, 2003; Weber & Levy, 2011; Williams & Taylor, 2004) and for transformative resistance, with youth being seen as critical researcher-activists (Cerecer, Alberto, Cahill, & Bradley, 2011). In addition, social issues-based photography is employed towards education on a number of critical issues, many of which overlap and not all are listed here, including: *social in/justice* (Mitchell, Martin-Hamon, & Anderson, 2002; Smith, 2012); *racism* (Fey, Shin, Cinquemani, & Marino, 2010; Walker, 2001); *representations of and social issues surrounding family* (Kanatani & Vatsky, 2010); *difficult histories* (Wenger, 2007), *child labor* (Gianatti, 2004; Mizen, 2005); *advocacy and outreach by and for LGBTQ youth* (Rhoades, 2012); and *sexuality, inclusivity, and classrooms/curriculum as a space for needed change* (Ashburn, 2007). Researchers address social action and social awareness (Darts, 2011; Marquez-Kenkov, 2007) in various examples within this theme group, as well as activism (Emme, 2001; Mendez, 2013), intervention (Hoffman, 2007; Katzew, 2010; Yang, 2013), and memorialization (Bey, 2012).

In other related examples within this theme: Thomas (2018) suggests that photographs by student-protestor-photographers are signs of emerging 'woke' subjectivities of young Black South Africans. On fieldwork among Syrian refugees in Sweden and activists in Aleppo, Syria, Rodineliussen (2019) examines the role of visuals on Facebook by Syrian student activists in mobilizing demonstrations and other resistance acts. Arlington (2018) shares a *No Place for Hate* installation project that protested non-American values such as bigotry and homophobia. The work of Lykes (2010) considers photography as a contentious resource in post-conflict situations for

human rights activism and personal narrative (referring to PhotoPAR: Photo participatory action research). Lastly, in another example, Ivashkevich (2013) uses the metaphor of disidentification to study digital narratives made by adolescent girls in a juvenile arbitration program that invited the girls to speak back to their own stigmatizations.

These examples support the theme of *social action and awareness*.

Theme 3: Collaborative partnerships & community engagement: Photography beyond schools

The two concepts I bring together for Theme 3 complement one another well and come alongside Theme 2 in a generative and sometimes overlapping way. Often photography is used as a bridge between collaborative partnerships and community engagement, as a medium by which groups/partners/communities collaborate. Collaborative partnerships and community engagement often share a sense of coming together for a greater good, be it for a shared project or to engage with/as a community and, in some cases, to do both. In the examples found, different kinds of public and private organizations and institutions, nonprofits, artists, and other groups created partnerships with youth, youth organizations, and schools or those who work with youth (such as their teachers and mentors) to carry out photography projects and/or research.

Here, community engagement arrives in the form of photo projects or research that, for example, might aim to tell the story of a place, or connect with or document a certain community or one's relationship to it. Other examples in the literature include using photography as a means of exploring visual communication, social justice, and/or creative practice. This theme also includes community art education and is, in some cases, an embodiment of it. Often the collaborative partnership is purposefully combined with/created for the community engagement piece, or the engagement with local and even online communities occurs through partnerships with others. The key takeaway here is the idea that photography is not being done alone or without a sense of community, partnership, support, and the sense of a collective effort. This supports the notion that photography can be educative and creatively useful in ways and places beyond school.

Collaborative partnerships and art-related projects involving youth and photography involve multiple stakeholders and various sites of art engagement and programming, including universities, community centers, schools and after school programs, museums, youth organizations, artists/art centers, grant-funding agencies, youth incarceration facilities, etc. The promise of collaborating with youth is evident and exciting while raising a number of important ethical concerns as well (some of which are noted in Theme 4: Ethics and discussed later in the dissertation). A variety of relevant studies from the literature around collaborative partnerships

and community engagement include: Chung & Ortiz, 2011; Eckhoff, 2011; Ewald, 2007; Goodwin, 2013; Herne, Adams, Atkinson, Dahs, & Jessel, 2013; Hiatt & Kushner, 2013; Hyde, 2005, on the collaborative works of Wendy Ewald; Marin-Viadel, Arias-Camison, & Varea, 2019; Markidou, 2019; Rhoades, 2012; Richard, 2005; Stanley, 2003; Tuck, 2014; and Wewiora, 2019.

Within this theme group are an array of interesting examples for how photography (and in some cases video) is employed with regards to collaborative partnerships and community engagement. For example, Klimt (2018) shares a community-based collaborative documentary photography project, and Hutzler (2007) discusses service learning via cooperative imaging. In differing ways, community engagement and film-making are addressed by Castro and Grauer (2010) and Gerdtz (2008). Hart (2009) discusses community art education and interactions cross-culturally, and Purcell (2009) brings forward a discussion on community development, social regeneration, and critical photography practice. Brown and Jeanneret (2015) present the *Evolution Program*, an artist-guided visual arts program for youth with mental health and social challenges, founded by a community-based youth arts studio. As well, Kee, Bailey, Horton, Kelly, McClue, and Thomas (2016) present the *Unpacking Student Identities Through Art* project, a collaboration with K-12 students who collage antique suitcases.

Further examples from the literature include photography being used in a number of productive ways, including: social transformation and engaging youth in their local community (Prettyman & Gargarella, 2012); working directly with artists/photographers (Hark-Weber, 2013; Rhoades, 2012; Stanley, 2003; Walker, 2001); collaborations between groups of teachers – here, non-art – using PhotoVoice in English classrooms (Zenkov, Harmon, Bell, Ewaida, & Lynch, 2011); and online collaborations/participatory projects (Motter, 2011; Carpenter & Cifuentes, 2011; Kan, 2013).

These examples support the theme of *collaborative partnerships and community engagement in terms of photography being employed in and beyond schools*.

Theme 4: Ethics

Of note, most of the examples located under the theme of ethics are written by researchers (regarding research ethics and photography) not teachers, which I determine to be a gap as well as an area of further curiosity and potential. Ethics is an area of study important to my dissertation. Thus, I sought out works on this theme in two ways: 1) in relation to photography and memory work; and 2) as an area (the ethics of art and photography) that I wondered if photo teachers and other art educators were talking/writing about very much and, if so, in what ways. I wonder if/how the language of research ethics translates into the classroom or other spaces where youth and

others reside. Or how it could, for example, involve more teacher education or professional development around ethics in art and photo education. Of note, in the pieces I located, more emphasis is on ethics with projects involving children than with older students (for example middle- and high school-aged youth) and most examples are research studies. This is an important area of study as there is great creative potential as well as some risks that exist when inviting youth, young people, students, teens, or adolescents to partake in endeavors that involve photography, video, and other image-based print/digital media as forms of telling, as inquiry, and as social/cultural critique.

Under the theme of ethics, some recurrent themes touch on a range of evident and emerging topics, including: participation, silencing voice/personhood, representation, authorship, collaboration, agency, curation, power, trauma, and visual data production/analysis/methods. What resonates is the potential for cameras (and other imaging devices) to assist and enable youth in telling their story and to share insight on and document their lived experiences, as discussed in varying ways across Themes 1, 2, and 3.

Thought differently, what is potentially problematic is the possible assumption that to see a photograph is to fully know a person, that all of lived experience is documentable or capable of being understood by others, and the fact that youth are sometimes not in control of how images of them (or images created by them) are presented in research, writing, some exhibitions, or other areas. Because of a seeming reliance on cameras to ‘give voice,’ an assumption may be raised that voice did not already exist or that we can gain access to another person’s eyes and way of seeing the world by handing them a camera. Although in some ways we can, this is an area for further discussion and study. In some ways, this is possible and such camera-giving has resulted in some fantastic, emotionally-moving, and powerful work in both art and research. And yet, it is helpful to also consider the ways that such compelling creative photographic possibilities may pose a challenge, be entangled in a power dynamic, and be ethically complicated to navigate.

Within this theme, some of the ethical concerns raised by authors vary widely and include a plethora of important topics for consideration. For example, (Aldridge, 2012) addresses children’s participation, vulnerability, and transformation in/from visual research studies. Joanou (2009) writes of protecting participant interests and a concern for exploitation and intrusion in research with adolescents living on the streets. Ewald (2007) discusses collaboration with children and questions around authorship. Fairey (2018) shares the need for listening to and negotiating (rather than giving) voice in participatory visual projects, regarding photographs by refugee youth, and addresses researcher transparency and accountability.

Of note is a distinction among writers with equally relevant perspectives who highlight the need to protect children/youth and those who speak more of their innate capacity for authentic voice and something to say. Luttrell (2010) considers children as knowing subjects and writes of the limits of what we can understand about them, including multiple voices. McClure's (2009) work puts forward the need for reconsidering images of children as localized and site-specific. Of photographs by children who work and live on the street, Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2010) write of photography as a vector and of the capacity of children's photographs to astonish us as well as shed light on the imperfections of our understandings. Last, on youth voice, Batsleer (2011) discusses the capability of pedagogic engagement through arts-based strategies to offer a form of voice that is hopeful rather than controlling and 'tokenistic.'

Further studies and publications address other related issues connected to ethics, spanning a range of topics, subthemes, and perspectives. These examples are gathered together here in a purposeful collection that highlights different ethical considerations as well as some of the ways ethics is tied up with photography and with youth. The work of Sinner and Owen (2011), centered in this dissertation as an exemplar of visual lifewriting, uses pinhole photography to address vulnerability, agency, risk, and empowerment in visual lifewriting projects. McAra (2016) studies relational ethics, creativity, and building trust through participatory filmmaking with at risk youth. Lykes (2010) critically considers the emergence versus silencing of voices in published photonarratives. Marshalsey and Sclater (2019) raise the ethical challenges and benefits of using social media and video-based research methods such as PhotoVoice. Mannay (2013) writes of the effects of a researcher's and significant others' intrusive presence and on the use of participant-led visual data production. Gianatti's (2004) work addresses the ethics of interventions (photographic and humanitarian), including a photographer's role as an observer, referring to Gianatti's documentation of child labor in Peru. Pink (2011) discusses amateur photography and the mis/representations of place. Hoffman (2007) considers the truth of the photographic image as thought from a West African (particularly Yoruba) perspective versus the traditional realist approach of documentary photography.

Lastly, three final examples that contribute to insightful perspectives in this theme group include: Sweeny's (2007) point of view on censorship and mass-mediated images; Gil-Glazer's (2015) discussion on facing difficult knowledge with students in educational contexts; and Green's (2004) suggestions of how to look at violent images with students.

These examples support the theme of *ethics*.

Theme 5: Existing & new technologies

Moving across the literature I reviewed, a fifth trend emerged, somewhat outside the triad of autobiography, narrative, and participatory/relational works I set out to study, yet important in a discussion on photography. I include existing and new technologies as an important and timely trend to note, taking into account the capture, delivery, and distribution of images alongside the content in them. Ways in which youth and others are invited to photographically express themselves understandably changes as new and available technologies and media change. As such, this theme dovetails nicely with Themes 1 (Identity, voice, and lived experience) and 4 (Ethics) in thinking about the role of new technology with projects that intend to evoke voice and have ethical considerations to attend to, such as image/content circulation and distribution, context, authorship, representation, consent, privacy laws, and the potential for manipulation or misrepresentation.

This theme was realized in articles and/or projects using existing and new technologies with/for photography¹⁶ or video with youth in a number of innovative ways, highlighting modes of visual capture and rendering as significant and ever-changing. Photography and videography have gone digital for over a decade. This review suggests changes in digital modalities and digital learning need to be recognized, explored, and more fully understood so that educators and researchers can keep up to date¹⁷. In my review, I observed that over time, as new technologies and media have emerged, new photographic approaches are developed and new articles are written about them, offering insights towards technological futures as well as the present. Educators and researchers with expertise and experience in these areas often discuss their projects and new understandings. Those less familiar with technology can learn from these authors, articles, and projects in terms of applications, creative uses, challenges, new considerations, and educational and artistic value.

This collection of literature contains a wide variety of articles and approaches, which speaks to the breadth of directions these authors have taken in their work involving technology and

¹⁶ Some but not all of the following examples are written about in this theme group, including a range of technologies with some connection (or potential connection) to photography across various devices, digital platforms, software, applications, and media such as: *smartphones, photo apps, Ipads/tablets, digital cameras and videocameras, digital pinhole photography, scanners/scanography, Adobe Creative Cloud (ex: Photoshop, Lightroom, InDesign), drones, GPS, geocache, GoPro video, videography, vlogs, social media (such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Facebook, Youtube, TicTok, Twitter), mobile media, memes, websites, games/gaming, virtual worlds/reality, and other innovative technology being used both inside and outside of classrooms*. Additionally, especially given the current 2020 context of COVID-19, photography is also being used successfully online in many virtual classrooms as a valuable tool for visual teaching, learning, sharing, storytelling, documentation, and self-expression. Thus, the use and creativity of photography in online teaching spaces could be a compelling area of research to consider exploring now and in the future.

¹⁷ It is valuable to note that the references provided under Theme 5 are not necessarily all *about* technology as their main subject but rather they may include *the use of* some form of technology in their teaching, art, and/or research projects.

photography. Specifically, several examples in this theme include photography and other technology being used to connect *with* and invite creative expression *from* youth and others, not unlike projects and studies shared in the previous four themes. For example, the work of Castro, Lalonde, and Pariser (2016) involves a mobile media visual art curriculum with at-risk youth that increased their agency and made space for the possibility of learning to be a positive experience. Eglinton, Gubrium, and Wexler (2017) share an arts-inspired inquiry as a digital storytelling initiative supporting Indigenous and marginalized youth to produce digital stories. Herne, Adams, Atkinson, Dash, and Jessel (2013) describe a technology learning community in *The Future Something Project (FSP)*, a two-year action research project designed to nurture the talent of small groups of at-risk young people. Cress (2013) creates an Artist Postcard project, framing on-and off-line activity for teens. Carpenter and Cifuentes (2011) create an online image gallery, entitled 'Seeing Culture,' designed to build visual literacy. Durrant, Frohlich, Sellen, and Uzzell's (2011) work explores representations of self and family through photographs, regarding on and offline photo displays. Last, Marshalsey and Sclater (2019) discuss the use of Snapchat and participant generated GoPro video filming to understand students' lived experiences of studio learning.

Additional examples from the literature include the power of digital storytelling to teach contemporary visual culture (Chung, 2007); a commentary on new visual technologies (Graham, Laurier, O'Brien, & Rouncefield, 2011); Black's (2010) discussion on place-based community education and digital art practices; Overby's (2009) writing on weblogs; and a discussion around the shifting dynamics of teaching and learning through social media (Castro, 2012). Further dynamics are discussed in a study of virtual worlds to support the development of voice and active citizenship (Sclater & Lally, 2013) and the use of quest photography in *Second Life* (Stokrocki, 2014).

Finally, another collection of studies addresses perspectives from students, teachers, and researchers on technology, photography, art education, and new media in schools and communities. Black (2009) addresses wired art classrooms and teachers' perspectives and lived experiences regarding technology usage, specifically regarding authority and pedagogy. In another work, Black (2014) shares a case study of three strong Canadian new media/video programs of recognition. Lin, Castro, Sinner, and Grauer (2011) write about new media arts programs in and out of school. Black, Davidson, and Mullen (2007) consider new media approaches to art education. Carlos & Grauer (2010) discuss GIFTS, a community-based new media school. Lastly, Macdonald (2012) studies students' attitudes towards digital and film photographic media.

These examples support the theme of *existing and new technologies*.

Theme 6: Photographers as inspirational entry points & Ways of engaging the photograph

From my analysis of the readings and drawing on my understanding of photo curricula, I observed a sixth theme that readers, especially teachers and artists, may find useful. Across the five aforementioned themes are curricular models, pedagogical practices, community work, projects, collaborations, and research studies using photography in a number of ways in terms of knowledge formation, creative visual expression, documentation, and community engagement. This theme highlights some of the ways photography is being engaged in such projects and research and how the work of mostly established and well-known photographers is being brought into classrooms and projects as inspirational entry points.

Like projects in the previous theme groups, photographic engagements with youth in this theme involve a wide and exciting variety of media, including film and digital photography, video, stop-motion animation, mobile media, collaborative film-making, and more. Some projects are done individually, where youth work alone on individual images, mostly for in-school art projects. Others are participatory and/or collaborative, where several youth work together on a project or where youth work alongside others, such as university students, researchers, teachers, artists, and/or community workers. In addition, I located several international participatory and/or collaborative photo projects involving research, activism, and education as well as a few online participatory photo projects. I also came across photo-based studies occurring world-wide (individual and collaborative) involving youth participation, suggesting collective global interest in photography's reach with youth in/across various cultural, social, artistic, and educational spaces.

In terms of engaging the photograph, there are numerous examples of ways this occurs, from critique to creation, that appear common for educators and in some cases, researchers and their subjects. Such ways of engagement include: 1) *looking at, critiquing, or using* works by photographic artists as exemplars and conceptual jumping-off points for projects; and 2) *taking or making* new photographs, drawing on a range of themes, concepts, and assignments; or 3) *manipulating* existing photographs.

In terms of looking at and responding to images, many of these projects are designed to have students view/interact with examples of photography that critique social issues (connecting back to Theme 2), that address some aspect(s) of culture, specifically, visual/material culture, and/or that speak to youth identity and lived experience (connecting back to Theme 1). Notions of identity as self-constructed and socially/culturally constructed are often addressed in terms of how we see ourselves and others and how others including the media see us (Blair & Shalmon, 2005; Kanatani & Vatsky, 2010; Peralta, 2010).

Images being brought into classrooms appear to come from several places and sources of inspiration for curriculum, an interesting example of tracing pedagogy beyond *and into* classrooms. Of note, there is a particular emphasis on using local, contemporary, and historical photographic artists' works as entry points for projects, described further on the next page. As a photography teacher, this is a practice I engage in often as well. Likely, in the reviewed pieces, these are artists that teachers were already familiar with or interested in learning more about. New and experienced teachers alike have their own archive of works and artists they reference, reflecting each teacher's own knowledge collection of teaching resources. These examples are often based on the educator or researcher's interests, experiences, curricular goals, and (for art educators) artistic practices.

Across works in classrooms, the work of mostly established photographers is often brought in (shown on screen or in print) to spark dialogue, provoke response and discussion, and provide project inspiration and visual reference for students. As one journal-specific example from the literature review, within the American journal *Art Education*, I located a series of 'Instructional Resources'¹⁸ that speak to this practice by highlighting and centering the work of photographers in the process of learning, making, and seeing.

With the artist(s) named first, followed by the citation, I have compiled a list of articles that center around or reference the work of artists. These examples include, by order of year (present to past):

- ❖ Eudora Welty (Furniss, 2019)
- ❖ Bea Nettles (Cress, 2012)
- ❖ Stephen Marc (and other historical images) (Smith, 2012)
- ❖ Helen Levitt (Ruich, 2012)
- ❖ Juan Miquel Ramos (Peralta, 2010)
- ❖ Nikki S. Lee (Allison, 2009)
- ❖ Nic Nicosia and Modern Art Museum of Ft. Worth (Talusani, 2005)
- ❖ Gordon Parks (Mitchell, Martin-Hamon, & Anderson, 2002)
- ❖ Tseng Kwong Chi (Fey & Bashore, 2000)

¹⁸ In a March 2020 online [call for submissions](#), the following description for Instructional Resources is given by the journal *Art Education*: "Instructional Resources provide readers of *Art Education* a fresh look at a single work of art or body of artworks to inspire art educators in classrooms, museum galleries, and community spaces.

Who can submit an IR? You can! Submit one by yourself or with a writing team.

How?

- 1) Select an artwork or artist's body of work that has contemporary significance
- 2) Identify meaningful connections with National Visual Arts Standards
- 3) Write up essential information about the artworks or artists, including cultural and/ or historical context, and present practical applications for the teaching and studio practices of art and design educators."

Other important examples from the literature that center the work of photographers include:

- ❖ Sol Lewitt and Uta Barth (Marin-Viadel, Arias-Camison, & Varea, 2019)
- ❖ Antoine D'Agata, Nikos Economopoulos, Bieke Depoorter and Nicolas Iordanou (Project Creator) (Markidou, 2019)
- ❖ Sally Mann (Savage, 2017)
- ❖ Susan Bowen, Rita Marhaug, Dennis Adams, and Frank Video (Ozga, 2016)
- ❖ Laurie Hogin, Siebren Versteeg, Brian Ulrich, and Hank Willis Thomas (Danker, 2014)
- ❖ Ashley Gilbertson (& NY Times photo slideshow "The Shrine Down the Hall") (Fontes, 2012)
- ❖ Liv Gjestvang (Rhoades, 2012)
- ❖ Tom Bamberger's "Cultured Landscapes" (Huang, 2011)
- ❖ Selection of photographs by Marion Palfi, Ansel Adams, and David Levinthal from the collection of the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) at the University of Arizona (IR) (Fey, Shin, Cinquemani, & Marino, 2010)
- ❖ Catherine Opie, Janine Antoni, Tracey Moffat (Kanatani & Vatsky, 2010)
- ❖ Emily Jacir (Trafi-Prats, 2009b)
- ❖ Cindy Sherman & Jeff Wall (Perkins & Andaloro, 2008)
- ❖ Jacob Lawrence, Dorothea Lange, and Ben Shahn (Goetz Zwirn, 2004)
- ❖ Esther Parada, *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents* (Eggemeyer, 2004)
- ❖ Sets of two artists juxtaposed (from China/USA): Pan Yuliang and Margaret Bourke-White, Alvin Ailey and Guan Pinghu, Xu Shichang and Normal Rockwell, and Jackson Pollock and Zhang Daqian (Kan, 2003)
- ❖ Lewis Hine (Smith-Shank, 2003)
- ❖ Chandra McCormick & Keith Calhoun (Walker, 2001)

It is promising to see many artists being brought into the classroom and/or used in research. Furthermore, these examples connect to some of the pedagogical and creative possibilities raised in the following chapter regarding two contemporary artists I have used in my teaching and garner inspiration from for this study: Ishiuchi Miyako and Alfredo Jaar.

In terms of taking/making photographs, examples in this grouping are often based on a theme, concept, issue, or question posed or taken up by a teacher, researcher, or other project leader and involve youth as the photographers. Curriculum-wise, content is often organized around specific photographer(s), specific photograph(s), or a project/exhibition based around a theme and/or photographer(s). Some examples of the variety of themes addressed include: *loss, identity, place, racism, teen pregnancy, suburbia/suburban life, play, dreams, activism, stereotypes, empowerment, sexuality and gender, resistance, and storytelling*. Most of these studies used digital photography, and it appears some projects were about art making, while others were about documentation, and still others a blend of both.

Photographic making can also include the manipulation of existing photographs (digitally or physically). Software such as Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom, iPhoto, or photography apps are often used to alter various kinds of images, while filters and editing tools on social media apps such

as Instagram provide further ways to manipulate or edit images. Some examples from the review include: manipulating found/family photos (Golding, 2011; Ulkuniemi, 2007); deconstructing cigarette ads (Chung, 2005); and using collage/mixed media in a women's prison as an alternative to taking photos (Williams & Taylor, 2004). Manipulation activities are sometimes based on a theme, concept, issue, or question as well as a skill/technique, such as assemblage or learning editing tools in Photoshop.

These examples support the sixth theme of *photographers as entry points and uses for photography*.

A Breadth of Awareness

In this review, I included a collection of existing and emerging literature in photography, art education, and arts-based research as a way to: a) survey the field; b) situate my research interests and pedagogical commitments; and c) highlight certain gaps around photo-based memory work in schools, communities, and other educative spaces. I sought to locate potential connections between memory work and other kinds of pedagogical and research-inspired engagements with photography (such as identity and lived experience, social awareness, ethics, technology, and looking at photographers for inspiration). I examined the ways other educators and researchers are employing photography and photographic inquiry as a means of creative expression and knowledge production.

From a collection of journal-specific abstracts and articles and an interest in how *autobiography*, *narrative*, and *participatory/relational* projects and studies have been employed and imagined, six themes emerged. The review found trends as well as several noted gaps within the literature, addressed by this study. The six themes I highlighted in this chapter suggest a number of vibrant and promising directions educators, researchers, community pedagogues, artists, and youth have taken and might take with the practice of photography. Understandably, the six I chose were a selection that fall under a wider net for possible thematics in photographic work with youth and others.

Within the six themes, schools as well as community-based, research-based, and alternative settings are making use of photography with youth and others to explore an array of complex, current, and important issues and possibilities in a variety of artistic, documentary, and storytelling modalities. As well, there is a common interest of including visual forms as methods, outcomes, and art as part of research studies, community/activism-based work, and art and non-art classroom projects. For those inviting youth participation in photo-based projects both inside and outside of

schools, common issues and strategies center on: the location of autobiographical and social identity, the development and exposure of voice, visual culture critiques, (in some cases) ethics, ways of visual storytelling, activism, resistance, understanding the lives and experiences of youth (particularly labeled as marginalized, at risk, etc.), and more. These findings suggest there is a desire to picture experience, self, and others as a way to reveal, discover, create, and/or uncover aspects of identity, place, and lived experience among other aspects through photography. They also suggest to me that the medium of photography is a popular, promising, and often-used method for educators and researchers wanting to encourage personal expression, artistic documentation, and photo narrative inquiry among youth and other individuals/groups they work with.

In this review of literature, I gathered some of the ways that photo-based curricular models, pedagogical practices, and research have developed and been engaged in a number of educative spaces. The emphasis was on the photographic education of youth and the work mainly of art and photo educators and researchers. This survey approach supports the rationale for this study of working with artists and educators committed to photography by looking at some of the work that is done *by them* or is related *to them* and those with which they work. It diverts from yet comes alongside the writing in the following chapter by taking a pedagogical approach instead of a philosophical one to the subjects of photography, memory, and ethics as I looked for potential areas where photo-based memory work might: a) fit into; b) diverge from; or c) align with existing and emerging pedagogical and curricular models.

By analyzing a wide variety of classroom-based, community-based, and research-based literature, I located what kinds of agendas, strategies, and hopes are being laid out for photography and for youth at this time in an array of spaces and ways – from art making to activism – while considering my own research, teaching, and photography in relation. As well, I discovered trends, common language, holes, and places where my work may add value and insight.

The limitations of filtering my selection with three areas (*autobiography*, *narrative*, and *participatory/relational*) and then thematizing the review may reduce or exclude certain other themes, concepts, or organizing structures and publications for this collection of literature. As such, it is a subjective analysis and a selective, non-exhaustive grouping of ideas and scholarship that support and frame this study, both in terms of expressing the range of uses for photography *and* of illustrating what is missing and what the literature fails to address. This method of a selective systematic review of literature intends to express a breadth of knowledge on photography education and research by casting a wide net, demonstrating my awareness of these areas and noted themes. However, not all of them are directly related to this study or are the focus of the

dissertation. Their inclusion here is to acknowledge the presence and perseverance of certain themes, topics, and agendas in photo education and research while also attending to gaps.

In terms of furthering this field of study and attending to what is missing from the review, it is important to share that in the selected studies, 'photo-based memory work' and 'memory' did not necessarily surface as prominent projects or trending research themes, thus highlighting a gap in the literature that my study addresses. I consider why this might be the case while confronting my own agenda around the desire to do photo-based memory work. However, memory is a broad term and in some ways all photography is a kind of memory of the past: every image is a moment already past. Therefore, several projects and studies touch on aspects of memory and themes close to it but in general 'photo-based memory work' as a genre or pedagogy is mostly absent from the review.

From the perspective of a teacher and researcher, I am encouraged to consider why there might be a gap around memory work and the ethical implications of doing projects on the theme of memory in today's classrooms and in research, which I address further in Chapters 7 and 8. Perhaps the absence of this topic is a sign that some teachers or researchers are not comfortable exploring memory as a topic. Or perhaps researchers are not looking at it specifically as an area of interest, or that writers use different words when describing memory work (such as remembrance, forgetting, memoir, revisiting the past, historical/social memory, or storytelling). This gap points to a need for more studies, articles, and terminology to be published on this topic, more language around memory work to better describe its complexities, and a deeper understanding of photo-based and other forms of memory work across and within disciplines. Similarly, there could be more research studies with photo educators, particularly on collaborative groups and photo-based communities of practice. This realization provided inspiration for my study, which incorporates photo-based memory work with photo educators in a group, intending to address this double-gap.

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As we move next into Chapter 3, I turn to the work of selected photo theorists and artists to help frame photography as a form of knowledge. I consider ways of *seeing* seeing by thinking about what we can learn with and through certain types of photographs, specifically those related to or artistically addressing absence and loss. This focus helps position the value of photographic inquiry within an a/r/tography-based dissertation while highlighting the work of individuals who are influential in my writing, thinking, and seeing. The coming chapter considers my research question from a theoretical and ethical perspective. In it, I use writing to think with artists and theorists as a form of creative engagement with photo-based memory work to evoke meaning and provoke critical conversations about ethics in art.

“Gathering in:” On Photography | *Thoughts on Sontag, Barthes, Butler, Jaar, & Miyako*

This chapter seeks to address how encounters with key theoretical writings on photography¹⁹ and selected photo-based works related to memory can help to understand photographs as agents and archives of knowledge. By closely reading and bringing together foundational writings on photography by Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Judith Butler with selected artworks by Alfredo Jaar (from Chile) and Ishiuchi Miyako (from Japan), as well as the Abu Ghraib torture photos²⁰ critiqued by Butler and Sontag, individual approaches to photography within a context of disappearance are brought forward and juxtaposed for deeper study.

Specifically, for the two artists Jaar and Miyako, I look at the ways their works are against the disappearance of memory and history through photographs and how the photographic act of *being against disappearance* is generative as a visual lifewriting practice towards autobiography and creative remembrance. The work in this chapter is an example of how photo educators might bring artists and writers who work with memory and photographs into the secondary or post-secondary classroom. Using the artists’ works or writers’ ideas as a prompt, conversation can be engaged through a philosophical discussion, debate, or critique around some of the issues raised and/or through a photography project on memory (or memory project on photography). In addition, their works can help us to think more carefully, critically, and ethically about the educative potential and performativity of photographs (Derrida, 2010) as knowledge forms.

Because this dissertation positions photographs, art making, and artistic thinking as central to learning, a dialogue on their potential as ways of knowing and documents of understanding is critical to the study. This chapter dovetails intentionally with the review of literature in Chapter 2 as two ways of thinking about photographs and photographic making as agents and archives of knowledge. This chapter explores this idea through a *photo theoretical lens* via the work of some prominent writers on photography and prominent photographers. The previous chapter takes it up through a *photo educational lens*, considering how knowledge is built in schools and other educative spaces, with and through photographic engagement.

¹⁹ Works studied on photography include: **By Roland Barthes** – *Camera Lucida* (1980) & *Mourning Diary* (2010). Helpful also was Graham Allen’s *Roland Barthes* (2003). **By Susan Sontag** – *On Photography* (1977), *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), *Regarding the Torture of Others* (2004), and *Looking at War* (2002). *A Susan Sontag Reader* (1982) was also helpful, including the Introduction by Elizabeth Hardwick (1982), Sontag’s essay *Against Interpretation* (orig. 1964) and a previously unpublished essay of Sontag’s *Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes* (orig. 1981). **By Judith Butler** – *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009), specifically her Introduction, Chapter 1: “Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect” and Chapter 2: “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking With Sontag.” Also helpful were Butler’s *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), her essay “Ethical Ambivalence” (2000), and Butler and Salih’s *The Judith Butler Reader* (2004).

²⁰ I elect not to include or reproduce the Abu Ghraib torture photos out of respect to those pictured. If readers wish to view them, see: Walsh’s [“The Abu Ghraib Files”](#). The images are also searchable online. [Warning: Graphic]

Agents, Archives, & Absence

Vision is *always* a question of the power to see –
and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices.
With whose blood were my eyes crafted?

Donna Haraway
The Persistence of Vision, 2002, p. 680

In closely reading the works of Sontag, Butler, and Barthes and studying the photographs of Miyako (Miyako 2008/2005 a&b; Michiko, 2005; O'Brian, February 27, 2012) and Jaar (Jaar, 2006; Jaar, Jacob & Princenthal, 2005; Jaar, 1998; Schweizer, 2008; Strauss, 1998), I consider the potential of photographs as agents and archives of knowledge. One of my aims is to think with these theorists about how the two photographers, Jaar and Miyako,²¹ each uniquely perform, embody, and conceptualize their own photographic knowledge in relation to memory. Such knowledge suggests a range of artistic participation and social intervention, from the intimate tracings of fragile personal objects remaining after war (Miyako's ひろしま *hiroshima*) to the deliberate burying of images (Jaar's *Real Pictures* and *The Rwanda Projects*). While there are many artists to choose from in helping to frame a conversation on memory, I draw deep inspiration from Miyako's and Jaar's respective bodies of work, as we share something in common: we each address our own ways of camera-grieving and memory-collecting in the visual stories we tell, sharing a narrative thread around loss. In different ways, the practice of writing (like Barthes) and the practicing of picturing (like Miyako and Jaar) can become ways of coping, of remembering, and of recovering that loss.

Through a discussion and weaving together of works by Miyako and Jaar, as well as the Abu Ghraib torture photos, I situate photography's employment and knowledge-forming/-disrupting potential three ways: one, as a public artistic intervention; two, as a way to satisfy and frame human desires for seeing/being seen; and three, as a refusal to forget or be forgotten. I think with and favor the images themselves²² in order to look at what they have to offer in terms of photographic knowledge formation. One aim of "gathering in" (Hardwick, 1982, p. xii) these five individuals together into conversation is to juxtapose them and make relevant the studied literature by Sontag,

²¹ I selected these two artists as they were highly influential in my own understandings about and creative expressions of photo-based memory work. As a photographer, I am emotionally moved by their visual renderings, particularly of objects and landscapes. I was introduced to Miyako's work for the first time at UBC's Museum of Anthropology in 2012 in the [ひろしま *hiroshima* exhibition](#) and to Jaar's work in a graduate class at UBC on historical memory and social reconstruction by instructor Dr. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá. As a teacher who shows artists in the classroom (including EDCP 405) as ways to introduce and critique notions of *seeing* as well as to explore photography on challenging subject matter, I have found them both to be powerful teaching examples that my students respond strongly to in a positive manner.

²² Due to image copyright, I do not have the artists' permission to reproduce their works in my dissertation. Instead, I have included links to their referenced works, which can be easily found online.

Butler, and Barthes alongside the works of these photographers. Lastly, this theoretical chapter draws on my scholarly commitments and connects with my teaching experience, personal knowledge of photography, and evolving research commitments involving photography, notably an interest in better understanding ethics.

In the following sections, I focus on notions of presence and absence by critically reflecting on photographs and the knowledge I argue they produce in the wake or aftermath of war violence. While this is not the topic of my dissertation, some of the examples refer to knowledge formation during/after times of war violence: a) in order to provide a context which unites the two artists, Jaar and Miyako, as well as the torture photos; and b) as illustrations of difficult subject matter, which some teachers, artists, and researchers may choose to engage or become faced with. [Discussed later in Chapter 7, difficult subject matter is presented as a pedagogical challenge arising from the data and will connect back to this chapter.] In addition, images of war violence can fall under the banner of photo-based memory work if we consider individual and collective memory of war *photographically*, which is how most of us learn about the tragedies and traumas of war and violence – through war photographs we see online, on social media, in print media, on television, or in books. In a classroom setting, the picturing of war violence is an example of one contemporary topic and a challenging theme, one related to the question of ethics. It raises questions on how knowledge is formed from images, the distinctions of photo journalism and photography as art, as well as the visuality, politics, and poetics of violence. Furthermore, these images and the concepts they represent touch on, in many different ways, several themes of photographic inquiry tied to this project, such as: *remembrance, memory, loss, seeing, ethics, disappearance, and the pain of others.*

‘Only Beginnings’

To practice writing itself as a space of evocative personal and poetic inquiry (Meyer, personal communication, June 2013; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), I borrow from Barthes’s habit of composing what he called ‘only beginnings’ (Allen, 2003) and offer five ‘beginnings’ to help organize this chapter’s writing as inquiry:

Photographability/Grievability

The Privilege of Seeing/Disrupting Seeing

Framing Desire

Post-Death: Visual Narratives in the After-moment and

Toward an Ethics of Picturing Others

Each section heading is presented as an offering of thought around one theme where I have attempted to invite theory into conversation with art. Like a/r/tographical "openings" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx), these 'beginnings' hope to open up new space for considering the photograph as knowledge agent and/or archive.

Because much of this dissertation is composed in the narrative spirit of lifewriting (Adams, 2000; Kadar, Egan, Warley, & Perreault, 2005; Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, & Sinner, 2012; Irwin, Hasebe-Ludt & Sinner, 2019), there is an interest in wanting to know more about the lifewritings and lives of these writers and artists as a way to be with their works in a more personal way. Thus, I became inspired to want to learn more about *who* I was reading, not just *what* I was reading. What emerged, then, was a necessary importance for contextualizing not just individual earlier works (such as Sontag's *On Photography*, 1977, and Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, 1980) or specified artworks of interest (such as Miyako's *hiroshima* photographs), but also to look for interviews (such as Cott's *Rolling Stone* interview with Sontag, 2013), journals and diaries (such as Sontag [Author] & Rieff's [Ed.], *As Consciousness is Harnessed to Flesh: Journals and Notebooks, 1964-1980*, 2013), and final works created by them or their loved ones composed before, during, or soon after their deaths (such as Barthes's *Mourning Diary*, 2010, and Rieff's memoir on Sontag, 2008).

In another example, powerful black and white photographs of a dying Susan Sontag pictured by her longtime partner and photographer, Annie Leibovitz, are included in Leibovitz's (2009) retrospective collection [A Photographer's Life: 1990-2005](#), a series that includes numerous photographed moments of the life and death of her beloved Susan. In this way, photographs of and writings about the person who always wrote about them became of interest to me as part of her life text. This became another way of seeing her. As well, David Rieff's memoir *Swimming in a Sea of Death: A Son's Memoir* (2008) is about his mother Susan Sontag's battles with and death from cancer, providing deeper insight into her persona, relationships, and illness. These works (by Rieff and Leibovitz) left a significant mark on my thinking and are worth mentioning in terms of becoming more familiar with Sontag beyond her writing (and, with *Mourning Diary*, Barthes beyond his). By learning about her incredible ten-year struggle with three cancers and an unwillingness to die as she insisted on always knowing the truth of her diagnosis, I think her life in the end days mirrored her writing. In the way photographs freeze time, it seems she was attempting the same. Pushing against photography's claims at truth-telling and adamant about the need for an ethics of picturing peoples' pain, yet she refused to picture or surrender to her own (Rieff, 2008).

This process of layering my own knowledge about *who* I read²³ impacted *how* I read and has further illustrated some of the key themes evident in each of their works, particularly around temporality and the difficulty of letting go – even in pictures, or because of them (Barthes, 1980). These tracings became powerful biographical material for me to not necessarily write *about*, but to pull guidance *from* in terms of the longevity and movement throughout someone’s life of ideas. It provided yet another layer to the ones created in their more-famous works which I initially set out to study and became my *currere*, the conversation I was having with myself (Pinar, 2010/2004) as a way to understand these individuals both through and beyond their writerly works.

To know a writer’s words and worlds, I wanted to know the writer, and while I cannot claim to know Sontag, Miyako, Barthes, or the others, I can attest to what the endeavor of looking past the surface of letters and pictures has brought forward for me. Like a photograph that is visibly flat yet viscerally and contextually multi-dimensional, the lives these writers and artists led certainly bled into their work in the ways rivers run into the sea and become one with the ocean. Furthermore, while it may be impossible to say with certainty what is seeable or knowable about a certain work or author, I found it helpful to uncover some of their narrative frames as a way to position the works as once-alive and human, when so much of the writing and art is about the absence of such. Thus, the process, the *experience* (Dewey, 1934) of looking deeply and seeking a close-up lens on these individuals in order to connect with their works more intimately has offered much in terms of new understandings, autobiographical context, and making personal the reading and seeing process from one writer and artist to another.

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To honor her extensive contributions to photography and to privilege her work at the core of new perceptions surfacing through this dissertation, I open with the work of Susan Sontag.

²³ In terms of a reading, thinking, and writing strategy, it may be valuable for readers to know that I did not read the works of these five individuals one by one in some decided or chronological order, nor did I look at the artworks as separate from the literary texts. Instead and deliberately, I came to know them in *layers* that, over time, interlaced into one in a back and forth together-reading of essay against image, image alongside theory, theory touching story. Some of the works I knew better than others from the onset, and certain photographs and specific chapters or lines resonated more than others. Because I read them this way (in conversation with one another, not simply one by one), I mostly wrote them that way: intentionally weaving and overlapping ideas, making diagonal not always lateral connections. In paragraph form, I move from Sontag to Jaar to Butler to Miyako and Barthes, but they each make their presence known in my thinking elsewhere throughout the essay as well as the dissertation. Some take up more space than others on the page as part of my own ways of making sense of the readings and artworks.

Photographability/Grievability

“It all started with one essay – about some of the problems, aesthetic and moral, posed by the omnipresence of photographed images; but the more I thought about what photographs are, the more complex and suggestive they became.”

Susan Sontag, May 1977
In the opening letter of On Photography, 1977, n.p.

Beginning with her own early encounters with difficult Holocaust images of Dachau and Bergen-Belsen, Sontag describes in *On Photography* (1977) how these images pierced and unsettled her at a young age when she accidentally came up on them in a bookstore. Revealing her own first punctum²⁴ (Barthes, 1980), she writes:

Nothing I have seen – in photographs or in real life – ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years later before I fully understood what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs...When I looked at those photographs, 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. (Sontag, 1977, p. 20)

The idea of photographability and its ethical counterpart are key to what I think Sontag wants her readers to think about and be accountable for. It seems, for her, knowledge formation from photographs is, in part, dependent on the codes (or rules, norms, and cultural practices) of looking. Sontag writes, “In teaching a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe. They are a grammar and, even more importantly, an ethics of seeing” (1977, p. 3). Though the code being visual is not a new concept, the code is indeed altered daily as visual images and media surround us at every turn. In today’s generation in most Western societies, many have never gone or seen a day without images and, instead, are often barraged by and immersed in them. Sontag puts forth the issues and implied power that photographs behold, suggesting the link between knowledge, power, and an ethics of picturing others.

Like Butler’s work on the Abu Ghraib torture photos (addressed later in this chapter), Sontag questions the ability and potential of violent or difficult photographs to generate affect –

²⁴ In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Barthes is known for his distinction of the *studium* and *punctum* regarding photographs – the *studium* is the obvious meaning or intention of the photo; the *punctum* is capable of wounding: it is what “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me” (p. 26-27). He also defines a second punctum around “Time” and its “lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (‘that has been’)” (p. 96).

and to e/affect peoples' beliefs, stating "It is an Event: something worth seeing – and therefore worth photographing" (1977, p. 11). If and when photographs embody "an ethics of seeing" (Sontag, 1977, p. 3), this implies an ethical imperative for viewers or image consumers as well as photographers, challenging them to engage with the task of evaluating, understanding, contextualizing, and in some cases addressing sensationalizing visual content. These issues among others, I suggest, come to bear on knowledge formation and transmission.

Some of Sontag's larger and lingering questions that surface in the span of her life's work address the theme of this chapter, including concerns like: *How (and why) do we 'regard the pain of others' (Sontag, 2003) at a distance? What knowledge of each other is being formed in between, and what (and who) exactly are photographs showing us? Why the distance, why the desperate need to see, and why pictures everywhere?* I believe she highlights important critiques about how viewers as consumers and creators of pictures can ethically locate a 'safe' spectral distance from which to view the lives of others, particularly others like Guetete (a photographed subject in Alfredo Jaar's work).

As a survivor of genocide, Guetete is a woman who suffered in ways we as onlookers and outsiders can never know – we can never *see* her pain. Like Bal (2007), Meiselas (2012), and Reinhardt (2007), Sontag raises questions not only of why we photograph and are surrounded by pictures (many depicting suffering), but also why there always seems to be someone or somewhere else, something exotic, violent, disturbing, and 'newsworthy' (Sontag, 1977) *to* photograph. Sontag writes, the "promise inherent in photography from its very beginning: to democratize all experiences by translating them into images" (1977, p.7), yet the presence of works by photographers Jaar, Miyako, and those from Abu Ghraib seem to show otherwise.

In her earlier writings, she asks, why is this looking necessary and why must we look? (Sontag, 2002/1977). In later writings, Sontag suggests that, in fact, we must see difficult images in order to be confronted with what harm humankind is capable of inflicting upon one another so we might not repeat it (Sontag, 2004). In this sense, photographs as knowledge agents can produce valuable social documents necessary for the archives (Bell, 2005) of history and memory so that future generations can be educated through difficult pictures *and* so that history might not repeat itself if, collectively, we can see what damage has already historically occurred. If looking might inspire social action to end violence and suffering, Sontag is skeptical that affect can inspire such action, but she is certain that outrage, public criticism, and looking are necessary. For her, photography in the face of suffering is a complicit act of "non-intervention" (1977, p. 11). When faced with the choice of a human life or a photograph, there are times when one may choose the photograph, for "The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot

intervene” (Sontag, 1977, p. 12). To Sontag, images “appropriate the photographed subject,” they “transfix” and “anesthetize” (1977, p. 20) it. She writes, “Still there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have...” (1977, p. 14). Further, photography can become a power act of ‘acquisition’ whereby subjects are controlled and visual information is substituted for experience. Sontag asserts, “Indeed, the importance of photographic images as the medium through which more and more events enter our experiences is, finally, only a byproduct of their effectiveness in furnishing knowledge dissociated from and independent of experience” (1977, p. 156).

Her position on photographs, although it changed somewhat between *On Photography* (1977) and *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), continues to call attention to the tendency to photograph pain and to want to (and *need to*) see photographs that depict human suffering, thus

establishing through the visual frame a proximity that keeps us alert to the human cost of war, famine, and destruction in places that may be distant both geographically and culturally. In order for photographs to evoke a moral response, they must not only maintain the capacity to shock, but also appeal to our sense of moral obligation. (Butler, 2009, p. 68)

Sontag questions and problematizes, like Jaar and Butler, the seemingly-inherent human desire to see while situating the seeing suffering as a potential moral call to action. Sontag challenges readers to imagine what such desire implies about photographs, their makers, their subjects, and their spectators – and about the kinds of interpretations (and I argue, the kinds of knowledge) produced by/for/against desiring, consuming eyes (Sontag, 1982). Of shared concern then, by Jaar, Miyako, Sontag, Barthes, and Butler, is what happens when photographs and their subjects are made public, particularly photographs referencing suffering in a context of violence or post-violence where pictorial representation often lays claims to and/or contributes to mis/understanding.

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As a way to confront these ideas and look at photographic performativity in a context of contemporary art addressing memory (McTighe, 2012) and war violence, I have chosen to highlight a selection of photo-based works by artists Alfredo Jaar and Ishiuchi Miyako. I propose their works offer a way of thinking differently about picturing suffering and framing/reframing violence and disappearance, perhaps with a greater sensitivity and aesthetic that Sontag might have appreciated. These artists’ works in particular help me consider, with Sontag and other theorists, what ways of knowing might become possible while being in the presence of (their) photographs and the absence of bodies. I turn now to the work of artist Alfredo Jaar.

The Privilege of Seeing/Disrupting Seeing

I have always been concerned with the disjunction between
experience and what can be recorded photographically.
In the case of Rwanda, the disjunction was enormous
and the tragedy unrepresentable.
This is why it was so important for me to speak to the people,
to record their words, their ideas, their feelings.
I discovered that the truth of the tragedy was in the
feelings, words, and ideas of those people,
and not in the pictures.

Alfredo Jaar
In Strauss (1998), citing Rubén Gallo's
"Representation of Violence, Violence of Representation," Trans 3/4, p. 57

In a series of works including videos, photographs, and installations which, together form *The Rwanda Projects* (1994-2000), Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar photographed many scenes and subjects during and after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. His work in this series attempts to both capture and mask the objects of his encounters during his time in Rwanda, as well as challenge viewers' own expectations for and experiences of seeing. As such, he joins the company of many others in the postmodern contemporary photographic tradition that dispute representation (Grundberg, 2010), raising issues around his own anxieties and pain of/in picturing (Bal, 2007; Reinhardt, 2007). Amassing over three thousand film negatives, most of which were not looked at or developed until returning from Rwanda to his home in New York, his images of the genocide were set aside untouched for over two years due to his need for time to process the horrors of what he saw and ethically decide what to do, if anything, with his photographs.

There are three works from *The Rwanda Projects (TRP)* I find relevant to a discussion of seeing, memory, and photographs as knowledge agents, presented next.

[Warning: Graphic]

Real Pictures (1995)

This is the first project Jaar presented publicly out of his body of troublesome images from Rwanda: he printed photos of each stage of killing then buried them one by one inside sealed black linen boxes, printing on the outside of the boxes in white text only brief captions describing each image concealed inside. That was all that visitors were permitted to see upon entering his show. In this way, he forms knowledge about genocide by disrupting it and by disrupting a way of conventional looking – only he knows what lies inside those boxes; hauntingly, we can only imagine.

Work shown [here](#) [*Real Pictures*]

The Eyes of Guetete Emerita (1996)

This is one of Jaar's most well-known works from the *TRP*. He photographed a woman who was a witness to the violence, one living body amongst a graveyard of dead: her name is Guetete. She was inside the Ntarama Church and witnessed her husband and two children murdered before her eyes. Jaar met her after she emerged from hiding in the woods nearby the church for three weeks with her only surviving daughter. With no way to ease her pain yet identifying the importance of telling her story of loss, he photographed only her eyes. In an attempt to show scale of over one million people killed during the genocide, Jaar has (as part of several exhibitions) printed one million duplicate slides of her eyes. He piles them on large tables inside gallery spaces like plastic hills with loupes on hand so visitors might encounter the single yet repeated image of her eyes up close – eye to eye, human to human.

Work shown [here](#) and [here](#) [*The Eyes of Guetete Emerita*]

Field, Road, Cloud (1997)

This is one of my favorite pieces by Jaar. He photographed the *cloud* that sat high in the sky above the small church where Guetete witnessed horror, the *road* leading to the Ntarama church, and the *field* next to it. During Sunday mass, it is the cloud in whose presence four hundred Tutsis were slaughtered by machete, their prayer turned to bloodbath. Later, along with rotting bodies that clogged rivers (Strauss, 1998), destroyed homes, and survivors with stories of surviving the genocide (including Guetete), Jaar was there on site as an artist responding, not a journalist for hire. He saw, photographed, and sketched among other things this particular field, road, and cloud as part of the living landscape of memory and history. If clouds have eyes, this one, like Jaar and his camera, also became a witness to violence and its aftermath.

**This piece inspired the title to this chapter 'These Clouds Have Eyes.'*

Work shown [here](#) [*Field, Road, Cloud*]

Through these three works, Jaar tells his own story of facing the unimaginable and wondering how/if to make these images public. I believe Jaar keeps the difficult memory of the days and the stories of those who died and survived partially alive in pictures. These objects are now made permanent in his image-archive and perform as remembering markers of a now-haunted place where memory forever lives in the land, post-violence (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011) – and in his photographs. Four hundred skulls now remain inside the church in/as memorial to one massacre among many. Jaar’s artistic responses are evidence of his refusal to picture what carnage lay beneath the cloud or the bloody scene at the church where he encountered Guetete, as well as his deliberate focus on sites not of death, but of absence and what is *not* seen or shown, similar to *Real Pictures* (1995). While we as viewers cannot see the dead, we are reminded of them in these image documents that retain, photographically and archivally, the knowledge of dead and unseen bodies, the knowledge of unthinkable violence, and the knowledge of great loss. These are remembering photographs.

Positioning Jaar’s work both as a documentary project and a public intervention, the photographs may become tools for awareness around Sontag’s “ethics of seeing” (1977, p. 3) and can be considered communicative, politicized visual documents showing evidence of genocide as well as performing as keepers of memory. The images produce knowledge from an artist’s point of view about ways of picturing (and, here, intentionally *not* picturing) others as well as the social responsibility to intervene and to document history that some artists take on as a civic or personal duty. Jaar’s work is deliberately against the forgetting of this violence through a performative photographic act against its disappearance in our collective memory. These three works of Jaar’s insist on remembering by way of refusing the act of direct picturing. His works, through their presence and circulation in exhibitions, galleries, books, and collections, also demonstrate a refusal to be erased from history and his (and our) memory: the cloud, her eyes, the sealed boxes, and these narratives are critical information he thinks viewers need to know, ought to see, and must not forget. This idea is also present in Miyako’s work.

From my readings about Jaar’s lifetime of artworks and his career and ideologies, it appears he is aware that experience in full cannot be captured in photographs – that is not his project. He attempts not to strictly picture reality but rather to demystify it and admits that part of his work comes from a place of anger and ‘rage’ about what he was seeing and what was in need of being expressed (Jaar, Jacob & Princenthal, 2005, p. 24). Princenthal (in Jaar, et al., 2005) suggests Jaar’s work is characteristically similar to Barthes’s idea of the punctum with “the creation (or recognition) of meaning in a disruptive or unexpected fragment” (p. 20). By making public art and

much of it participatory and interventionist, such as some of Jaar's other projects like *Camera Lucida* (1996), *The Gift* (1998), and *Lights in The City* (1999), perhaps he wants his work to have the capacity to intervene while gnawing simultaneously at people's emotion, reason, and heartstrings – to empathize with and truly see “what James Agee called ‘the cruel radiance of what is’” (Linfield, 2010, p. xv). This is how he interrupts the desire to see, bringing his own knowledge formation beside whatever knowledge or understanding is formed when others encounter his works. By inviting viewers as seers to act as third witness, he recognizes and draws public attention to the need for people outside of Rwanda to see these works, to hear these stories we might not otherwise hear, and to confront a collective global naiveté about pictures, violence, and human suffering. In doing so, he takes an opportunity to use art politically and socially. Jaar's artistic ‘public acts’ (Ibáñez-Carrasco & Meiners, 2004; Riaño-Alcalá, 2004) of intervention and disruption address these issues through art making and art exhibitions, embracing the strategic power of creative “acts of making *knowledge public* (to tell) and making *public knowledge* (to be seen)” (Ibáñez-Carrasco & Meiners, 2004, p.1). Judith Butler, in *Frames of War* (2009) might suggest Jaar's agenda performs a commentary on whose lives are “grievable” (Butler, 2009, p. xxii), worthy of international media attention and front cover printing – thus, whose lives are *printable* and worth remembering.

Moving now to Butler's work, which draws on Sontag, on the Abu Ghraib torture photographs and inviting Barthes to the discussion, I add another layer of thinking about the picturing of suffering. Using their ideas as a base, I consider how the ways we frame violence through photography frames how we construct knowledge from, with, and because of these frames.

Framing Desire

If, as the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas claims, it is the face of the other that demands from us an ethical response, then it would seem that the norms that would allocate who is and is not human arrive in visual form.

These norms work to *give face* and to *efface*.

Accordingly, our capacity to respond with outrage, opposition, and critique will depend in part on how the differential norm of the human is communicated through visual and discursive frames.

Judith Butler

Frames of War, 2009, p. 77, italics in the original

In her essay, “Ethical Ambivalence” (2000), Butler's own beginnings with ethics (connected to Sontag's in a way) position her in a place of grappling with her relationship to a devastating Holocaust history, stating “I began my philosophical career within the context of a Jewish

education, one that took the ethical dilemmas posed by the mass extermination of the Jews in World War II, including members of my own family, to set the scene for thinking of ethicality as such” (Salih, 2004, p. 4-5). For Butler, these issues hit very close to home, and her continuing life’s work is much devoted to asking a simple question that I think she implies is at the very heart of much violence and ethical decision-making: *What and who counts as human?*

In wanting to understand what motivates Butler and learn what motivations might shape her life’s work, Brownley’s review (2006) of *The Judith Butler Reader* (edited by Salih with Butler, 2004) is helpful:

Butler herself offers a succinct summary of her ongoing academic explorations: ‘In a sense, all of my work remains within the orbit of a certain set of Hegelian questions: What is the relation between desire and recognition, and how is it that the constitution of the subject entails a radical and constitutive relation to alterity?’ (p. 408)

This notion of desire is where I think Butler’s critiques on ethics and being human come into play with Barthes’s writings on photography as ‘haunted spectatorship’ (Sontag, 1982) Together and in boldly differing ways, Butler and Barthes consider what desire does, how it affects, and why it will never disappear. For Butler, her concern, I believe, is what desire *implies*.

In her chapter, “Torture and the Ethics of Photography: Thinking with Sontag” (2009), Butler discusses what happens when private desire and disturbing actions go public. In the case of the torture images from Abu Ghraib, a group of infamous United States soldiers decided not only to torture their prisoners-turned-victims but also to photograph them being hurt and humiliated. In those photographed and lived moments, Butler insists human life and human dignity became malleable, negotiable in worth, and subject to interpretation of value and to selective violations – physically, mentally, and *photographically*. She critiques the ways desire frames the subjects being depicted, the power structures *beyond* and the norms embedded *in* the frames, and the complicity of the amateur photographer-soldiers who participated.

Like Barthes’s dual loss of looking at the *Winter Garden Photograph* of his mother at age five after her passing, knowing she is/was there in the paper image but already gone in real life, the Abu Ghraib photographs critiqued by Butler (2009), Eisenman (2007), and Sontag (2004) also perform a kind of doubling effect: depictions of those who experienced pain and humiliation became victims twice-over by being photographed and re-pictured again and again, their trauma re-inscribed for others to see yet wholly unrepresentable or knowable to anyone but themselves (Bennett, 2005). Their lives of that moment in time are now spectacles in the form of images that may forever circulate digitally long past their time of creation, continuing to potentially shape a way of thinking about war violence, photography, torture, and inform how public memory is influenced and

marked by certain troubling images.

These stories told in pictures were likely never meant to go public or viral online yet are now part of historical living memory. They, like so many other disturbing images in circulation, are images we and the victims, their families, and the aggressors will live with the rest of our lives, whether we want to see them or not. We cannot make them un-exist or go unseen. By framing our collective desire to see and recognize what or who we see, Butler asks what all of this says about whose suffering and realities are made 'normal' through such photographs. Norms and frames, then, in their capacity to privilege some lives over others, also have the capacity to determine what is known, or knowable, remembered, and "grievable" (Butler, 2009, p. xxii) about them. In this sense, photographs (in this case, clearly *not* by artists) can also be thought of as agentic to knowledge formation and production even if it is knowledge that disturbs or disrupts. We still learn from these challenging photographs and the contexts of their creation. In a way, perhaps we become changed by them, as they educate us in many ways.

For Barthes, on the other hand, I believe his concern is what desire *does* – how it lures you in, tugs at a piece of you on the inside that is perhaps triggered by something encountered on the outside. Like his punctums, desire haunts, it "pricks" (Barthes, 1980, p. 96), yet by the time of its pricking, it is too late – desire meets death, or as Butler might see it, desire meets dehumanization. Barthes was lured by the grip of time and the love of his mother, not wanting to lose hold of either. His seminal work *Camera Lucida* (1980) speaks not to war violence, but rather to the violence of loss and the gravitas of "lost time" (Haustein, 2012, p. 1) in his photographic autobiography. Photographs, for Barthes, catastrophically always possess "a defeat of Time in them," stating "there is no need to represent a body in order for me to experience this vertigo of time defeated" (Barthes, 1980, p. 96-97).

For Barthes, Butler, Sontag, and perhaps for Jaar and Miyako, complex commentaries are put forth about the ongoing desire or need to savor the 'photographable' (Sontag, 1977), as they each consider what kind of ethics *of* and nostalgia *for* picturing constitutes this. Sontag and Butler certainly question how such desire is born, fed, politicized, and mediated by the visual modes and 'codes' (Butler, 2009) that produce the punctums-as-studiums. Barthes's work on text/intertext adds to this in terms of his critical analyses of intertextual sign systems (Allen, 2003) through which we see and are seen.

Where Barthes's often positions texts and sign systems as subjective, Butler positions the frames of picturing and valuing of human life as such. To her, frames matter. They frame reality, they frame perception, they frame incomplete truths, and they frame and normalize who suffers –

in whose hands and on whose watch. Most of all, frames as politicized, moralized lenses structure a way of thinking about whose lives are “grievable” (Butler, 2009, p. xxii) and what exactly constitutes a human life. These are all frames that can define how people become educated (and sometimes miseducated) by or about photographs. In turn, these frames inform knowledge formation, the politicization of visual content, and affect ways of visual mediation and communication. Such affect is, in part, because of the way images as information perform – they become archived as knowledge partially based on how they are framed and seen. By disarming and unframing (Rogoff, 2001) the frames that shape reality, it may be possible to consider the implications of what lies beyond the literal edges of a photograph in order to rethink what truths are being represented (Hall, 2003).

To consider another perspective on framing, I turn now to the work of a photographer who frames pieces of delicate history in her work, working poetically behind the camera with memory and delicate objects. As the second artist I bring into this conversation, I look at photographs by artist Ishiuchi Miyako as another way of addressing the knowledge of difficult, violent pasts through the presence of photographs and the absence of bodies – in pictures.

Post-Death: Visual Narratives in the After-moment

I continue to take photographs of scars.
I cannot stop because they are so much like a photograph.
More than like, they have almost the same quality as a photograph.
They are visible events in the past and recorded days. Both the scars and the photographs
are the manifestation of sorrow for the many things that can never be retrieved
and love for life as a remembered present.

Ishiuchi Miyako
On Scars, 1988
As cited in Miyako (2005a, p. 132)

Ishiuchi Miyako’s photographs, particularly the series [ひろしま *hiroshima* \(2008\)](#) and [Mother’s 2000-2005](#) (2005b) make available another way of thinking photographs as agents and archives of knowledge. Her images in the two series I refer to address contexts that are deeply political (war and what remains of atomic bombs dropped in Japan) and deeply personal (the skin and belongings of her deceased mother, whom she says she did not get along with very well). As one of Japan’s well-known female photographers having grown up *in* and responding *to* post-war life, the work in [ひろしま *hiroshima*](#) as well as the series *Mother’s: 2000-2005* both follow a line in her earlier works around the idea of tracing memory (Michiko, 2005), a concept important in this

dissertation. Previously, she has photographed peoples' body scars (including the entire body of dancer Ono Kazou in *1906 to the Skin* (1994), women born in her birth year (*I.9.4.7*, 1990), and places she has lived (*Apartment*, 1978 and *Endless Night*, 1980).

Continuing where I left off with Butler (2009) in the previous section, the notion of grievability takes on, in my view, different meanings and forms in Miyako's works. As a way to cope with her own grief, Miyako's photographs in *Mother's: 2000-2005* include stills of her mother's belongings (from undergarments to used lipstick tubes) and close-ups of her mother's scars from being burned when she was younger. For Miyako, skin and scars, like the clothes and makeup upon them, hold memory and tell stories. They, as a palpable landscape of pain and living history, evoke a sense of grief, absence, traceability, and loss. If her memories need to be forever archived and preserved, perhaps that is why she has been called the photographer of memories (Michiko, 2005). In her series ひろしま *hiroshima*, forty-eight large color photographs depict rusted, fractured, worn, once-owned objects and thin, tattered, and stained clothing belonging to victims of Hiroshima. Miyako was invited to select and photograph her subjects out of the 19,000 items stored at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and chose only to photograph items that had touched human skin. She presents a photographic collection of still life objects (a shoe, a blood-stained dress, a pair of glasses, a watch, etc.), each shot against a simple white background in natural light.

These works bear not only a history marked by stains, tears, blood, and the stories of whom they once belonged to but also invite a sense of grieving due to their mere presence as post-war artifacts, now photographed. The physical presence of these items at the museum and her images remind us that their owners are absent, due to violence caused against them in a time of war – her photographs bring them back into the present again. Their owners have been disappeared yet, in part through these photographs, the memory of them has not. Her work, like Jaar's, is against their erasure from historical memory, as a story and a person's life history live within each of the objects and photographs, which Miyako artistically saves from certain disappearance. They are a kind of "living memory at a point of contact" (Bennett, 2005, p. 44), part of a "living archive" (Riaño-Alcalá & Baines, 2011, p. 414) for remembering the past in the present.

Of her experience photographing them, she writes "All I can do now is to focus on the air that I share with the objects lying before me and press the shutter to capture that moment in time" (Miyako, 2008, p. 76). As agents of knowledge, her moving suite of images provides a new visual context for post-war memory from a contemporary Japanese female photographer's point of view. We, the public, can become photographically educated by her intimate work with these war-torn objects and consider the role of contemporary art photographs and photographers in learning

about history, public and private memory, and in responding to trauma through art. Additionally, the images add to existing historical photographic archives about war and some of the very personal, tragic losses associated with it. Her work is in stark contrast to the Abu Ghraib photographs and are the opposite of such dehumanization (unless, perhaps, one considers viewing these bloodied, war-torn artifacts as voyeuristic or ‘disaster porn’), although they still remind us of it. Somewhat similar to Jaar’s, Miyako’s work respectfully honors lives lost and uses photography to reconsider, visually trace, and poetically acknowledge and render the beauty in pain (Reinhardt, Edwards, & Dugganne, 2007) while acknowledging the deeply personal, intimate nature of such wounds. As Barthes’s once wrote in *Camera Lucida*:

But my grief wanted a just image, an image which would be both justice and accuracy—*justesse*: just an image, but a just image. Such, for me, was the Winter Garden Photograph...I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me... at most it would interest your studium: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound. (1980, p. 70/73)

Of great contextual note, Miyako’s was the first ever contemporary art exhibition devoted to Hiroshima. Contextually, in terms of knowledge produced, shared, and encountered in an exhibition format at a particular time and place, the first time her ひろしま *hiroshima* series was shown outside of Japan and in North America²⁵ was at the Museum of Anthropology exhibition at The University of British Columbia, where I first encountered it. That exhibition was held from October 14-2011-February 12, 2012 at The Audain Gallery. This exhibition and opportunity to publicly engage with her moving work marks a significant moment in the history, understanding, and creativity of post-war photography as well as a noteworthy encounter of mine with her work.

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Studying closely the works of Miyako and Jaar has called me to consider: a) how a photographer, with the aid of a camera, comes to register time spent in the presence of tragedy and loss, be it public and/or personal; and b) what is the photograph’s (and photographer’s) role in preserving memory and tracing disappearance? In the act of subjective, intuitive, photographic seeing, knowledge is being formed in the performative act of visual registration where the

²⁵ The J. Paul Getty Museum hosted a large solo exhibition ([Postwar Shadows](#)) by [Ishiuchi Miyako](#) in 2015-16. An exhibit of smaller scale photographs took place in a New York City gallery in 2014 (Personal communication with Linda Hoaglund, November 2013). Linda Hoaglund is the director of the documentary film about Miyako’s ひろしま *hiroshima* exhibition at UBC’s MOA titled [Things Left Behind](#). Of note: In 2014, Miyako was awarded the prestigious Hasselblad award for her photography.

photographs and the artists together seek an essence, shedding light upon something in a new way in order for others to see, encounter, and learn from if they choose.

Like the clothing and artifacts selected from museum archives to be photographed by Miyako and Guetete's lifted eyes in Jaar's work that gaze out, photographs like these can remind us never to forget or repeat these violent histories and stories, but always to remember them instead. They can also haunt. As photographic memorials and traces of human life both dead and alive, they may raise collective consciousness about the devastation and human cost of war, the finality of loss, the violence of being violent, the role of the artist in history, the power of the gaze, and the process of remembering and forgetting. Thought this way, an awareness and understanding about devastating historical events can be shifted, all because of a single image or series of them; in the case of Miyako and Jaar, for the better, while in the case of the Abu Ghraib torture photos, for the worse. Photographs and exhibitions like the ones by Jaar and Miyako discussed in this chapter offer a final resting place for what has been seen in the form of an archivable series of photographs now devoted to *being seen*.

Thought this way, Miyako's and Jaar's photographs pictorially challenge the time punctum Barthes's so fervently resisted: their images recall the past (like Barthes' *noeme*: 'that has already been'), yet they retain a present and foreseeable future life as contemporary art images in wide circulation. As creative counter-points to censored knowledge about war violence that still exist in many places, they will always be documents that can stand alongside history and say otherwise.

I think photographs for Barthes performed as knowledge about time's inevitable disappearance, even when remembering the present (Miyako, 2005b). They became, in light of his mother's death, part of the archive of his own sadness, knowing death would always come, something he continued to wrestle with even after her death and before his own (Barthes, 2010). Barthes's nostalgia and mourning over the passing of time mimics Miyako's in the sense they both are in the present, looking back, both speaking of *what once was* (including their mothers) – reaching back into time's deep abyss where what and who they were both looking for was there... yet not. Barthes's *Winter Garden* photo of his mother reminds him of her death; Miyako's photos of the Hiroshima clothes remind us of whom they once may have belonged to – and why they are no longer here to wear them. Both speak to being in the presence of photographs and the absence of bodies.

Unlike reminiscing, Miyako and Jaar invite us think about the ethics of violence through the intimacy of the photographic lens, using poetic means to make political statements. Perhaps they hope, by showing us the residue of war and by archiving a difficult past as they have each

encountered it, that genocide and war like this will never again occur. Both Jaar's and Miyako's respective bodies of work embody methods of visual storytelling, I argue, that speak back to death and history, signifying the passage of time and an ethically-bound refusal to let go, forget, or be forgotten. Photographing becomes agentic as a way to recover the gut-piercing hallows of loss and to archive the past (in part) through pictures. Of such loss, Derrida (2010) writes:

This is perhaps the photographic emotion, the poignancy of which Barthes speaks. One keeps the archive of 'something' (of someone as some thing) which took place once and is lost, that one keeps as such, as the unkept, in short, a sort of cenotaph: an empty tomb. (p. 19)

Moving into the final section of this chapter, I focus on some of the ethical issues embedded in the work of Jaar, Miyako, and the Abu Ghraib torture photos. In the context of this dissertation, some considerations from the onset are how educators might make sense of these works towards a productive learning lesson, how each of the aforementioned works or set of images raises ethical concerns for photography, and the kinds of knowledge that are produced in ethical moments of encounter through art, exhibition, and seeing.

Toward an Ethics of Picturing Others

Most of all beware, even in thought, of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of griefs is not a proscenium, a man who wails is not a dancing bear.

Aimé Césaire
Return To My Native Land, 2013

After analyzing these images and ideas, my thinking has been shifted in several ways, particularly around my own ethical and pedagogical responsibilities as a viewer, photographer, teacher, curator, and researcher as I consider the capacity for photographs to impart important knowledge, both helpful and disturbing. One justification for braiding the writings of Sontag, Butler, and Barthes with the artworks of Miyako and Jaar along with the Abu Ghraib photos is what they offer collectively and individually towards an ethics of picturing others.

Educators, artists, and researchers alike are often involved in the shaping of seeing on a daily basis. Some might say we have an ethical responsibility of engaging with Haraway's question (2002) "With whose blood were my eyes crafted?" (p. 680), whether we teach art, take pictures, or not. Looking to contemporary artists like Jaar and Miyako along with the infamous Abu Ghraib 'photographers' for ways of performing and contesting seeing by way of the photograph invites us

to consider, through their lenses, what it might mean to be in the absence and presence of bodies, cameras in hand, while coming to terms with an ethics of picturing others. Further, as viewers or image consumers, we can consider our engagement as ethical witnesses (Garden, 2011) to their works and ways of picturing.

From my background as a photography teacher, I argue there is educational value in looking critically at the ways artists like Jaar and Miyako visualize and trace history. We can consider how their respective senses of artistic agency might help to destabilize, disrupt, and adjudicate conventional knowledge archives around war violence, memory, and photographic representation. Discussions on this topic, using the work of artists and writers on photography as a guide, could be used as a curricular entry point and teaching tool for photography education (Barrett, 2011; Hirsch, 2018; Papageorge, 2011; Rand & Zakia 2006), opening up spaces for deeper understandings of aesthetic modes of knowing (Irwin, 2018a) and for photographic inquiry as an inroad to teaching, learning, understanding, and creating. Therefore, I ask this: From Jaar's *Guetete* to *Shit Boy*, an infamous Abu Ghraib 'portrait,' what limitations and ethical considerations would need to be addressed if a high school or university teacher wanted to bring these images or a discussion about them into the classroom around ethics and seeing? How can Miyako's work with post-war still life photography as well as the images of her mother's belongings inspire a discussion on the picturing of others or the relationship between photography, memory, human traces, and objects left behind? What do these works collectively teach us about the inherent desire to see, and how is seeing a way of knowing as well as not knowing or blindness?

From their varied perspectives, photographic *preservation* (Jaar's, Miyako's, and Barthes's work) and *degradation* (the Abu Ghraib images, Butler's and Sontag's work) become contexts for re/framing the possibilities, moral dilemmas, and desires inherent in seeing/been seen photographically. They also raise greater awareness about the social, emotional, political, moral, and personal cost of putting suffering on stage whereby pictures perform as visual 'prosceniums'²⁶ of others' pain. By juxtaposing two socially-located artists who responded to atrocity with/through photographs in uniquely different ways, alongside the Abu Ghraib images, I do not intend compare the tragic events upon which their works draw from nor suggest similar experiences between the atomic bomb, genocide, and torture. Rather, my intention is to think about the role of artists and photographs in the formation and adjudication of knowledge and memory as well as the ways their

²⁶ This idea and Jaar's work on *The Rwanda Projects* are eloquently discussed in David Levi Strauss's poignant essay, "A Sea of Grievs is Not a Proscenium: On the Rwanda Projects of Alfredo Jaar" in *Let There Be Light: The Rwanda Project* (Jaar, 1998). See also: *Between the eyes: Essays on photography and politics* (Strauss, 2012).

works are *against disappearance*, a key concept in my dissertation. I also think about what ways the visual nature of photographs may affect, contribute, and complicate knowledge formation, communication, migration, reception, and circulation.

As photographic forms of knowledge about war and genocide, the works by Miyako and Jaar straddle a line between documentation and art, while sharing a through-line of pain; whereas, the Abu Ghraib images, exploiting pain, straddle a line between government-sanctioned torture practices and abuse of force (if there is such a line). Together, they waiver between an “ethics of seeing” (Sontag, 1977, p. 3) and the dangers of *not* seeing – how would the world know of these atrocities if not from photographs? This suggests a contradiction between often-dehumanizing representation of difficult subjects and a need for their ethical remembering (Naguib, 2007). In other words, to see (in pictures) and/or not to see? To remember and/or to forget?

Batchen (2012) writes of truth, “Posing (that) truth as a question, rather than a given, it asks us to be critical interlocutors rather than passive observers. It asks us, in short, not just to contemplate the cruel radiance of what was, but to reach out and take responsibility for what still might be” (p. 239). Through their works, we as viewers and readers are invited to face our hopes and fears for what photographs as visual forms and archives of knowledge can and cannot ‘do’ or teach us about difficult stories – what their culpability, vulnerability, and temporality offers as well as constrains. Particularly, in contexts of violence or post-violence when photographs often become spectacles, we are reminded to consider not only the importance and “ethics of seeing” (Sontag, 1977, p. 3) the pictures in order to know what has happened, but also the potentially voyeuristic spectatorship around violence, loss, and others’ pain (Reinhardt, Edwards, & Dugganne, 2007; Sontag, 2003/1977). I believe Jaar and Miyako’s works, amidst this concern, find ways artistically and conceptually to celebrate survival and remembrance in a way that outshines victimhood and suffering while still acknowledging it in a respectful and highly creative way.

My encounters with these texts and images suggest it is imperative to recognize that photographs and photographers can also betray or deny the agency of their subject(s) in terms of subjective stories and representations (Hall, 2003) told by whom, on whose behalf, in what context, and for what purposes. Without having Jaar’s prominent spotlight as an international artist, his images might just appear to be pictures of any field, any road, and any cloud. Guetete might just be another photographed Black African woman with a life deemed “grievable” (Butler, 2009, p. xxii). And I wonder: Is she aware of how many times her eyes and story have been projected, seen, printed, reprinted, piled, enlarged, stared into, and curated? Was this the permission she granted up on first being photographed?

In addition, I wonder, would Barthes (2010) appreciate the posthumous printing of his personal mourning diary, despite his close friends' support of this, or Sontag of her private, intimate journals? What might Miyako's mother think of having photos of her delicate undergarments on display in museums, or perhaps she was aware this could happen? I raise these questions not to criticize anyone, but more so to raise the concern as one possibility and to avoid assumptions. In *Picturing Atrocity* (Batchen, Gidley, Miller, & Prosser, 2012), Prosser suggests that photography is "in crisis" because "the photographing of atrocity always involves an ethical crisis of representation" (p. 9). Perhaps the teaching and curricular design of photography is, too: if photographs can and do build/shape knowledge which in turn builds/shapes curriculum, then how is knowledge about/ and from photographs forming – by whom and in what ways? And where might ethics fit in?

In an era where culture and identity are highly visual and much of our lives and the lives of others are being visualized, digitized, televised, analyzed, and *seen* on various media, art, and online platforms, I believe it is valuable to consider the implications of seeing and photographing by taking into account how knowledge and knowledge archives are being formed, reformed, and sometimes disrupted through the photographic image. Acts of awareness around picturing or being pictured (such as: *seeing, framing, storytelling, tracing, erasing, curating, participating, and writing*) help to define as well as disrupt what can be mis/understood, historicized, archived, problematized, and counter-archived, remembered, and/or forgotten. When seeing and unseeing can be thought of as forms of participation and/or acts of creative resistance, I argue that disrupting it (as Jaar and Miyako do in differing ways) can help to challenge notions of what is representable, "grievable" (Butler, 2009, p. xxii), traceable, replaceable (Derrida, 2010) – and of course what and who is 'photographable' (Sontag, 1977). In moments of awareness around seeing, new knowledge can be formed even when disruption and critique occur. When 'disruptive curriculum' (Ibáñez-Carrasco & Meiners, 2004) reshapes learning, learning, in turn, might reshape curriculum (Eisner, 2005). From this awareness, perhaps the knowledge agent is present in the act of encounter and the knowledge archive can expand to include the new knowings that can come of significant encounters – here, with photographs.

On the other hand, photographic forms of knowledge also suggest to me the potential of artists to respond to tragedy, inviting opportunities to recreate, resist, and counter-narrate histories in need of countering. By producing images that push against narrative definiteness (or, the 'definiteness' of a singular narrative) and expose things we may need to see, these two artists (Jaar and Miyako) narrate and archive (Merewether, 2006) other ways of knowing and remembering. They shed photographic light on both presence and absence in relation to difficult histories in ways

both beautiful and haunting. They question truths, intervene, bear witness, and act as storyteller and bridge (Meiselas, 2012). Through their works, we can encounter a different way of *seeing* seeing (Berger, 2008; Sturken & Cartwright, 2009), showing seeing (Mitchell, 2005), and showing feeling (Bennett, 2005). While the artists like Jaar and Miyako may not be able to capture or reproduce lived experience, they can reveal pictorial fragments of experience that might otherwise never have been seen, stories that might otherwise have gone unheard, untold, and erased.

In today's visual and visualized culture, it seems we are, at once, bound to look away (Rogoff, 2008), look upon the surface of, and look deep within our own seeking selves at what exactly is being sought after and revealed in the act of seeing. As well, we may consider what might be missed or outside the frame due to perpetual or peripheral blindness, including things some may refuse to see. From this, we can consider carefully not only the dilemma around photography's performative capacity, but also the implications of visual participation (Rogoff, 2008) as a form of cultural participation. We can think about how moments of seeing, participating, and photographing can be equally educative, relational, creative, and healing as they can be harmful, dehumanizing, voyeuristic, and 'compassion-fatiguing,' especially in the contexts of violence and war (Sontag, 2004/2003/2002/1977).

While much knowledge has been gained through the efforts of artists-activists like Jaar and critics like Sontag, I wonder what has potentially been lost or whose stories are perhaps being erased in the acts of piling and duplicating Guetete's eyes (Jaar), rephotographing archived war objects (Miyako), calling attention to war torture photos (Butler, Sontag), and refusing to let go of someone that is already gone (Barthes). In Jaar's photographs and installations in *The Rwanda Projects* that decline to picture the grotesque yet insist on remembering it, I wonder if the dignity of Guetete and the other survivors is perhaps slightly destroyed. As a third-world subject deemed worth seeing (Sontag, 1977) in first world countries, it is valuable to contemplate the implications of seeing when the exoticism of suffering is often a common visual currency seen in both news and art on a regular basis (Lidchi & Tsinghahjinnie, 2009). This, perhaps, is why Sontag (2002) once said, "Compassion, stretched to its limits, is going numb" (p. 11).

Even though we do not see a dead or bloodied body in Jaar's work (or in Miyako's forty-eight large-scale color photographs), the singular painful story and image of Guetete's loss stands in (Meiselas, 2012) for the other 999,999 dead in Rwanda. Where are those stories and eyes? Photographer and activist Susan Meiselas (2012) asks, referring to a growing tradition of 'aftermath photography': "What about all the bodies we're not seeing now? Can I make an image that makes you think about the pictures you're not seeing?" (p. 120).

I have suggested the benefits of looking to contemporary artworks that take up these issues; however, I am also suggesting the need for critical questions like these I have just posed about Guetete to be asked in order to address an ethics for both the *photographer* and the *photographed*. The answers, I argue, come to bear on knowledge formation, historical archives, as well as individual understandings of and encounters with photographs in everyday life, both private and public.

In this chapter, I have aspired to better understand and contribute to a targeted yet complicated conversation about the life and ethics of photographs and photographers which, I offer, exist within the many ‘gray zones’ (Levi, 1988) of seeing, picturing, and being seen. As a way of addressing difficult pasts in/through pictures, I have situated photography’s employment and knowledge-forming/-disrupting potential three ways: 1) as a public artistic intervention and creative offering (Miyako, Jaar); 2) as a way to satisfy and frame human desires for seeing/being seen (Butler/Abu Ghraib, Sontag, Jaar); and 3) as a refusal to forget or be forgotten (Miyako, Jaar, Barthes). Through a critical rumination on Alfredo Jaar and Ishiuchi Miyako with the help of Sontag, Butler, Barthes and others, I took into consideration the potential, privilege, and ethical problematics of picturing others as well as the disruptive and creative potential of ‘reframing history’²⁷ (Meiselas, 2012) through art. The works studied offer artistic, theoretical, and I suggest potentially pedagogical ways to “build” new and perhaps “unbuild” (Richter, 2010, p. x)²⁸ ideas about photography/s created during and after difficult times, such as war violence, and the language, codes, and frames of seeing them. In their respective ways of speaking out – whether in critical art or critical writing practice – each of the five key individuals I reference fights erasure from a history of memory and a memory of history by refusing to be silenced, misremembered, or made invisible, using photography and writing as mediums of personal expression and social commentary. While their works of course speak for themselves, I have attempted to translate my own encounters with them in a way that thoughtfully layers the five ‘beginnings’ (presented at the opening of the chapter) in order to offer a new one.

These critical and creative ruminations on art and theory represent significant understandings I have gained from engaging with their collective works as they relate to photo-based memory work and teaching practice, laying a foundation for this study as one that is layered,

²⁷ This phrase borrows from photographer Susan Meiselas’s *Cuesta del Plomo* (2004/1978), from the series [Reframing History](#), Managua, July 2004. See her chapter “Body on a Hillside” in *Picturing Atrocity* (Batchen, Gidley, Miller, & Prosser, 2012).

²⁸ In his Introduction to *Copy, Archive, Signature: A Conversation on Photography* (Derrida, 2010), Richter references “building and unbuilding” as a Heideggerian-influenced Derridian notion of deconstruction.

interdisciplinary, challenges the role of the artist and/as teacher, and takes up critical issues relevant to education today. It was an honor spending time thinking with their respective bodies of work, and I acknowledge there is more to be unraveled. This is just a 'beginning.'

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As we move now into Chapter 4, I introduce readers to my chosen methodology of *a/r/tography* and discuss the research participants and methods for the study, including interviews and details on the group exhibition at the center of this dissertation. This chapter provides an understanding of the ways this research was conceptualized and carried out and with whom, as well as offers a framework for the merit of *a/r/tographic* scholarship and visual lifewriting in/as photography research.

Chapter 4

An Artful Methodology: Photographic Inquiry Through an A/r/tographic Lens



Fig. 7 | By Blake Smith, *Knolling: Some materials for an arts-based dissertation, camera in use*

A/r/tography: An Overview

The methodological heart of this study is in a/r/tography. A/r/tography is an arts-based, practice-based methodology devoted to the attunement of sensory, artistic, aesthetic, bodily, poetic, and material practices in relation to the lived experiences *of* and relationships *between* teachers, artists, scholars, learners, and communities. Irwin (2013) describes a/r/tography as:

a research methodology, a creative practice, and a performative pedagogy that lives in the rhizomatic practices of the in-between. Resisting the tendency for endless critique of past experience and bodies of knowledge, a/r/tography is concerned with the creative invention of concepts and mapping the intensities experienced in relational, rhizomatic, yet singular events... (p. 198)

Le Blanc and Irwin (2019) provide further definition, stating:

Since its conception, a/r/tography has been described as an interdisciplinary, dynamic and emergent practice, blending visual, narrative, performative, poetic, and other modes of inquiry with qualitative methodologies such as ethnography, auto-ethnography, autobiography, and participatory or educational action research. (p. 1)

While it has transformed over time, a/r/tography's origins emerged out of Curriculum Studies in the Faculty of Education at The University of British Columbia. It began with the work of early a/r/tographers who explored the potential for artistic process to complement, impact, inform, color, and disrupt their research and practices (see Irwin & deCosson, 2004). "Through rigorous and continuous forms of reflexivity and analysis, these early a/r/tographers wove theory, practice and poesis together, which allowed for deeper understandings over time" (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, p. 5). Autobiographical self-study, collaborations, activism, and communities of practice inform some of the key tenants of the beginnings of a/r/tography (Irwin & deCosson, 2004; Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzaouasis, 2008). More recently, studies involving the movement of ideas, deeper nuances of artistic practice, and emphasis on new materialisms, processes, and propositions have emerged as both complex and vibrant. LeBlanc and Irwin (2019) write:

Although it is usually grouped with other research methodologies in social sciences and education, such as arts-based research and arts-based educational research, a/r/tography differs in that movement and materiality generate innovative assemblages, environments, experiences, and events of learning that are participatory, embodied, and complex. As a material and conceptual practice, a/r/tography is a continuous state of movement that transcends the final product, the medium, the material, the ritualized steps, and the repetitive gestures normally associated with practice. It is a process of emergence that embraces 'becoming.' (p. 13)

Part of the elegance of *becoming* is how it can be informed by different actions impressing upon its becoming skin; as such, "knowing (theoria), doing (praxis), and making (poesis) are three forms of thought important to a/r/tography (see Leggo, 2001; Sullivan, 2000)" (Irwin & Springgay,

2008, p. xxiii). While making is a critical component to this methodology, it is important to note that:

Although image-making is immanent in a/r/tography, the a/r/tographic invitation is not toward illustrating, textualizing, or representing already determined understandings. Its practice does not situate artist, teacher, or researcher to act as a fixed symbolic foundation of meaning for art-making, researching, or teaching but rather as an invitation to move into the teaching that the world compels as we respond with sensate learning selves. (Triggs & Irwin, 2019, p. 4)

In terms of noteworthy features, Irwin and Springgay (2008) write “a/r/tography...is concerned with self-study, being in community, [and] relational and ethical inquiry” (p. xix). They describe the “constructs and conditions of a/r/tographical research as practice-based research, as communities of practice, as relational aesthetics and through six renderings of engagement” (p. xxi). *Practice-based research* is important in a/r/tography as it emerges from a practitioner’s own lived experience and values the natural, intuitive, and sometimes challenging cycles of questioning, doing, and thinking that arise when embarking on a personal inquiry rooted in practice, be it teaching practice, art practice, research practice, or an intersection or braid of all three. “In practitioner-based research, theorizing through inquiry seeks understanding by way of an evolution of questions within the living inquiry processes of the practitioner” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxiii). Irwin and Springgay also write that, “A/r/tography as practice-based research is situated in the in-between, where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-complication intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxi). *Communities of practice* (Irwin, 2018b) are essential in a/r/tographic life and projects because they form the relational base of community, dialogical exchange, care, and relationships necessary to carry out artistic endeavors that rely on and can benefit from the presence of multiple voices, varied perspectives, expertise among members, co-creations, co-learning, collaborations, and shared vision and/or mission.

As well, in communities of practice, teachers, artists, and researchers can theorize their own practices through a/r/tography and can explore their practices through an a/r/tographic lens towards scholarship and scholarly making (Irwin & Sinner, 2012; Sinner, 2016). Irwin and Springgay (2008) write:

A/r/tography as living inquiry necessarily opens up the way to describing and interpreting the complexity of experience among researchers, artists and educators, as well as the lives of the individuals within the communities they interact with. As a result, it also opens the topics, contexts and conditions of inquiry. (p. xxv)

Further, communities of practice by their nature of being a group, large or small, make space for potential collaborations among some or all of the members. “In effect, a/r/tographers are concerned with creating the circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding through artistic and educational inquiry-laden processes” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxvi). *Relational aesthetics*, introduced by Bourriaud, is valued in a/r/tographic efforts for its connection to social engagement and how it pays attention to the relational in-between of time and space. “Meaning making within relational aesthetics is embodied in the intercorporeal negotiations between things” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxvi). Further, “the research conditions of a/r/tography reside in several notions of relationality: relational inquiry, relational aesthetics, and relational learning” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxvii).

The last condition for a/r/tographical research is the six conceptual *renderings*. In a/r/tography, renderings offer ways of understanding, embodying, describing, and expressing a/r/tographic work through the lens of working concepts that are “embedded in the processes of artful inquiry (in any art form such as music, dance, drama, poetry and visual arts) and writing. To be engaged in a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through both processes, noting they are not separate or illustrative processes but interconnected processes” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxviii). Renderings are intended to be conceptual methods that help researchers, artists, and teachers to theorize, describe, understand, vision, and conceptualize their practices, projects, collaborations, and selves in a nuanced, dynamic way. A collection of original renderings offered through a/r/tography as conceptual methods for practice-based research include: *contiguity, living inquiry, metaphor/metonymy, openings, reverberations, and excess* (Springgay, et al., 2008; Irwin & deCosson, 2004). These six rendered *concepts as methods* present an emergent foundation for considering, reconsidering, and deepening a/r/tographers’ research, teaching, and creative activity. As well, they offer conceptual frames for understanding and exploring what arises from these activities as one engages reflectively, immersively, and intentionally with one’s practice(s). “For Bickel (2008) renderings assist a/r/tographers to understand the multiple aspects emerging in their art-making/inquiry/teaching process. She writes, ‘[a/r/tographers] allow renderings to emerge out of the inquiry process...’” (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, p. 3). Further, LeBlanc and Irwin (2019) write:

Irwin and Springgay argue that a/r/tographical renderings are ‘flexible, intersubjective locations through which close analysis renders new understandings and meanings’ (2008, p. xxviii). The term was intentionally borrowed from artistic discourse, and it emphasizes the process of invention and its pivotal role in the creation of new knowledge...Rather than capturing research ‘findings’ and displaying them as a static or fixed representation of knowledge, renderings play and move alongside one another, disrupting other thoughts and ideas...Renderings tell evocative and provocative stories. They are meant to disturb, to displace and to raise questions. (p. 3)

All six of these aforementioned renderings are, in a way, evocations and provocations towards doing, seeing, and embracing the processes, methods, outcomes, and possibilities of a/r/tographic work. Varying definitions for 'render' include: to give/to give back, to restore/a restoration, to translate/a translation, and to become. Understanding the etymological root meanings of this term helps to consider the ways render and rendering might be useful in an a/r/tographic lexicon as concepts that speak to novelty, innovation, invention, and potentiality with the capacity to invoke giving/giving back, restoration, translation, and becoming. These are iterative processes within a/r/tography where the gestures are generative and unfolding. Thus, render/rendering as a conceptual method is alive, unfixd, and fluid in motion, sometimes moving to provoke a next iteration or birth a new rendering. LeBlanc and Irwin (2019) state:

A defining feature of a/r/tography is provocation: whether this is in the form of an artwork, an object, a practice, or a system of meanings, the provocation calls the inquirer to actions; to navigate through/with/in the complex processes that reflective, reflexive, recursive, responsive, and/or embodied modes of questioning and questing require (Irwin, 2014). (p. 8)

Yet, the initial renderings described are not limited to these six, for the nature of a/r/tography is to evoke, explore, expand, proliferate, rupture, and transcend boundaries of understanding and visuality in order to redefine and move beyond them, using artistic gestures, scholarly writing, relational happenings, and philosophical undertakings to do so. As such, further extensions, expansions, interpretations, and iterations of the notion of rendering have been made by many other contributors in the field, with emerging a/r/tography projects capable of new ways of rendering. For example, in this dissertation, I introduce three new renderings that emerge from and help to conceptualize my research. They include: *disappearance*, *duration*, and *the lexicon*. Finally, as well as renderings, other important attributes of a/r/tography embedded in this research include the context of emergence, the context of currere (Irwin, 2018a/2017), the context of the in-between, and the context of living inquiry (Le Blanc & Irwin, 2019).

The philosophical underpinnings for a/r/tography are layered, drawing from several bodies of theoretical thought. "Through a post-structural, hermeneutic, and phenomenological paradigm, a/r/tography was conceptualized on the premise that multi-faceted, lived experience and subjective perspectives make substantial contributions to complex phenomena (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Springgay, et al., 2008)" (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, p. 1). Over time, however, the theory forming and informing a/r/tography has experienced a transformation. As LeBlanc and Irwin state (2019), "Drawing from post-qualitative inquiry, feminist theories, new materialisms, and post-humanistic ontology, a/r/tography has grown concerned with the more nuanced understandings of artistic

processes and practices ‘that question yet re-imagine how we might live in difference’ (Irwin, 2008, p.78)” (p. 1).

A/r/tography appreciates and celebrates difference across arts-based disciplines, arts-based research and practices, and aesthetic education (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018; Greene, 2001) by encouraging creative expression, knowledge creation and exchange, and the formation of new and enriching rhizomatic connections in individuals, in communities of practice, through image-making, and in the worlds of research, art, and, education. Speaking of rhizomatic relations, a/r/tographers have often drawn on the philosophy of Deleuze and Guatarri’s (1987) concept of the rhizome, suggesting the rhizomatic potential and nature of a/r/tographic and a/r/tographers’ work and the relationality between them. Triggs and Irwin (2019) write:

The rhizome, with its network of subterranean and rapidly proliferating roots that spring up elsewhere, is a way of thinking about art, teaching, and research practice as disruptive of linear beginnings and endings, resistant to already determined knowledge, as creative of interconnected networks with multiple entry points and most importantly, as always becoming what it is not. (p. 9)

The rhizome is also used as a transformational object of purpose in positioning theory (theorizing) and practice (practicing) from a/r/tography’s view. Irwin and Springgay (2008) write:

Building on the concept of the rhizome, a/r/tography radically transforms the idea of theory as an abstract system distinct and separate from practice. In its place, theory is understood as a critical exchange that is reflective, responsive and relational, which is continuously in a state of reconstruction and becoming something else altogether. (p. xx)

It is this emphasis on the potential of what something *might become* that continues to inspire and hold space for an a/r/tographic energy that leans heavily and artfully towards the unknown, the not yet, the in-between, the yet to be imagined, and the what might be/come. Staying open and attuned to these nuanced spaces of possibility keeps an a/r/tographic perspective fresh, hopeful, thriving, and committed to living inquiry and new discoveries. A/r/tography asks researchers, artists, and educators to adopt an ongoing inquiring stance, suggesting:

With this lens, a/r/tographical research places emphasis on agency and the human and non-human interrelationships that shape our understanding. It is an invitation for artists, researchers, teachers, and learners to continue exploring the contextual, social, and political dimensions of making art, researching, and teaching, especially if this requires breaking away from more conventional ways of conducting research that have difficulty accepting insight, imagination, or intuition. Working in this manner creates possibilities that are more fluid, open-ended, and open to possibility. (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019, p. 16)

This openness to the possibilities of what may come of artful thinking, doing, and making is one of the core beliefs for a/r/tography and what makes it remain popular today as a flexible, rigorous, and inspiring methodology of potential. A/r/tography encourages us to imagine, re-imagine, and reflect on the work and heartfelt efforts of teaching, art making, researching, community-building, writing, curating, walking, and collaborating as immensely abundant ground for possibility, creativity, new understandings, and most of all for learning.

Photography & Visual Lifewriting Through A/r/tography

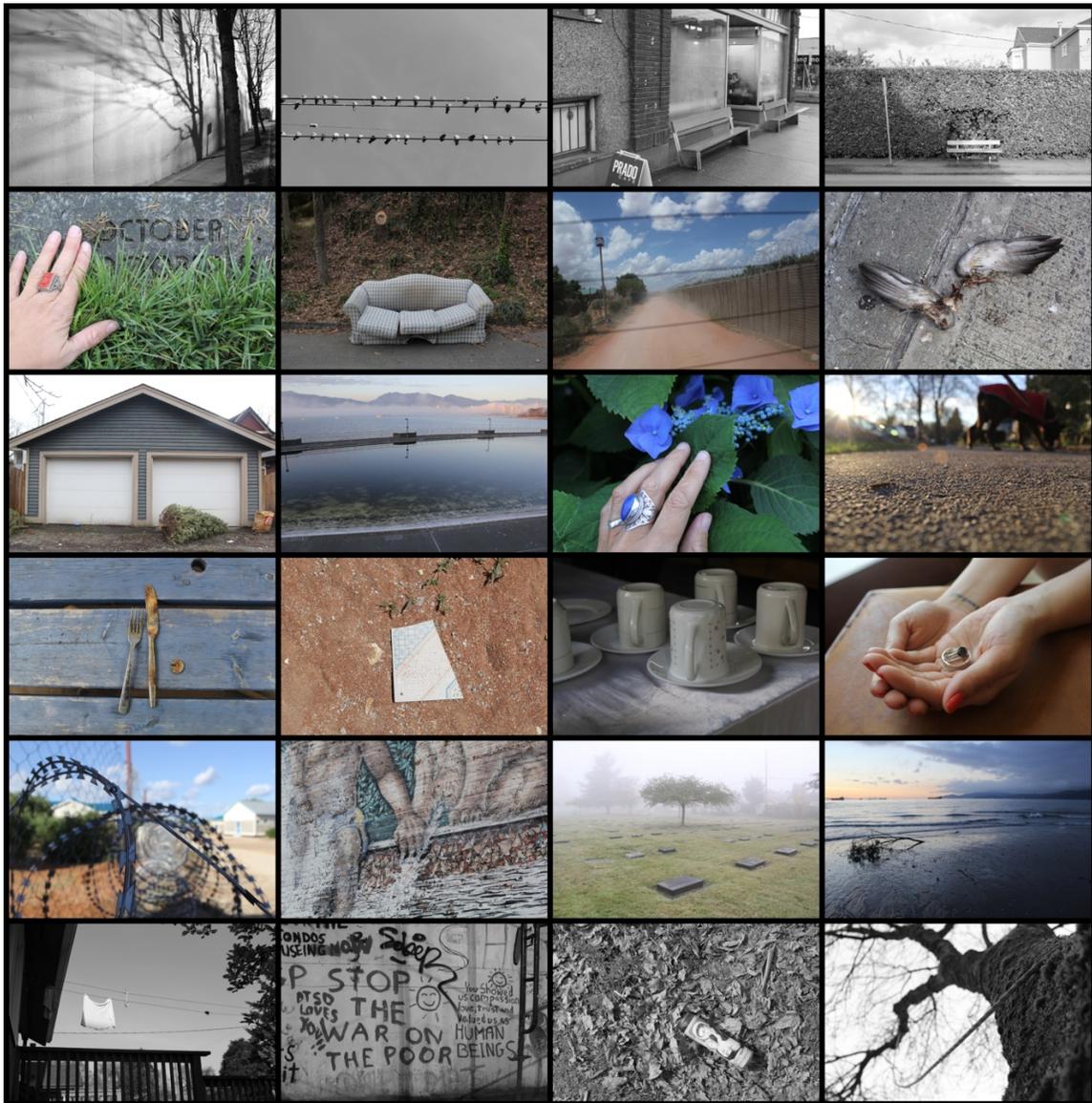


Fig. 9 | By Blake Smith, *Contact sheet (iteration): 24 selected images from The Visual Memoir Project*

As an a/r/tographer, my artistic work behind the camera is a way of engaging the world through visual means, communicating and thinking photographically. As described in the opening chapter, my experiences as a photography teacher and as a practicing photographic artist combined with an interest in creative approaches to academic research informed a necessity to situate my own artistic exploration as a significant method of inquiry in the study. As such, this research involves photographic inquiry, specifically visual lifewriting, through an a/r/tographic lens. Evoking the poetics of living inquiry, I employ a/r/tography through photography as a way of attending to the creative possibilities of visual language from a self-reflective, documentary, and storyteller perspective while centering the overlapping roles of artist, researcher, teacher, and curator.

In my early explorations of a/r/tography, the idea for a long-form photography series emerged, and a project was born that later developed into this study. It was a memoir, a series of images emerging from my everyday experiences and bookended by the duration of my time in graduate school. Using visual lifewriting under the banner of a/r/tography, I ‘wrote’ my visual memoir (entitled *The Visual Memoir Project*) of those years. In this study, visual memoir is both a method and form inspired by a/r/tography – the photographic ‘writing of memoir’ as a practice of visual lifewriting *and* an aesthetic, poetic container for the images that lifewriting produced.

The intimate, educational, and autobiographical form of visual lifewriting through photography initiated by the work of Sinner and Owen (2011) is the main inspiration for my work. It is a method that combines the process and poetry of lifewriting with the attunement and aesthetics of visual practice through artistic explorations of and through visual inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2018). Using photography in a writerly manner, the visual lifewriting process becomes an artistic narrative gesture for storytelling and a way to aesthetically and photographically respond to lived experience, both past and present. Like a photo diary or extended travelogue, visual text and life text merge, inspiring visual lifewriters like me to ‘write’ of our lives in pictures (or other art media) as we live them – responding, perhaps, to an inner and outer longing ‘to live artfully’ and find our place in this world (Dalton, 2012).

In my practice, actual written text in the form of narrative, poetry, prose, journal entries, field notes, and/or captions often accompanies the photographic image. As well, the photographic image itself can be read as a visual lifewriting text, one that bears significance as a fragment of living pictorial narrative in my own history. Sinner and Owen (2011) write, “Photography can be applied to life stories, making photographs a way to trace self in the world” (p. 70). This traceability is, in part, what describes the visual lifewriting act as a provocative visual modality for artistic

documentation and poetic observation. Visual lifewriting as a method in this study emerges from the everyday of lived experience as a way of collecting both past and present, marking and juxtaposing significant moments in time and of time as place-holders for memory and meaning.

The relationship of photo-based inquiry and visual lifewriting to a/r/tography is that they are forms of/for deep visual awareness as well as creative means for the study of lived experience through artistic practice. Through these methods, attention is paid to the in-between spaces of seer and seen, form and image, and seeing and feeling. Photo-based inquiry here is the intentional pursuit, poetics, and production of images that seek to deepen understandings of visual language and lexicons while resonating new meaning. Visual lifewriting, along with visual memoir, are two of many expressions of photo-based inquiry, or ways to inquire visually, that are autobiographical, storytelling vehicles connected to a/r/tography and explored in this study. They are mindful methods of expression that embody (in this case) visual noticing, intuition, reflection, duration, photowalking, visual collecting, and life telling. When used as a research method, here connected to a/r/tography and living inquiry, visual lifewriting in particular is a way to write the stories of research in pictures and to stay photographically and intimately attuned to the process of coming to know, wonder, see, seek, and understand.

Study Details: Extending the Learning Moment

Generally, when classes end, we exit the door and travel in separate directions, some students never to cross paths again and most teachers to never know what comes of our conversations and brief encounters of being together, unless we somehow manage to stay in touch. It can be difficult to ever know what lingered or made a difference. As courses run in cycles and follow terms often concurrent with the seasons, the duration of one's learning moment is, in some ways, marked by the measure of time between a course's or a term's beginning and end. For this study, I wondered: *What if that duration and those conversations could be extended? What if we could touch the tender edges of a learning moment and linger there, not letting go just yet? And what if it could turn into something else, something more, but at the same time something not yet imagined?* That possibility – to extend the learning moment – enacted as a pedagogical trace from a course to a research group to an exhibition was laid forth to the participants who became group members, introduced next. This research story is what unfolded from the offering to participate and linger together in that once-unknown space of *something more*.

Described in Chapter 1, the group of educators and artists who came together for this research study first met in the summer of 2015 at UBC in the course I taught, *EDCP 405 Visual Arts*

for Classroom Practice: New Media & Digital Processes in the Faculty of Education. As a qualitative photo-based research project rooted in a/r/tography, the offer to participate in this study was extended to them as an invitation to create, learn, and be in a photography community alongside. The group was invited to participate in an exhibition as part of this doctoral research project: a) to explore pedagogical possibilities for photography and memory; and b) to look at what kinds of meaningful art educational experiences and art making are possible from engaging creatively with photo-based memory work and ethics. From our gathering together, our research group created the exhibition, *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*, a significant learning event, presented in the following chapter.

Eight Participant Biographies: Our Creative Community of Practice

Using excerpts from the biographies each participant presented in the exhibition²⁹, I introduce readers to the members of our research group. Biographies were written in their own words and included next to each participant's works in the exhibition as a way to share biographical context about the person alongside their art. Some biographies are longer than others, and one participant chose to write very little so I honored her request. The eight participants in the exhibition and research study were: *Paul Best, Hari Im, Niloofar Miry, Kathleen Nash, Matthew Sinclair, Andrew Smith, Joanne Ursino, and myself, Blake Smith.*

Paul Best has taught in elementary grades 2, 4 and 5 Art as well as grades 5, 6 and 7 English at Southridge School. Paul is teaching with the North Vancouver School District as an intermediate teacher at Lynnmour Elementary School. He has also delivered various art classes with the district's Artists for Kids program. Raised and educated in New Zealand, Paul earned a graphic design diploma before embarking on a career as a designer, illustrator and cartoonist for various newspapers in New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong. He moved with his family to Vancouver in 2001. The new environment encouraged a change in careers; first, as a stay-at-home Dad while he completed his Bachelor of Arts (History and Politics) via distance learning, then as a teacher. He has a Bachelor of Education and a graduate diploma in teaching English as a Second Language from UBC. Paul completed a graduate diploma in Art Education also at UBC and has been enjoying rediscovering art photography.

²⁹ As this dissertation is completed in 2020, it is important to note these were our biographies composed in 2016, at the time of the study/show, presented in the exhibition in this manner. Since 2016, many things have likely changed for the participants who may be working, teaching, or living elsewhere. These are the contextual biographies of *that* time.

Hari Im

Artist / Art-Instructor

Emily Carr University of Art and Design, B.F.A.

University of British Columbia, B.Ed.

Niloofer Miry focuses her practice on photography and object-installations. She works with different mediums to explore the theme of migration throughout the idea of third space, drawing on the philosophy of Homi Bhabha. She explores her concepts with a mix of contemporary mediums such as photography, performing and digital arts and more traditional art mediums including painting and crafts. Much of the content of her work comes from the land and ancient motifs in a contemporary setting to represent the new adopted life. She explores these ideas by bringing into play historical and philosophical references. Born in Tehran, Niloofer received her BFA in Visual Art from the University of British Columbia and her BFA in Photography from Tehran Azad University (1997). She has shown her work in numerous galleries during the last decade in Iran and Canada. She currently lives and works in Vancouver.

Kathleen Nash is an artist, parent and educator. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Concordia University as well as a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) from the University of British Columbia. Areas that she is particularly passionate about are Art, Aboriginal Education and Outdoor Education. Social justice is extremely important to her, and Artistic inquiry into issues of equity is a driving force in both her personal and professional life and work. Kathleen is initially from the Okanagan Valley and comes from a diverse family consisting of grandparents and great grandparents born in Canada, England, Switzerland, Ireland and the United States. She is proud to acknowledge her Cherokee heritage.

Matthew Sinclair is a multi-disciplinary artist and educator who lives and works in Vancouver, BC. A 2005 BFA graduate from Emily Carr University, winner of the Mary Plumb Blade award for painting, his works range from paintings and illustrations to mixed media, sound and animated works. His photography focuses on local environments, family, nostalgia, privacy and action sports. Holding both a Bachelors of Education and a Masters of Education through UBC, Matthew teaches at King George

Secondary School on Denman Street in Vancouver's West End neighborhood. He has been teaching at the school for the last five years and has been with the Vancouver Board of Education since 2006. Alongside all of this he is an avid musician, BMX rider, father and husband.

A photographer and graduate of the UBC Bachelor of Education (2015) program, **Andrew Smith** is a resident of New Westminster. Andrew has worked as an outdoor educator on the Sunshine Coast and with Fresh Air Learning and is a Grade Four teacher at Southridge School in Surrey. Having grown up as a 'third-culture kid' in Germany, Thailand and Malaysia, Andrew moved to Canada in 2005 where he completed his Bachelor of Arts (2010) specializing in Visual Arts at the University of Victoria. A son of two international educators, travel has always been an integral part of his life and a major influence on his artistic endeavors. Many of his photos are from family visits whether it be visiting Kuwait where his brother was a teacher or to parts of the Southwestern United States where his now-retired parents travel during the winter. Having met his American wife Ashly overseas, he has also spent time photographing the mid-west region, primarily in Chicago and Michigan's Harbor Country.

Joanne Ursino is a PhD candidate in Cross Faculty Inquiry in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Joanne developed a strong studio art practice through her graduate studies in Art Education, including work in textiles, printmaking, ceramics and book arts/artist books. Joanne has been making quilts for twenty-five years. Her work is intimate, intricate and engages feminist and queer discourse at the cutting edge of arts based research. Joanne is committed to making and writing in an interdisciplinary unfolding of scholarship that integrates quilts, social justice, memory studies and the public archive. [For more information on her work, art, writing, and research, please visit her website: <http://www.rosesandbread.ca/>]

Blake Smith is the author of this dissertation and is a Liu Scholar Alumnus and PhD candidate in Curriculum Studies and Art Education in the Department of Curriculum & Pedagogy. Her interdisciplinary research interests engage with photographic practices and pedagogies, creative memory and memoir work, and ethics in art. Her efforts artistically explore complex emotional landscapes of memory, place, pain, time,

hope, and the trauma of loss as they come to bear on a life of teaching, writing, making, learning, and living. Her contributions offer new perspectives on photo-based, emotive approaches towards the search for meaning in everyday lived experiences, including education. Blake holds a M.A. in Art Education from Arizona State University (2008) and a B.F.A. from the University of Georgia (2002). Originally from Atlanta, Georgia, she taught art and high school photography for ten years then worked in UBC Teacher Education as a Faculty Advisor and sessional instructor in Secondary Art Education. Blake was the Graduate Research Assistant for the UBC/Moi Dadaab Secondary Teacher Education Project (2013-2015) and curator/co-curator of The Liu Institute's Lobby Gallery (2014-2018).

'Who-ness'³⁰

We are a group of artists and educators joined together by a common interest: photography. In some way, for each of us the teaching, learning, and making of photography holds resonance. That resonance is critical to our vocations, practices, research, passions, and daily lives. In interviews, wanting to trace their stories of coming to art and coming to teaching, I asked *why photography*, or where their interest in art and teaching comes from. Nearly every single person shared stories of a key mentor (such as a teacher, a parent, a grandmother) introducing art and/or encouraging it, often from a very young age. Some of us were handed a camera as a small child, some saw our parents take pictures, and some picked up a camera in a high school class, in college, or as part of a job requiring photography. The stories varied and the reasons why did too. What mattered to me was how those earlier experiences and the ones in our summer class and after might continue to shape and inform their new understandings about and relationships with photography.

As aforementioned, the relationships that were built in that class became the ground-laying for forming a research group that developed after the course. For some, it was not the first time we had met, as there were existing relationships for a few members,³¹ and each person had a reason for

³⁰ I was inspired to consider Hannah Arendt's (1958) notion of 'who-ness' from my courses and many meaningful conversations on writing, method, and form with Dr. Karen Meyer of The University of British Columbia.

³¹ My path had crossed earlier with Andrew and Hari in that same room when I taught EDCP 302 in 2014. I later supervised Andrew on practicum as his Faculty Advisor, nominating him for the top award in Teacher Education which he was awarded. Joanne and I are colleagues, were neighbors, and became very close friends. Having met before, Matthew and Joanne earned their Master's degrees at UBC. EDCP 405 was Matthew's final course in completion of his Master's degree, a moment we all celebrated with him in class. Kathleen was returning to complete a teaching certificate already begun and was pregnant, about to give birth to her second child. Niloofar came from the School of Art (VISA) at UBC and was also finishing her degree. Paul, the author of five published books, was gaining the required diploma to obtain qualification to teach art in B.C., informed by a twenty-plus year established art career in New Zealand and in Hong Kong, specializing in graphic design, cartooning, and drawing.

taking that course. Whether coincidentally or not, our lives intersected at UBC that summer of 2015, eight life journeys made literally around the world in order to arrive, illustrating the mixed cultural biography of this group with connections to Iran, South Korea, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Dubai, The United States, Canada, Italy, and Kenya. These are only some of the places we come from, traveled to/through, and call home, and only three of the eight of us are from Canada. In our coming together, the crossing of paths in a photography course marks a moment of intersection that will forever remain, significant in the story of how a group came to form one summer at UBC.

Artistic Methods as Teaching & Learning Methods

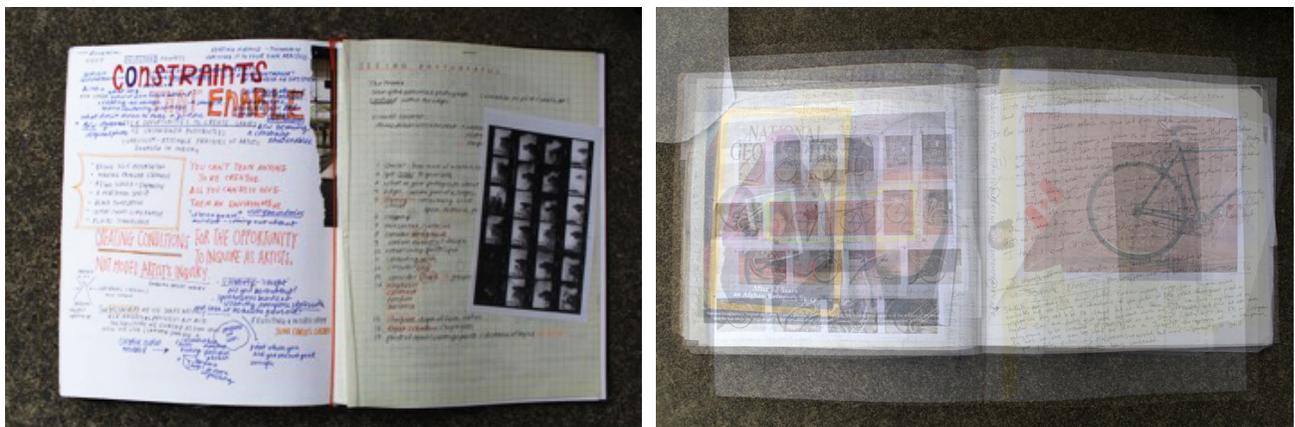
As a complex, creative form of visual-poetic inquiry, this dissertation employs arts-based approaches towards method, theory, pedagogy, and writing. In doing so, I explore and count on the kaleidoscopic capacity of the artistic lens to reveal new perspectives and to extend the inquiry's depth of field. In terms of *a/r/tographic inquiry* evident in the study, we can look to the series of pedagogical and artistic events that inform and/or emerge from the research: *a/r/tographic inquiry* in the course EDCP 405 (from a teacher, learner, and photographer perspective) and *a/r/tographic inquiry* in the research group coming together as a creative community of practice for our exhibition.

Connections and through-lines exist from the course EDCP 405 to the work we did as a group after. Like the exhibition, EDCP 405 emphasized art making in/as the immersive learning process through student-driven, self-thematized photographic inquiry projects as well as the collaborative, holistic, and nurturing nature of being in a learning community with artists and teachers. In both settings (the course and research group), we investigated the benefits of employing artistic methods as teaching, learning, and research methods while we practiced how to think artistically about all three. From an *a/r/tographic* perspective, we looked at and explored the pedagogical, artistic, and theoretical possibilities of photography from a range of viewpoints and considered how the contemporary, digital age affects us as teachers, students, and artists alike.

Some course assignments and activities in EDCP 405 drew on selected works of contemporary artists who are influential in my work including Alfredo Jaar, Ishiuchi Miyako, Byron Wolfe, Mark Klett, Dana Claxton, Emily Jacir, and others, emphasizing their photo-based memory work and autobiographical framing of lived experiences. Our group was able to learn from these artists as visual references and gain inspiration for our own photography and teaching. In the course, I taught a two-day lesson on photo-based memory work and visual lifewriting inspired by Ishiuchi Miyako's still life photography and Sinner and Owen's (2011) visual lifewriting text,

creating individual ‘do it yourself’ (DIY) diffusion boxes to photograph personal mementos. As well, we held a fruitful class debate on the ethics of visual lifewriting in secondary and postsecondary schools, one of the lessons that laid important conceptual groundwork for the work we did in the show. These artists’ works address some of the themes I investigate in this study such as: *ways of creatively documenting ‘the everyday,’ presence/absence, photographic methods for artistic observation/response, visual storytelling, disappearance, memory, the poetics of loss, duration, and ethics.*

Offered as pedagogical interventions, the selected photo-based contemporary artists and artworks were positioned as potential curricular entry points for critical discussion and for the artistic investigation of concepts through photographic inquiry. There was some overlap from the course into the study, and some photo-based methods participants chose to explore in the exhibition that followed the class include (but are not limited to): *everyday photography, rephotography, photo-based inquiry, a/r/tography, visual lifewriting, memoir, photowalking, the photo essay/book, visual journaling*³², *diptych/triptych, juxtaposition, and still life photography.* All of this is to say that while the study is centered around the exhibition, the earlier context and methods of the course shared some through-lines and helped to frame an understanding of photographic inquiry as a way of visually thinking through critical and creative ideas.



Figs. 10 & 11 | By Blake Smith, Fig. 10 (Left) Page spread from participant Hari Im’s visual journal from EDCP 405 (2015). Fig. 11 (Right) Image overlay of 8 visual journal page spreads from EDCP 405 (2015).

³² Visual journaling was another entry point to visual inquiry and served the space for self-study and artful documentation. With the guided teaching of Joanne Ursino, students in EDCP 405 handmade their own visual journals on the second day of the course and used them as a daily space for reflection to document their process, observations, artwork, artifacts, writing, and creative ideations. As part of my teachings and use of visual journals, students were invited to make notes and create imagery around their experiences and ideas, including course discussions and responses to readings, local field trips, photowalks, and their self-designed photographic inquiry projects. In a way, students were using visual lifewriting in these journals as they kept visual and textual record of their evolving selves in the processes of learning to teach and teaching to learn.

A/r/tographic inquiry was evident from the start both during and after the summer course ended and our research group formed and gathered. We exchanged ideas and stories of teaching, strengthened our relationships, and began to think about shifting our perspectives from teaching and learning photography to photography *creation*, something most in our group spent less time on, as teaching and other commitments often took priority. Our efforts were collaborative and relational from the beginning, as we extended conversations and relationships begun in the course and carried them forward into the fall of 2015 and then 2016, forming a meaningful creative community of practice over time.

With an intentionality towards being together, thinking together, and co-learning together, we listened and bore witness to each other's living stories as artists and teachers in the midst of transforming – all of this during historic teacher strikes in British Columbia. With a wide variety of experiences, prior knowledge, and passion for the medium of photography, our group's interests bear both breadth and depth. While there are some overlaps, none are exactly the same, and this uniqueness along with our commitment to one another is what held us together. As a collective, our myriad of skill sets, cultural backgrounds, previous art educations, life experiences, and lines of inquiry threaded across and alongside one another in the rhizomatic way that a/r/tography provokes. In a sense, we were living our currere as one, performing photographic inquiry as a community of curious, committed a/r/tographers in the making.

It was from this place of togetherness and our commitment to the group along with my connections at The Liu Institute that the exhibition experience came to be: a group show of eight unique photographic inquiries into memory and disappearance. The exhibition became an opportunity to create new work, support one another, learn more about and practice the medium all of us love and some of us teach, give studio time to ourselves, and to publicly showcase our art work together, a first for several members in the group. Through our efforts, conversations, and collaboration, we birthed and launched this pedagogical project as a team, which demanded time, leadership, sacrifice, care for others, authenticity, creativity, heart, trust, compromise, and good communication. Although I had curated large shows before, this was something none of us had done in this size or capacity before, so every step was a new learning moment and a personal and professional opportunity to participate in something novel at the university we all attend. As a creative community of practice, we shifted between our identities as teachers, collaborators, researchers, curators, and artists, sharing knowledge and expertise from varying perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds in ways that contributed to the group offering. Together, we created and nurtured this learning experience for one another, for ourselves, and for the greater public who

came to view our work, including colleagues, mentors, family members, and former students. Through it all, living inquiry informed our relationships and relationality with the project, the photographs, and with each other as we lived this inquiry together, in community.

Methods

As readers move through this chapter and are introduced to my methods, I share a reminder of the guiding two-part research question for the study: *How can creative engagement with photo-based memory work, including visual lifewriting: a) evoke meaningful experiences of teaching, learning, and making art; and b) provoke contemporary, critical conversations on ethics in art?* In order to gather data to address my research question, the methods I used for data collection utilized triangulation (Creswell, 2003). The three methods include poetic observations; from the exhibition: artworks, writing, and artifacts; and individual and group interviews. Together, the three methods enabled me to study, collect, analyze, and appreciate a unique data set and draw implications and particular nuances from the information generated, centering the artistry in each method. This triangle of methods allowed me to capture, overlap, and overlay pieces of the study narrative in various artistic and documentary capacities, as I stayed attuned to details, stories, personal reflections, interview excerpts, field notes, questions, and day to day experiences as they unfolded.

Poetic Observations

As an a/r/tographer, I made artful observations of several phenomena throughout the study, both in writing and in art. The methods and forms of poetic observations I utilized draw on my practice as an artist and creative writer and include: *digital photography (DSLR and iPhone), rephotography, visual lifewriting and the writing of visual memoir, Instagram posts, visual journaling and artifact collecting, written field notes (by hand and iPhone notes), visual field notes, audio notes, poetry writing, photowalks/photowalking, emotional reflections, and other compositions.* In addition, I had assistance in collecting data for group interviews with the help of participant Joanne, who was the note-taker for all of the focus groups.

As a collection of meaningful methods, each poetic in their own way, my reflections encompass the artistic, pedagogical, participatory, relational, and curatorial experiences of producing photographs, facilitating this research group, bringing the exhibition and its related events to fruition, and studying the exhibition, group dynamics, and data. In particular was my method of photowalking, an artistic practice of walking with the camera – sometimes alone, other times with friends alongside, including sometimes Joanne – through local neighborhoods,

alleyways, and places I have wandered and called home. Photowalking offered a way of seeing, holding still, and contemplating my surroundings in a cadence of slowness through the lens of a camera and/or iPhone, making art of out of the everydayness of daily life. Embarking almost daily on photowalks, this became a way of artfully noticing and photographically rendering the nuance of landscapes, the presence of found objects and debris, colors of light, artifacts of human existence, the four seasons, and the passage of time. My photowalks mark a mapping of this research in a significant way, aiding in the creation of many photographs included in the exhibition.

Exhibition: Artworks, Writing, & Artifacts

To address a research question in the form of an exhibition was a deliberate artistic move, placing the art at the center of the inquiry so that creative activity, public engagement, and dialogic opportunity could become possible. Thirty-six images and one sculpture were created for the exhibition, including my photographic series, *The Visual Memoir Project*. Individually and as a collection, I studied artworks and artist statements by each of the eight participants as significant and primary artifacts of research, placing emphasis on creative production as knowledge formation. In appreciating the artworks and written artifacts, I prioritized understanding participants' meaning-making (Barrett, 1997) and personal narratives, where fitting. As both form and method, the exhibition was a display of ideas about photography *through* photography and a way to publicly disseminate visual a/r/tographic research born of a community of practice.



Fig. 12 | By Blake Smith, *Bug's eye view of Matthew and Joanne on our November 2015 photowalk*. As I was taking this photo, an older man walked by and asked "Are you making picture?" I smiled and said yes.

Individual & Group Interviews (Focus Groups)

A series of thirteen semi-structured individual interview conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) were held in and around Vancouver, B.C. (one to two per person), using two sets of interview questions – one following the course EDCP 405 and before the exhibition, the other after the exhibition and in closure of our group’s time together. Interview questions were sent via email to participants prior to the interviews. Five focus group interviews were held in Vancouver, B.C. Four of them were held at the home of Joanne (November 21, 2015, December 5, 2015, January 30, 2016, and October 1, 2016) and one was held at The Lobby Gallery in UBC’s Liu Institute for Global Issues (April 9, 2016). Three meetings were with the whole research group, one was a smaller group of us, and the very first one was with the three graduate students: Matthew, Joanne, and myself, captured in the photograph on the previous page (see Fig. 12).

The purpose of these interviews was to gain further insight into participants’ histories, experiences, interests, teaching, and photography practices. Pre-show interviews focused more on backgrounds, the course, and exhibition planning while post-show interviews focused on holistic reflections, our process, and meaningful moments from participating in the exhibition and study. Each person contributed significant time, personal stories, and the sharing of ideas during my process of interviewing them, expressing valuable and unique insights into their own experiences of this research and the process of engaging with it. At each interview conversation, data was audio-recorded with permission, transcribed (by rev.com or Amber Lum), and analyzed for thematic and narrative threads. Each individual interview was approximately one to three hours long, held at various locations of the interviewee’s choice, including places of work, a high school, a classroom and my office at UBC, an art studio, a restaurant, and the kitchen table at someone’s home. These interviews provided intimate insights into each participant’s personal story and helped me to better understand what it was that brought them both to this project and to a life with photography.

Focus group interviews were approximately two to four hours long, with questions and discussion prompts sent to participants ahead of time by email. We were grateful that Kathleen, who lived out of town, was able to participate in several of our group meetings by FaceTime audio. As a way of creating community, during each meeting, we took time to share food and drink together. As we stood in the kitchen, sat at a table, or circled together in seats and sofas in the living room, sometimes by the fire, these moments of being together and sharing food were important in growing our togetherness and comfort, offering space and time for rich conversations, laughter, and care for one another, anchoring us in a place of belonging. These are memories I hold dear.

Interview Details & Timeline

In terms of a timeline leading up to and after the exhibition, I made arrangements with everyone for first-round individual interviews following the ending of the course and over the next few months, conducted those interviews as detailed in the methods. In November of 2015, I gathered with the graduate students in the group (who all lived in the same local neighborhood) at Joanne's home in East Vancouver, and we discussed the nature of the research group and planned exhibition and shared ideas on teaching, research, and photography. Most memorable of all, after our discussion, we went on a lovely photowalk together in the afternoon sun. Embodying "walking as a relational practice" (Lenz Kothe, 2019, p. 46), we made images *in relation*, walking and teaching one another about photography while continuing our inspiring conversation. This experience revealed to me the beauty of working and collaborating with other graduate students. It helped frame my thinking about the work we could do together, inspired a sense of community in our graduate educations, and offered a compelling opportunity for dialogue amongst experienced art education colleagues, both at Joanne's home and while photowalking alongside, a fitting metaphor for our lived experience of this research. Together we made our way.

After November, our first gathering as a whole research group of eight was held in the form of a focus group in December of 2015 (a time when everyone was available) again at Joanne's home. At that focus group, we shared experiences from the course, got to know one another more, went around the room sharing updates on our lives and teaching, and discussed the possibility of participating in the exhibition, which had been approved for Liu Scholar funding in October of 2015. I shared with the group that this show would include a series of photographs from my visual memoir, as well as artworks and artist statements from those who chose to participate. I asked everyone to limit works up to three pieces each and invited each member to compose a one-page artist statement, a biography (included earlier in this chapter), and include the image didactics for their works. This meeting was a critical relationship- and trust-building moment for the group, as we established stronger bonds, expressed interest in doing a creative project together, and created an early commitment to the upcoming show.

In January of 2016, we met for a second time at Joanne's home, and this time our focus group considered in more detail the nature of the exhibition thematics around memory and disappearance, discussing further possibilities as to how everyone might participate. We went around the room and, one by one, shared our ideas and received feedback on what to create and submit for the show, while members offered commentary, questions, and listening. Some members

had projects or series already underway (such as myself and Niloofar), while others would use and perhaps modify existing work or make new work, including collaborations.

After the January gathering, everyone went in separate directions to plan, create, produce, and prepare work for the show to be held in May of 2016. I stayed in touch with the group individually to move us along in the planning process, while beginning the curatorial process of visioning an exhibition, selecting and preparing works to be printed, and fine-tuning details. As exhibition planning, production, and curation got underway, a third smaller focus group was held in April of 2016 at UBC in The Lobby Gallery in preparation for the show to be held in that space so that we could envision how it might come together.

During the fall of 2016, I conducted a series of second-round individual interviews with most of the participants to discover their thoughts and feelings on their experiences with the exhibition, the opening reception we had, and the study as a whole. After the exhibition, we held one final and memorable focus group at Joanne's home in October of 2016. Together, we debriefed our experiences from the exhibition and entire research collaboration process, reflecting back on (and drawing) our photographic journeys since the course until then. We shared insights, memories, new understandings, challenges, and stories of coming together to do this work and what we each learned in the process. One by one, each member shared his or her experiences, reflections, and observations, which enabled me to gain a fuller and more robust understanding of their lived experience with this work, both of the research group and the exhibition.

Looking ahead, we also exchanged our hopes and plans for the future, from graduate school to returns to teaching, and we all agreed to stay in touch, most likely through me. That focus group ended with a special group photowalk in our local East Vancouver neighborhood led by Matthew's young daughter, as she took us on a walk in a way that let us see the world from a child's point of view – ever curious, unabashed, and full of wonder, curiosity, and joy. It was a fitting goodbye for the group and a reminder for us as photographers to keep fresh eyes.



Figs. 13 & 14 | By Blake Smith, *Fig. 13 (Left) Children's chalk drawing I photographed at the beginning and again at the end of our group's final photowalk (October 2016).*

Fig. 14 (Right) Being led by a small child. Picture of Matthew and his daughter, camera in hand, petting a neighborhood cat along our photowalk.

My experiences conducting these interviews taught me the value of listening, the importance of establishing personal connections in community, and the necessity of making space for participants – particularly teachers and artists – to share their stories, to narrate their own histories, and to offer their impressions of and desires for a project as it is being conceptualized, undertaken, and reflected upon afterwards. In these meetings and in our shared time together, we listened to one another in a meaningful, attentive way. Through photography, we listened with the camera to what the world had to say. In relationships, we listened to our hearts and longings as artists and educators on a learning journey. Listening was a way of bonding and also taught all of us the value of coming together in community to materialize a group exhibition and to partake in critical, creative, and contemporary conversations about our teaching and art practices.

These meetings created a powerful opportunity for individuals to express their voices, be alongside, learn together, and bear witness to each other. As such, it is important to share with readers that, in addition to the artwork they created for the exhibition, their collective impressions shared across the five focus groups and thirteen individual interviews gave meaningful shape and incredible dimension to an understanding of this work in a way that would be sorely lacking without it. While there is far more I could write about the individual interviews and focus groups, what we did and said and what was so intimately shared, and how these conversations opened doors to other ideas and possibilities, I have tried to capture some of the essence of their voices in those conversations, presented in Chapter 6. Finally, this is to say I am greatly indebted to the group

members for their contributions and the gift of their time, presence, and commitment as an offering of self that I hope is in some ways reflected in this work.

~

As we move into Chapter 5, readers are invited to experience the artwork and wall text from our exhibition. In addition to participant interviews about their experiences with this exhibition and research group, the coming artwork and statements make up the key visual data set of the study. Moving into the next chapter, I invite you to imagine you are soon to walk into an art gallery on The University of British Columbia campus and experience the work of eight artists, all centering around the notion of *disappearance*.

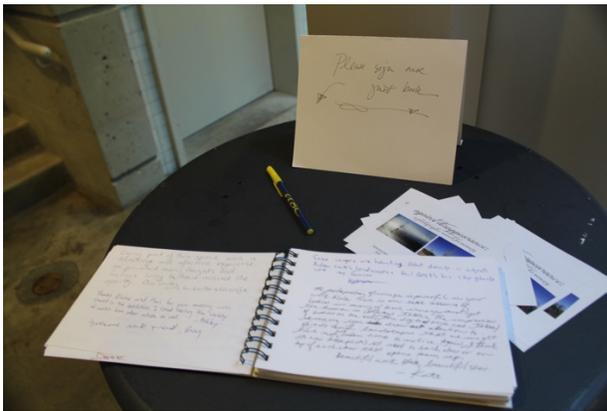
Chapter 5

An Exhibition

Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory

The Lobby Gallery at The Liu Institute for Global Issues,
The University of British Columbia

May 11th – Aug 25th, 2016



Figs. 15-18 | By Blake Smith: *Fig. 15 (Top left) View of gallery wall 1/2 of The Visual Memoir Project; Fig. 16 (Top right) View of Hari Im's work; Fig. 17 (Bottom left) View of guest book; Fig. 18 (Bottom right) View of 2 gallery walls and community piano*

The Summer of 2016

This highly visual chapter focuses on a special culminating moment and significant learning event at the heart of my study: a group photography exhibition entitled *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*. It positions art making as both a vehicle for creative expression and an act and product of original research creation. The exhibition occurred in the summer of 2016 and took nearly ten months to take from initial pitch (to The Liu Institute) to full fruition, an effort shared by all members of our group. For the purpose of photo-based educational research through a/r/tography, our group of eight came together as artists and educators to produce a thematized body of work where we each contributed artwork that we hope resonates with others. As a generative frame for thinking about the art making process we engaged in as data-generative and experientially-generative as well as relational, O'Donoghue's (2014) questions are helpful in setting the stage for possibility, as he asks:

What might happen, then, if we were to consider the experiences of encounters with art making, with art viewing, or by participating in art as data – data that could neither be predicted nor anticipated in advance of the encounter but important and productive because in the words of Giorgio Agamben (1999), they bring something from concealment 'into the light of the presence' that was not there before? In what ways might the act of paying attention to experience and its potential for becoming knowledgeable shift the emphasis from understanding research in and through art as something that is reportable to understanding arts-based research as something that is deeply relational? (p. 180)

Exhibition Location & Context

Our exhibition was held in The Lobby Gallery at The Liu Institute for Global Issues on The University of British Columbia Vancouver campus located on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territory of the Musqueam nation. A description of the space follows:

The Liu Institute for Global Issues is an interdisciplinary research hub for emerging global issues in the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs in the Faculty of Arts at the University of British Columbia (UBC). At the Liu Institute, we strive to catalyze innovative thinking and positive change, bridging the gap between academics and practitioners to transform research into actions. Our policy-led approach encourages examination of economic, social and environmental interactions and solutions that advance sustainability, security and social justice, particularly in lower income communities. ("Liu Institute for Global Issues, n.d.")

Within the Institute, The Lobby Gallery space is made of glass walls and windows with aluminum framing, and it is a gallery in the building's lobby; thus, it is a non-traditional gallery space aesthetically-speaking in terms of appearance (no white walls, natural and artificial light) and location (high traffic, multi-use space). Designed by Architectura in collaboration with renowned

architect Arthur Erickson, the building sits on the edge of a lush green forest on the edge of campus, and you can view the forest through the glass walls as well as view the gallery from outside, like a glass box or art snow globe. As a Liu Scholar³³, since 2014 I have been the curator or co-curator³⁴ of this globally-oriented gallery, an on-campus interdisciplinary space that most often features the arts-based research (often photography) of UBC doctoral students who are Liu Scholars and/or the research teams, philanthropic or nonprofit organizations, participants, and collaborators Scholars work with.

As a curator, when we hang and display work in this space, it becomes activated differently each time, with the exhibitions generating new enlivening conversations and pedagogical framings while showcasing the range of work graduate students are doing at/through/connected to The Liu Institute. The shows are often in juxtaposition with ongoing events, conferences, and community engagements hosted at The Liu, inspiring further dialogue, encounters with art and journalism, and the cross-pollination of ideas. As a community, PhD Liu Scholars are able and encouraged to join this network of energy, scholarship, collaboration, innovation, and creative research activity at The Liu as a way to invite interdisciplinarity, global thinking, and the research and art of others into their work, with The Lobby Gallery situated in a unique position at the locational center and main floor of the building, thus a space with many eyes, bodies, and perspectives passing through.

³³ On the Liu Scholar Program: “Created in 2009, the Liu Scholars program brings together exceptional PhD students from across UBC to facilitate collaborative, interdisciplinary research on global issues, to strengthen global networks, and to develop a community for research dissemination” (“Programs and Initiatives (School of Public Policy and Global Affairs), n.d.”). Being part of this program not only enriched my life as a graduate student, artist, and scholar but it gave me the unique opportunity to be a gallery curator or co-curator for several years, meeting many talented people and helping to conceptualize, curate, and hang numerous [exhibitions](#) (under link, see “Past Events”) by a variety of artists and researchers, including well-known photographers such as Mimi Chakarova. It was a very special creative space to work in, as well as a teaching and learning experience that came alongside my graduate education in a noteworthy, impactful way.

³⁴ Having been a volunteer curator or co-curator at the gallery for years before as part of academic service, my prior experience with and connection to the gallery enabled our research group to have an existing relationship with that space and to apply for then partake in the opportunity for Liu Scholars and our research collaborators to exhibit our work. Having this connection to the gallery and The Liu offered another form of leadership different than teaching and taught me how to: hang shows, write and co-write artist statements, work closely with artists and groups of artists, host public events, how to thematize exhibitions and curate them as educational, and manage all the logistics (from didactics to artists to social media to opening receptions). This curator experience was paramount in successfully producing our show, in understanding the dynamics of an exhibition, and having access to this unique on-campus gallery space.

Curating & Preparing for the Exhibition



Fig. 19 | Photograph and post by Andrew Smith, *Screenshot of a post from participant Andrew's Instagram account (web version) on May 16, 2016 as we prepared mats and frames for the show.*
Shown in picture left to right: Paul, Hari, and Blake.

The exhibition was hung on May 11th and 12th of 2016 and was on display until August 25th, 2016. Preparing the works for the space took another collaborative effort, as group members came together on several occasions to help frame, mat, organize, and hang the works, another learning moment we shared as this was the first time some had experienced this process. Each member contributed time, effort, and hands to get this project off the ground, and in this exchange, our community of practice became strengthened each time we came together alongside. Of note, participant Paul Best spent considerable time assisting me in preparing the mats and frames.

In another special moment of coming together, a tradition at The Lobby Gallery is to host a public opening and/or closing reception so on the evening of May 20th, 2016, we held an opening reception, sharing our collaborative work with the public. This event was a wonderful moment of celebration for us and an opportunity to spark dialogue with others, to be together as an almost-complete group (due to prior engagements, Niloofar and Joanne could not attend), to gain feedback on our work, and to share it publicly. To create a certain ambience in the space, I hired talented cellist Alexis Douglas to play music as viewers engaged with the works in the space and again

during a slideshow of photographs. Positioned by the top of the open stairs looking down at the gallery below, the sounds of cello floated into and through the highly acoustic space, an emotionally-moving musical accompaniment to the viewing experience.

Curated in conversation with the participants, in total we presented thirty-six new images and one sculpture across six walls spanning two rooms and one hallway, an arrangement that had never been done before at The Lobby Gallery. Taking up two of those walls with twenty-one works in total, I featured my series from *The Visual Memoir Project*. All thirty-six pieces were color digital photographs printed on several different types of paper with the exception of one all-white sculpture by Paul Best (*Untitled, Student Chair*, 2016). Each of the eight participants' artist statements and biographies (shared in Chapter 4) were placed on the walls next to their works. A group artist statement was printed large and placed on a key wall that viewers saw upon entering the space from the main entry doors; alongside that was another statement about the background of the study, noting how our group first met in the course EDCP 405 Visual Arts for Classroom Practice.

As an artwork itself, it is important to share that this was an exhibition designed and curated specifically *for* a dissertation, offered as a professional learning and making opportunity for our research group from which to generate artistic and narrative data for the study. As the facilitator of this project, there was a longing to showcase our work publicly and well, as evidence of our research group's creative, collaborative efforts. Through a vetted application process at The Liu Institute via The Liu Scholars Fund³⁵, this was a unique opportunity to exhibit at The Lobby Gallery and something I had always envisioned doing as part of my graduate education and curatorship.

The rationale to self-curate by taking on the role of 'artist as curator' (Jeffery, 2015) and participate in *Against Disappearance* involved a desire to actively engage in all areas of the creative and leadership process, with the purpose of demonstrating, articulating, and showcasing forms of artistic scholarship and meaningful research. As such, I aimed to produce a show worthy of a dissertation and a dissertation worthy of a show. This decision included how to curate that show in a way that could 'translate' as a curated visual chapter within a dissertation whereby the images and text are experienced 'on screen' in a similar, yet also very different, way to how they might have been viewed and experienced in person. Further, my decisions included how to organize a visual layout and thematic flow for images and content that would be further disseminated, archived, and visible online; this visibility is why, in part, we leaned away from portraiture in all but one case. As

³⁵ Support of creative research projects and other artistic endeavors is important and vital in thinking about and bringing to fruition what is possible in education and in academic spaces. My research group and I extend our gratitude and offer a sincere thank you to The Liu Institute for Global Issues for sponsoring this exhibition through a grant as part of The Liu Scholar Fund.

well, it is an unwritten tradition of sorts for Lobby Gallery curators, as practicing artists and/or arts-based researchers, to exhibit and curate their own work. Specifically, this includes doctoral research they have done solo and/or with research groups or communities that connects with their work at The Liu Institute. The exhibition was a special way to honor our group's work and the individuals who participated in it by sharing our artistic research with a wider public audience.

By participating, I had a sense of belonging in sharing a collection of my photographs from *The Visual Memoir Project*, a series I had worked on for years that inspired the thematics for *Against Disappearance*. The memoir was a continuation of my own a/r/tographic journey, now brought alongside the artistic journeys of others. Considerations from one creative project became echoed in another, present in the course as well the summer prior; thus, a creative through-line emerged.

As artists and educators, we came together to explore photography's pedagogical potential as a marker of memory and a storied object against loss, two themes I have been ruminating on for years. That decision meant bridging together an ongoing solo artistic endeavor (*The Visual Memoir Project*) with the group one (*Against Disappearance*), melding them, which created a valuable third space for artistic exploration and a mosaic of approaches towards disappearance. The two endeavors were linked through the shared themes of memory, memoir, absence, and loss – all aspects of disappearance – and through our group's shared interest in photography and pedagogy. In this bridging, there were moments of tension and uncertainty, resolved by artistic thinking and conversations with participants, other curators, and artists. As well, it was a key methodological decision to explore both *self-study* (Irwin & deCosson, 2004; Mitchell & Weber, 2004) and photographic *group* work with like-minded teachers and artists for this research agenda. Having a variety of distinctive viewpoints was critical to this study, as it never made sense to conduct an inquiry into art education without involving art teachers or, similarly, to study photography without *doing photography*, thus the emphasis on art making as research creation.

Looking to Other Artists, Curators, & Exhibitions



Figures 20 & 21 | By Blake Smith, *Fig. 20 (Top) Image of blades of grass emerging from an inverted table at the expansive installation 'Plegaria Muda' from the Doris Salcedo exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Fig. 21 (Bottom) Close-up image of a pair of abandoned shoes suspended in the gallery wall behind translucent material at 'Atrabiliarios (1992–2004),' from the Doris Salcedo exhibition.*

As part of this study, it was a creative curatorial challenge as to how eight bodies of work by eight very different artists might be presented as one, shown in juxtaposition yet retain a thread, or series of threads, that connects them. One way that I resolved this was to consider my impactful experiences attending, curating, and experiencing the photography exhibitions of individuals whose work I admire and have studied as part of a practice of learning from other artists and curators. As such, the importance and influence of other artists' work upon the conceptualization,

delivery, and analysis of this study and exhibition is significant, suggestive of other ways that this work is relational and bears a pedagogical trace.

In addition to Miyako, Jaar, and Wolfe, a collection of other artists and exhibitions were influential in the shaping and visualization of this research and my own photography, which then influenced the shaping of *Against Disappearance* – an important artist’s echo. As part of an ongoing interest in and commitment to seeing art in person, a method I engaged in for the preparation of this study was to attend (and in one case curate) numerous art and photography exhibitions³⁶ while in the midst of doing this research and writing, with the exception of Ishiuchi Miyako whose work I had already seen prior. In particular, an exhibition our EDCP 405 class saw together at The Vancouver Art Gallery entitled *Residue: The Persistence of the Real* (noted in the footnote below) resonated for us and especially for me, providing powerful visual inspiration for photo-based memory work around the concepts of residue, disappearance, loss, and what remains.

The *Residue* exhibition was a strong example of how photographers attend to these concepts in their own unique ways and how a curator can bring together an eclectic mix of photographers *and* photographs into one show under the banner of residue. As well, conceptually and curatorially, it was a group show by eight photographers all addressing a shared theme through a variety of photographs and accompanying wall text. Later on after the course, this particular photo exhibition and its structure became a model for *our* group’s exhibition, also by eight photographers and in many important ways about residue.

This ongoing self-education of attending exhibitions is part of my ongoing a/r/tographic

³⁶ As a history of my own learning and *seeing*, the impactful photography exhibitions I attended include the following:

- 1) [ひろしま hiroshima by Ishiuchi Miyako](#) at The Museum of Anthropology UBC Vancouver from October 14, 2011-February 12, 2012;
- 2) [Doris Salcedo](#) at The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago from February 21-May 24, 2015;
- 3 & 4) [How Do I Fit This Ghost in My Mouth? An Exhibition by Geoffrey Farmer](#) from May 30, 2015-September 7, 2015 and [Residue: The Persistence of the Real](#) from June 12, 2015-September 27, 2015, both at The Vancouver Art Gallery;
- 5) [Gordon Parks: Segregation Story](#) at The High Museum of Art Atlanta from November 15-June 21, 2015;
- 6) A collection of photographs (under a title I cannot recall) by the [Center for Creative Photography](#) (in 2016) at The Phoenix Art Museum;
- 7) [Nan Goldin: The Ballad of Sexual Dependency](#) at The Museum of Modern Art New York from June 11, 2016-April 16, 2017;
- 8) [Walker Evans: Depth of Field](#) at The Vancouver Art Gallery from October 29, 2016-January 22, 2017;
- 9) [Perpetual Revolution: The Image and Social Change](#) at The International Center for Photography Museum New York from January 27, 2017-May 7, 2017;
- 10) [The Price of Sex: Works by Mimi Chakarova](#) at The Lobby Gallery, UBC Liu Institute. Opened October of 2017 [I was co-curator of this photography exhibition with fellow Liu Scholar and co-curator Miriam Matejova]
- 11) [A Fire That No Water Could Put Out: Civil Rights Photography](#) at The High Museum of Art Atlanta from November 4, 2017-April 29, 2018. Collectively, these exhibitions and artists left a kind of visual lifewriting imprint upon my artistic understandings of photo-based memory work and come alongside one another as a unique and powerful collection of art and photo historical documents all tied in some way to memory, using the camera as a tool for remembrance, visual archive, storytelling, and documentation.

practice and was useful towards understanding the ways other artists and curators have conceptualized photographs that attend to memory, both public and private. My practice of viewing works in various cities I visited was for the purpose of: 1) learning about and viewing photography by established artists I admire or was curious about; and 2) studying the curatorial and creative presentation of others as a way to begin envisioning our own. What links these shows and artists together is their connection to memory through photography and the ways that the artists' photographic and artistic inquiry helps us to see subjects in new light from a wide range of perspectives historically, aesthetically, narratively, and conceptually. Including mention of them here highlights the ways other artists' and curators' ideas, imagery, and intentions have come to effect and further juxtapose this research, as my time spent in galleries with them was profound, leaving a noteworthy imprint on my photographic, curatorial, and pedagogical thinking by offering a range of conceptual and visual frames for this exhibition.

A Visual Chapter

On the coming pages, as a photographic curator (Smith, 2017), I present the eight artists' works, a significant visual data set in this study. I invite readers to linger there with the artworks and artist statements. Here, both the images and written text are evidence of artistic research creation and scholarship, critical documents of understanding as to how we addressed, individually and collectively, the research question through photographic inquiry and visual lifewriting via a thematized group exhibition. As a collection, our varying approaches add deliberate complexity and creative depth towards the exhibition and the experiences that unfolded around it.

One by one, I present each participant's individual artist statement, followed by digital photographic reproductions of his/her works from the show; image sizing and captions are shown in the didactics for each piece, providing further detail, context, and scale. The artist statements are shared before the images as a way to frame them, providing background and ideation to each artist's take on disappearance and memory through photographic inquiry. Image didactics are included for all works and should be read alongside images and artist statements as part of the visual data in this chapter. Together, the artwork, statements, didactics, and artist biographies make up the main living texts for this exhibition and study, as they provide important context to the overall framework of the project and its makers. Phillips and Willis (2014) write, "we see living texts as communication and representation of meaning, delivered through relationality experienced in events and encounters. Living texts offer fluid meaning-making that is action-oriented, generative, authentic, open, relational, affective, responsive, ever-changing, and engaging" (p. 76). The order

that these artists' living texts are presented is intended to echo the order they were presented and hung in the gallery, as if the reader were walking through the three areas of The Lobby Gallery viewing the works in person, wall by wall, beginning with my work as an anchoring of disappearance in the work of visual memoir.

~

To open the exhibition, I offer our group artist statement, a key text I composed with the help of some group members that provides the thematic underpinning and philosophical *reasons why* for our show, considered an essential conceptualizing frame for the exhibition. As a collective statement about art and ideas, it is meant to encompass and appreciate the breadth of approaches in our work while positioning our creative engagement with photo-based memory work as an artistic, intellectual, and rigorous endeavor relevant to these contemporary times.

*Please enjoy the show*³⁷.

³⁷ If readers wish to experience the exhibition set to music similar to what was played at our opening reception as part of the intended viewing experience, this cello performance on [YouTube by the Two Cellos](#) 'LIVE at Arena Pula 2013' has been used in presentations where I have shown this work in slideshows and can be played alongside the images and artist statements at the reader's discretion.

*against disappearance:
a photographic search for memory*

Artist Statements & Images from the Exhibition

“To remember is to have a memory or to set off in search of a memory” and distinguishes “memory as appearing...” and “memory as an object of a search ordinarily called recall, recollection.”

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur
Memory, history, forgetting (2004), italics in the original

Group Artist Statement
*against disappearance:
a photographic search for memory*

The 36³⁸ photographic works and one readymade sculpture presented in this exhibition are created by a group of 8 individual artists, each addressing the theme of memory and forms of disappearance from different visual perspectives.

Collectively, the works attempt to narrate, personalize, and perhaps even complicate photography's role in *marking and making* memory, including, in some cases, difficult memory. As a group of artists and arts educators, we seek to explore photography's creative and disruptive potential as an agent to memory in a time where disappearance takes many forms: *the disappearance of the traditional darkroom and printed matter, the disappearance of slowness, the disappearance of ourselves behind screens and smartphones, the disappearance of memory, the disappearance of stories (including stories of disappearance), the disappearance of our beloveds...and the disappearance of time itself.*

These images hope to collectively illuminate, from 8 different points of view, what might become possible through photographic acts *in search of memory* and *against disappearance* – one still frame, one remembered moment, and one fragment of memoir at a time. The *search* as a creative process can entail acts of returning, acts of seeing, acts of remembering or forgetting, acts of reflecting, and acts of framing. In the end, these endeavors begin to reveal the impossibility to ever truly archive the passage of time in a complete visual form, yet we can continue to try. Photographs may remind us of what we have lost or could lose, yet they may also reveal something gained or found in the act of their making: *the photographs themselves and the meanings they may hold, or invite, for their makers, subjects, and viewers.*

The title of this group exhibition “Against Disappearance” draws upon a seminal essay by photo critic Susan Sontag, entitled “Against Interpretation” (1966). Sontag's writing on photography is of particular influence on this show and the research study that anchors it. Individual artist statements are posted around the Lobby Gallery and its adjoining spaces next to each artists' works, including two collaborations. Featured on two of the gallery walls are selections from Blake Smith's ongoing “everyday photography” series on loss and hope, entitled *The Visual Memoir Project*, which inspired the initial thematics for this exhibition. Facing, alongside, and in juxtaposition with one another, all of these compositions offer subjective viewpoints from behind or in front of the camera and in the hands of their makers. As a collection, we hope they might spark conversations, prompt further questions, and invite dialogue with – *and against* – the intention of the exhibition's theme.

³⁸ The number 36 is significant and intentional, given there can be 36 exposures on a roll of 35mm film: as photographers, we were previously limited in our exposure capacity when shooting film. Now, digital media allows for endless picturing in the thousands, many photos never looked at again. This collection of artworks is an attempt to save these images from such disappearance.

The photographs in this exhibition are selected works from an ongoing series attempting visual lifewriting (Sinner & Owen, 2011) as photographic memoir. It began a few years ago with a single photo of my grandmother's locket as part of an A/r/tography course at UBC. The project is much like one extended image about presence/absence, and while it has changed over time, its through-lines have remained the same: *a rumination on loss and hope and a marking of the passage of time in photographic form*. Spanning four years to date, I have created, collected, and juxtaposed a series of "everyday photographs" in an effort to slow time and to locate the beautiful in the banal. Through the reflective and routine act of taking pictures "everyday" (or every day I could, or could bear), a common world of things found, felt, and seen have been brought closer, savored. Thinking photographs as visual testimony devoted to the recovery of experience, they are what Roger Simon (2014) might consider image "remnants." Photo-based and creative methods that assist this project's inquiry include: near-daily photowalks, rephotography, visual lifewriting, visual journaling, extended images, and poetry.

Unexpectedly, this work has become an emotional (sometimes heart-wrenching) process of photographing things I am afraid to lose and always want to remember, thus complicating the possibilities and highlighting the impossibilities of the visual memoir in/as creative research. A range of ethical issues related to photographic practice and research have also been guiding the series, in response to Susan Sontag's writing on voyeurism, vulnerability, and the 'picturesque' (1977). A photo diary *in search of memory* is being 'written' in pictures – yet it is a diary that, admittedly and inevitably, is flawed and incomplete. I used to think the photographs could help to hold on...but the longer the project continues, I begin to face the fleeting nature of these brief but magnificent moments which have all passed, leaving these photographs in their wake³⁹.

³⁹ [As aforementioned in the dissertation] Artistic influences on this series include the work of several artists such as **Byron Wolfe** (*Everyday: A Yearlong Visual Diary*), **Ishiuchi Miyako** (*Mothers: 2000-2005; Scars; Hiroshima*), **Alfredo Jaar** (*The Rwanda Projects; Field, Road, Cloud; Real Pictures*), and **Paul Graham** (*Empty Heaven; American Night*). Compositionally and aesthetically, I carry inspiration with me from my favorite college photography instructor, **Michelle Van Parys**, where my work with inner/outer landscapes and diptychs began (in the darkroom) in 2000 at the College of Charleston, SC.



Fig. 22

Blake Smith, Untitled

Left (L): Postcard from a sad day. Walking by the ocean with a heavy heart, a camera in hand and friend by my side.

2016/Davis Bay, BC

Right (R): Saguaro cactus photographed on a nearby road where a close friend's 30 year old son was killed in a motorcycle accident last year. Photographed on the way back, after visiting his roadside memorial.

2016/Wittman, AZ

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych

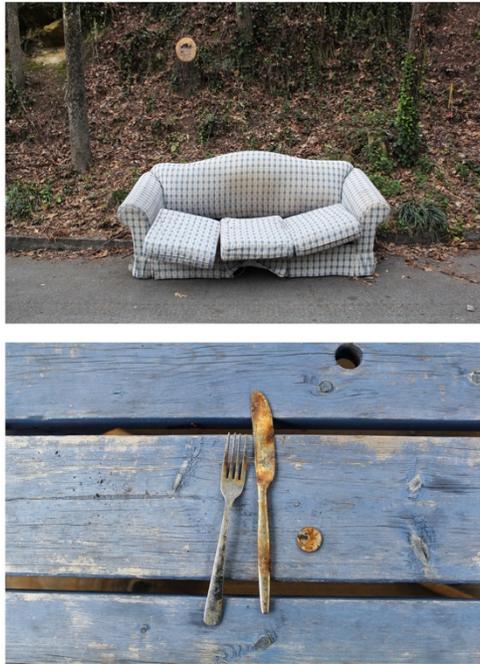


Fig. 23

Blake Smith, Untitled

Top (T): Driving with the family down my grandfather's street, we found a replica of our old couch on the side of the road – across town and almost 20 years later.

2015/Atlanta, GA

Bottom (B): Fork and knife found as is on a picnic table, while waiting for the ferry back from Bowen Island.

2013/Bowen Island, BC

*Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych*

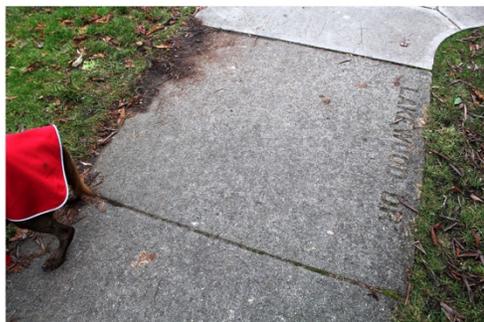


Fig. 24

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Memory from one of many neighborhood photowalks with my favorite walking companion, Kaylah, often in a little red coat to keep her warm.

2016/East Vancouver, BC

R: Walking among graves, a pastime in our family. This time, walking alone. The red sequins on the wings caught my eye in the setting sun.

2016/ Seaview Cemetery, Davis Bay, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 25

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Part of a rephotographic series of family visits to the cemetery where several generations, both sides, are buried. Or one day will be. Every year, we lay flowers on Nana's grave at Easter, Mother's Day, and Christmas.

2016/Westview Cemetery, Atlanta, GA

R: Post-90th birthday party for my grandfather Pop, a beautiful human being. Photographed in the trunk of my parents' car after the party ended.

2016/Atlanta, GA

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 26

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Encounter with colorful worn paint on a beautiful floor mural at the park. Thinking about residue and deep memory.

2016/Crab (Portside) Park, Vancouver, BC

R: Found by the ocean, while walking.

2016/Davis Bay, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 27

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Found while walking with Kaylah, as her rainbow leash entered the frame. Many things have been carved, chalked, and scribbled on these streets. I like to document them.

2015/East Vancouver, BC

R: A wall and chair that beckoned to be photographed, for many reasons.

2015/East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 28

Blake Smith, Untitled

All 4: Photographs collected while walking around local neighborhoods and downtown.

2014-16/ Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" quadtych



Fig. 29

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Shot from inside the UNHCR vehicle. A driver had been shot the day before we arrived.

2014/Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya

R: Seen outside a local storefront window in my neighborhood on Commercial Drive. The picture [by John Filo] is no longer there, but my memory of it always will be.

2015/East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 30

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: We can only photograph someone's childhood once, so for me this is a very special time to archive and remember in the little life of a close friend's son. Recently two friends have had children (both boys) and another had to say an early, unexpected goodbye. A somber echo of my photograph of the saguaro cactus in this series...

2015/Kitsilano, BC

R: An ongoing series of colorful sidewalk chalk drawings by children in my neighborhood. They're often washed away by the rain, with only traces and these photographs remaining behind.

2015/East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych

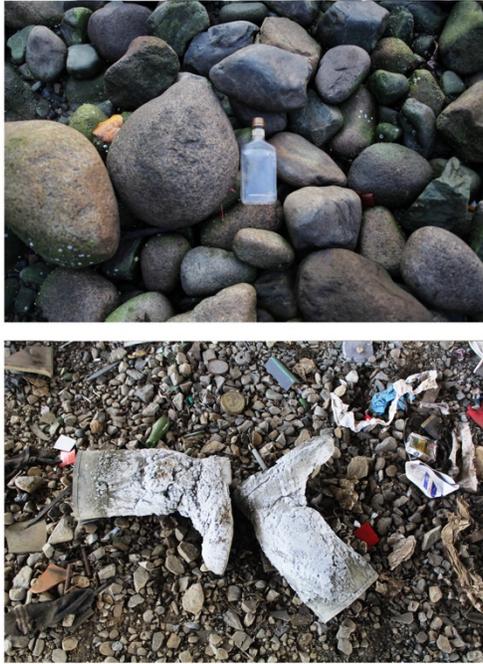


Fig. 31

Blake Smith, Untitled

T: A glass bottle found amongst the rocks, on the same day as the black jacket I found washed up on the sandy shore.

2015/Sunset Beach, Vancouver, BC

B: On a photowalk along train tracks in my neighborhood, I came across these boots and a pair of faded pink suede heels. I wonder who they belonged to and how they got there underneath the underpass.

2016/East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 32

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Memory of Dadaab: Dusty red roads, hot sun, vibrant souls. I became aware of an incredible sense of hope and the desire to learn.

2014/Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya

R: Piece of broken classroom floor tile I found outside the BHER Learning Centre and brought home. A cherished memento that will always remind me of what might be possible with education, anywhere in the world and under any circumstances.

2014/Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya

Digital color photographs
11" x 17" diptych



Fig. 33

Blake Smith, Untitled

Fence surrounding the BHER Learning Centre and Kenyatta University Dadaab campus. Thinking about access to learning and higher education and the importance of safety.

2014/Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya

Digital color photograph
11" x 17"

Artist Statement
Joanne Ursino

The signature quilt *Women United Against Poverty* marks the National Women's March Against Poverty of 1996. The quilt top was created by Alice Olsen Williams from Curve Lake First Nation and Joanne Ursino. The content on the quilt (text, photographs, and images) is of great significance in seeking to better understand a particular moment in the social justice movement in Canada. A unique moment when women across the country – from divergent political, social and economic identities, backgrounds and relationships – worked together demanding an end to poverty under the political banner: “For Bread And Roses – For Jobs And Justice.” In the world of textiles, signature quilts contribute to research in the field of narrative inquiry, feminist and queer discourse, public and contemporary art.

Why do I think it is important to care about this march and quilt? To speak and make and write against its disappearance and slipping away over time, is an act of love. I am moved by what stories *do* in their telling and in listening how the stories in turn nourish my own activism. I do not tire in this work – in part because of what becomes possible: how in this work of writing and making I make myself again. And, because stories and photographs have power.

Working on the quilt *Women United Against Poverty* is both an act of remembering the past in the present – and signifying the demands, hopes and imaginings of a future without poverty. It resonates with the intention of this exhibition: against disappearance – against the loss of women's political voices and actions most often seen and heard on the margins, and with what it seeks to represent in a public archive. This work is also against the disappearance of the work of the hand, and the intimacy of touch and the gesture - fabric once at the fingertips of those that marched is held again in the hands of the artist, and then again in the hands of the photographer – it is an engagement with memory and stitch and the quilt as text/ile, work that is poetic and political.

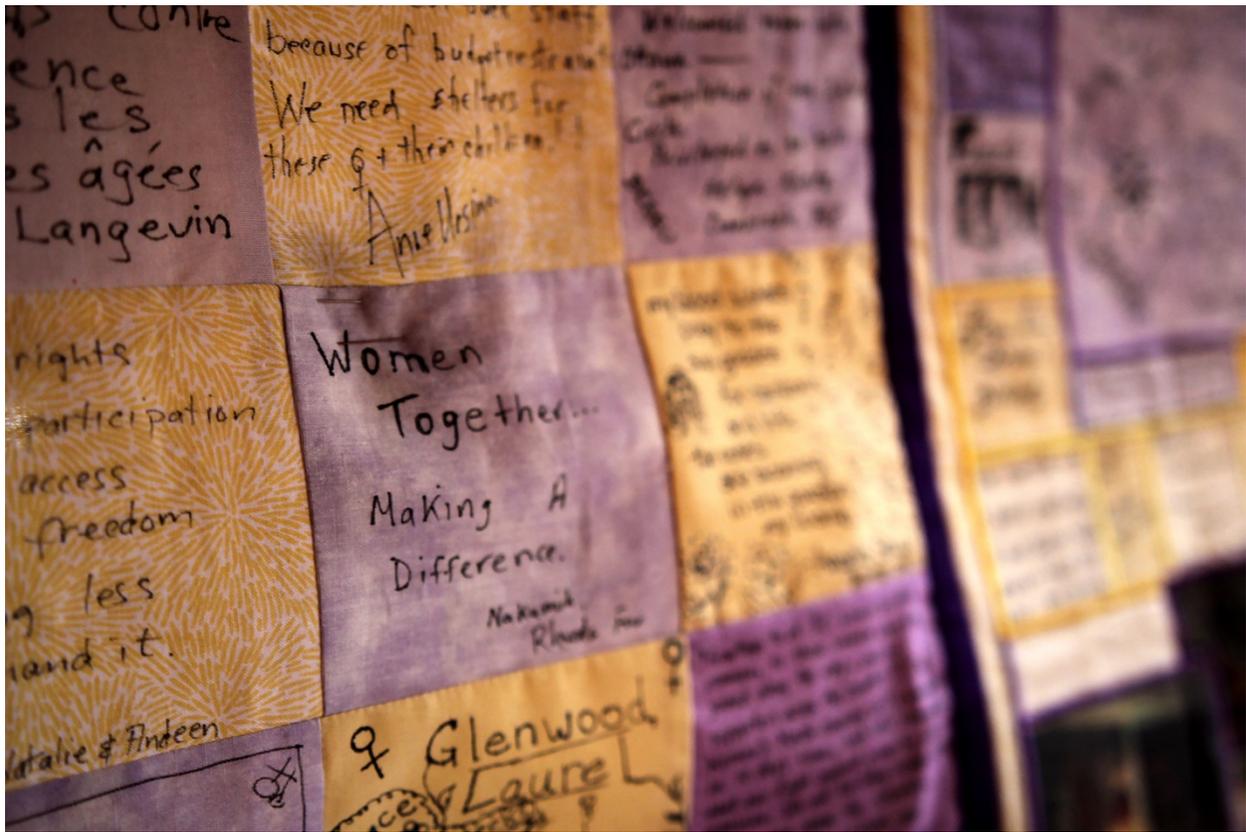


Fig. 34

Joanne Ursino
Matters of Text(ile)

December 2015

Digital color photograph on foam core
12" x 18"

Photograph by Blake Smith



Fig. 35

Joanne Ursino

Reading Embodied 1 and 2

December 2015

Digital color photographs on foamcore
11" x 17"

Photographs by Blake Smith

Artist Statement: Student Chair
Paul Best

I was thinking about “Against disappearance: A photographic search for memory” in a way that was not a photograph, but could be photographed as a memento. I was influenced by the work of New Zealand sculptor Peter Majendie, *185 White Chairs*. He created a temporary readymade sculpture in Christchurch city centre in 2012 with a different style of white chair to represent each person that died in the February 2011 earthquakes, from a baby carrier, bar stool, office chair to a La-Z-Boy lounge chair, all representative of a victim who may have used that type of chair. The greatest death toll of 115 occurred in one building collapse which included 70 foreign language students.

As I visited the installation during my last visit to Christchurch in 2014, I was able to sit on, move around, and take photographs of the chairs. I thought of all those students who travelled so far to New Zealand and died, crushed in their classroom, which is partly why I used a student chair. Secondly, as result of me leaving behind my binder of my Art History notes in one of the lecture halls in the Frederic Lasserre Building one afternoon. When I returned the next day to retrieve my notes, I discovered that they were still where I had left them, untouched by the dozens of students that had used the space in the interim. My student chair is a combination of both ideas, with its jacket loosely hung on the back and a small pile of notes left on the seat. Painted white and made to be photographed.



Fig. 36

Paul Best

Untitled (Student Chair)

May 1-6, 2016 in Vancouver, BC

VSB Student chair, white acrylic paint,
acrylic medium, denim jacket, note paper
and folder, wood base

Life sized

Photograph by Blake Smith, outside the
gallery



Figs. 37 (Left) & 38 (Below)
Paul Best, *Additional views of
Untitled (Student Chair)*

Photographs by Blake Smith,
outside the gallery



Artist Statement
Matthew Sinclair

I became a father three years ago. As an individual not used to restricting what I share with the rest of the world, having to heavily consider what images I chose to share and what images I keep for myself has been an ongoing conversation. Who is going to see it? What will they think? What will they learn? If I don't post it, will it disappear? Does it happen if no one sees it? Do I have the consent from someone not yet able to speak to make the image public? What will the image say about me? What will it say that I can't predict? Does our privacy disappear when we open ourselves to the world? There is always more to an image than what we see. Outside the borders of the frame lays a world viewers often have little access to. They are left to piece together what they can from what they see. When we share so much with the world, the space outside those borders becomes smaller and smaller. Sometimes the better story is something you cannot show in the picture frame, for whatever reason. The context, the story, the day, the event, the trip, the feeling, the place that woke your eye and said, take a picture. This will be forever outside the picture frame, private, just as it belongs to those who enjoyed the moment the most, never to disappear from our minds. Against becoming just another image in a flood of lives shown bare. Against us disappearing into that flood. When we share so much with the world our personal images are no longer just ours. We are at risk of having all seen the same images and no longer have something to call our own.



Fig. 39

Matthew Sinclair

Weight

2016

Digital color photograph

11" x 17"



Fig. 40

Matthew Sinclair

Forever

2016

Digital color photograph

11" x 17"

Artist Statement: Parallel Landscapes
Andrew Roy George Smith

Whether it was my intention at the time to capture a moment that I could share with someone, or if it was just simply trying to take home a visual from an abundance of overwhelming travel experiences, my images are a form of a fragmented visual memoir.

One of the benefits of having family members living in different corners of the globe is the opportunity to experience new places during visits. Each trip saw me unload hundreds of images into file folders, often without filtering or editing until much later. This project ensured that I went back into the folders, allowing for an artistic approach that was *Against Disappearance*. But what started to emerge as I visited these different places and reviewed the images, were patterns or what I would call visual parallels. I'm not sure I would have re-opened the folders if it wasn't for the ongoing search of these parallels.

While I would argue these images are able to stand on their own, the automatic comparisons between each image juxtaposed with a contrasting landscape is what draws me in. As time passes, I don't necessarily remember a place as a unique experience, but end up comparing it to what I know and have seen previously. As someone who has moved several times throughout my life, finding those similarities and differences is what activates the landscapes; similar to how I find ways to make sense of the places I've seen.

These images aren't just a snapshot of my own personal archives, but to me they are the living and breathing experiences that remain. At the time of shooting, as well as during the selection process, I chose the images that I found visually striking. In drawing from our course readings, borrowing specific concepts from Stuart Richmond's "Thinking Outside the Rules: Approaches to the Teaching of Photographic Art" (2004), I enjoy pairing my images with paralleled landscapes to invite the viewer in to make their own interpretations and assumptions. That doesn't necessarily mean I want the emphasis to shift completely from form to content, but the viewer's comparisons and perceptions are what help to activate the series. I hope that when you view these photos you can both enjoy them by themselves, while also engaging separately as an interpreter or consumer of the work.



Fig. 41

Andrew Smith
Parallel Landscapes 1
December 2014 / March 2014
New Buffalo, Michigan / Dubai, UAE
Digital color photographs
5" x 7" (each image)



Fig. 42

Andrew Smith
Parallel Landscapes 2
July 2013 / March 2014
Lake Louise, Alberta / Dubai, UAE
Digital color photographs
5"x 7" (each image)



Fig. 43

Andrew Smith

Parallel Landscapes 3

March 2016

North Vancouver, BC / Sedona, Arizona

Digital color photographs

5" x 7" (each image)

Artist Statement: The Bus Stop Series
Paul Best

As I thought about “Against disappearance: A photographic search for memory”, I was more focused on aspects of someone having previously touched an item. Not in a historically significant way like the work of Japanese photographer Ishiuchi Miyako, which features clothing and objects affected by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Rather, the everyday interactions of people with the things around them. I had watched the Bus Stop for several days, waiting for the right weather conditions before seeing my desired composition. The Bus Stop series displays a freshly vacated bus terminus, its former passengers already departed on an earlier bus. Their temporary presence recorded by their heat signature against the frosted glass wall of the stop, a ghostly memory of their existence.

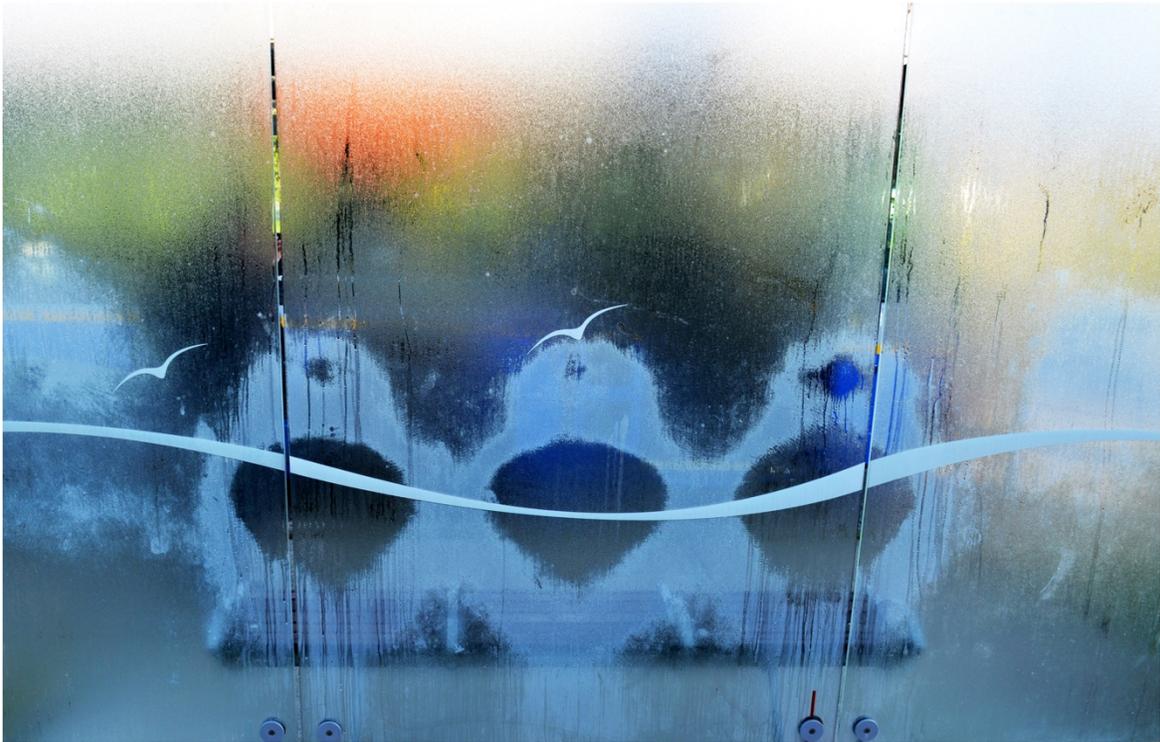


Fig. 44

Paul Best

Untitled (Bus Stop # 15)

Tuesday, February 9, 2016 at 10:34 am in Vancouver, BC

Digital color photograph, 1/200 sec. f/5.6 18 mm, ISO

400 on Nikon D5200

11" x 17"



Fig. 45

Paul Best

Untitled (Bus Stop # 5)

Tuesday, February 9, 2016 at 10:32 am in Vancouver, BC
Digital color photograph, 1/200 sec. f/5.6 55 mm, ISO 400
on Nikon D5200

11" x 17"



Fig. 46

Paul Best

Untitled (Bus Stop # 20)

Tuesday, February 9, 2016 at 10:35 am in Vancouver, BC
Digital color photograph, 1/100 sec. f/5.6 22 mm, ISO 400
on Nikon D5200

11" x 17"

Artist Statement: *Residue*
Niloofar Miry

In this group show, I present a series of digital photographic prints on paper. The title of this body of work is *Residue*. It is old and ancient tile belonging to Iran-Tehran that references decay and decreasing interims of the actual thing: tile and cultural disappearing. The images address our previous colored traditional lifestyle and culture - comparing this to our recent modern life. Some empty spaces are references to themes of disappearance, destruction and deconstruction of previous life in this country - Iran, before the revolution. In this work, the object acts as a cultural influence and as a distinct quality in the present time. Feeling a bit like unfinished media, it reflects on the dryness of the recent life.

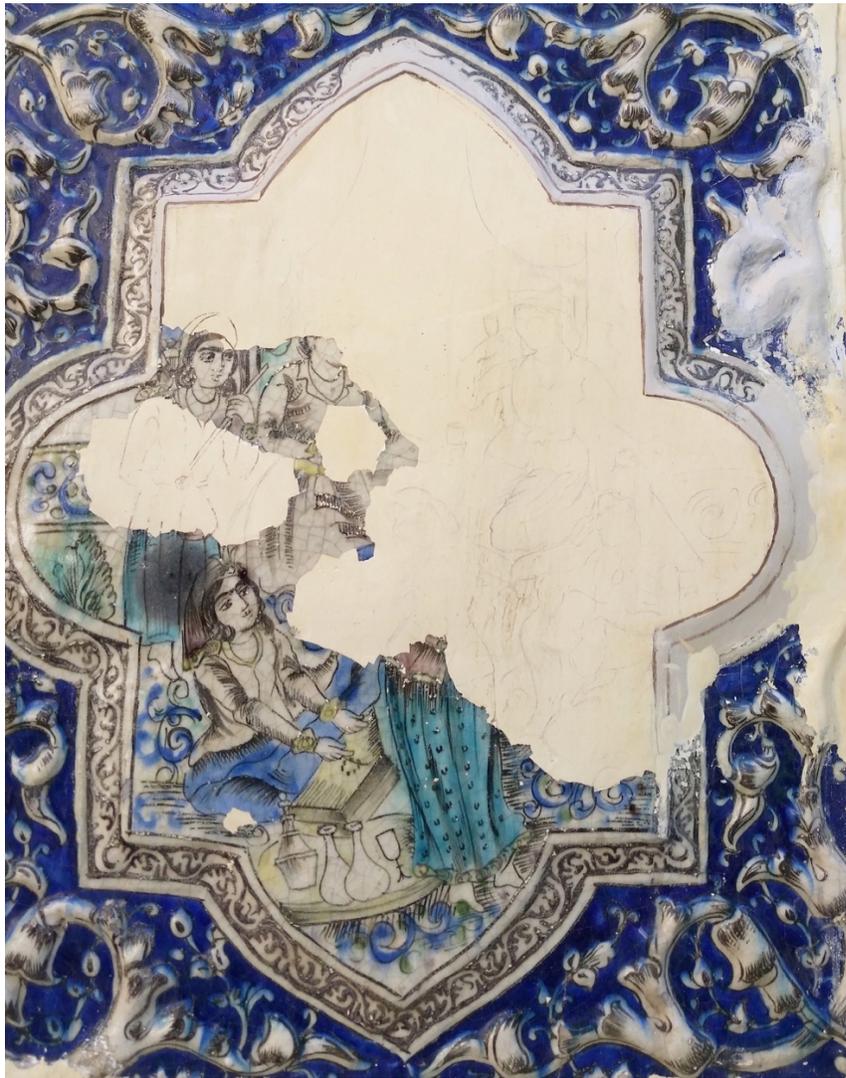


Fig. 47

Niloofar Miry

Residue #1

2016

Digital archival color photograph on BFK Rives paper

11" x 14"



Fig. 48

Niloofar Miry

Residue #2

2016

Digital archival color photograph on BFK Rives paper

5" x 6.5"



Fig. 49

Niloofer Miry

Residue #3

2016

Digital archival color photograph on BFK Rives paper

11" x 14"



Fig. 50 | By Hari Im
April 7, 2009 Jeju, Korea.

The present will move on to be the past. Fragments of it will become a memory as I remember. I photograph to assist the process of the present's becoming a memory. The act of returning to a place of the past was another process of remembering. Fourteen years ago, I left my hometown Jeju for Canada and every seven years I revisited the place to photograph. The physical revisiting of a memory to photograph is an uncanny act against disappearance. A photo is all that it takes to create a memory, and going on a photowalk to re-photograph where I already created such fragments of memory causes an abrupt and unexpected confrontation. Memories itself were confronted with the changes caused by the present.

After this year's photowalk, I was left with photographs, which pointed to changes of the person behind the lens. I was the one who was vulnerable to the changes caused by the present. I photographed as a stranger. I saw and captured things differently. And it made me realize that I was a foreigner who returned home and did not have the key to her own house. It didn't matter if I was the first dweller who smelt the fresh new paint of the apartment. The place was repainted 7 years ago and it was repainted again when I returned. I was the one who was painted over. I was the one who couldn't see the residues but only a projection. The place of the past became another place for the present.



Fig. 51

Hari Im

The process to say a proper goodbye

April 18, 2016

Digital archival color photograph on bamboo paper
12" x 18"

Artist Statement: Conversations
Kathleen Nash

Artists and teachers discern what conversations to initiate, information to present and facilitate these conversations through their work, and/or in the classroom. This inquiry includes thoughtful reflection and concrete choices. For example, what content and which photographs to select for this exhibition has been an ongoing discussion beginning with a conversation that took place during a photo walk Blake and I went on in December of 2015.

For me, as an artist and educator, one of the most difficult (yet important) issues that I struggle with is how to address the subject of suicide. Suicide is often related to mental health challenges, which do not receive enough attention. This contributes to and perpetuates both societal stigmatism (often rooted in unintentional ignorance) and isolation of people touched by the realities of mental illness. On a personal and professional level, I struggle with whether or not to talk about suicide explicitly or otherwise. It is such a sensitive issue, one that is pressing in the media, our communities, and many people's lives. Silence contributes to the problem, but romanticizing or promoting it in anyway is detrimental as well. We are curious about how to raise awareness/pay attention to something without being offensive, and the ethics of *not* talking about these kinds of issues, including mental health.

Suicide has touched my personal life in several ways in the last two years and is an undercurrent in this work. The scale of the photographs is important as it relates to the corporeal body and can be experienced more physically; this physical presence and lack of presence alludes both to loss - and to the wonder and joys of life. Whether or not to address suicide explicitly in the narrative was discussed throughout our collaboration. The photo walk in an emotionally and aesthetically loaded place encompassed many forms of inquiry. These conversations continue on the personal, communal, national and international levels. What conversations do we have and how direct should they be? What is respectful? Let's make this a part of an ongoing inquiry, as artists, as educators, as human beings.



Fig. 52 | By Blake Smith, *Exhibition image: Kathleen's work in the gallery, against glass walls.*



Figs. 53 (Left) & 54 (Right)

Kathleen Nash

Conversations

December 2015

Digital color photographs

24"x 36" (each) on foamcore

Photographs by Blake Smith

The Visual Memoir Project, continued
Blake Smith

In the gallery, this second set of images from this series was presented down an adjoining wall to the first set, leading into another room, next to the work of Hari and Kathleen. These images were printed on foam core and curated to look like a filmstrip, one work per rectangular glass window.



Fig. 55 | By Blake Smith, *View of gallery wall 2/2 of The Visual Memoir Project*



Fig. 56

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Cherry blossom petals and footprints photographed on my street in spring. The overlay of color and soft texture altered my vision of this everyday place.

2016/East Vancouver, BC

R: Cloe

May 18, 2014/Porteau Cove, BC

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore



Fig. 57

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Lone branch sleeping in the ocean.

2015/Third Beach, Vancouver, BC

R: Portrait of my father. Memory of a special summer day we spent together in the sunshine, atop the granite mountain.

2015/Stone Mountain, Atlanta, GA

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore



Fig. 58

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Snow-covered youth jacket found outside a local elementary school on a photowalk with Matthew and Joanne. When we walked by it again later, all the snow had melted away, and it would have been an entirely different photograph.

2015/East Vancouver, BC

R: Found jacket washed ashore, lying in the sand. It was right next to me, and I almost didn't see it. A haunted sense of absence came over me.

2015/Sunset Beach, Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore



Fig. 59

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: A yarn sign along 2nd Avenue that I drive past every day that normally reads “HOMESICK FOR A PLACE THAT DOESN'T EXIST.” I recently went back to rephotograph it – and someone has removed 'NT. It now reads “HOMESICK FOR A PLACE THAT DOES EXIST.” I'm not sure it does.

2015/Mount Pleasant, BC

R: The place around the corner from my house where I mail letters home – and where my friend sometime sleeps. Most days, flat cardboard is a signature he was there.

2015/East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
12” x 18” diptych on foamcore



Fig. 60

Blake Smith, Untitled

A found chair in someone's yard in my neighborhood, rephotographed 3x over 2 years. When I went to rephotograph it a fourth time, the chair was gone. In its place, ground-breaking for a new affordable housing development, Co:Here Housing, now under construction.

2015-16/East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" triptych on foamcore



Fig. 61

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Found: Wings, no body.

2014/Downtown Vancouver, BC

R: Held: Metal and hope. My friend's hands holding her wedding rings before the ceremony. Things are different now.

2014/Punta de Mita, Mexico

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore



Fig. 62

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: A photograph about longing and desire. The reflection of a home I once imagined.

2016/Phoenix, AZ

R: iPhone sunset, a photograph of a photograph. Makes me wonder about filtered experiences and what we are really looking at most days...

2016/Davis Bay, BC

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore



Fig. 63

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Photographed before, knowing a goodbye was likely soon and I'd have to get used to seeing an empty bed. The weight of that absence is still quite heavy.

2016/Davis Bay, BC

R: Kaylah.

2015, East Vancouver, BC

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore



Fig. 64

Blake Smith, Untitled

L: Seen on a photowalk in my neighborhood, I was drawn to the fallen net and pattern of black marks imprinted upon that wall as residue.

2015, East Vancouver, BC

R: Photographed this layered wall of paint alongside my father, on our way to visit an art gallery and studio inside a homeless shelter, the first of its kind in the area. Both have since closed.

2015, Downtown Atlanta, GA

Digital color photographs
12" x 18" diptych on foamcore

Chapter 6

A Lexicon for Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory

Inspired by Susan Sontag's "A Lexicon for *Available Light*" (2001, p. 161)
& Dr. Carl Leggo's Teachings on the Abecedarian



Fig. 65 | By Blake Smith, Untitled. *Bus stop and hedges in late afternoon light.*

“What is needed is a vocabulary –
a descriptive, rather than prescriptive,
vocabulary – for forms.”

Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (1966, p. 8)

“...Sadness and happiness – if those / are even useful words, because as the years have gone by I have wondered if we / want another language for emotion, if we would rather speak of deep and shallow, / because the things that move people to tears are sometimes joyous and because the / attempt to ward off sadness so often wards off depth instead – by distraction, for / example. Certain kinds of beauty make people weep, the moments “when hope / and history rhyme,” the arrival of the long-awaited, the revelation of a pattern in / the universe that is also the revelation of your own power of making and / perceiving order, and sometimes just extraordinarily intense beauty, including / moral beauties – justice done, truth honored, order or wholeness restored. Maybe / from that we can extract a definition of beauty that has more to do with depth: beauty is one of the things that make you cry and so maybe beauty is always tied / up in tears. And maybe we can practice taxonomy, in this case of the things that / produce tears rather than drink them. Pain. Sorrow. Loss. Thwartedness. Joy. / Pattern. Meaning. Depth. Generosity. Beauty. Reunion. Recovery. Recognition / and understanding. Arrival. Love. Mortality. Precision. Or maybe we can call / depth the genus and all these other things species. Moths drink; birds sleep; / there are tears; there are dreams; there is a difference...”

Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby* (2013)

(From: 8. *Unwound*. Beginning on p. 144, this excerpt is a running subtext along the bottom of the pages throughout the book. A “/” is added to denote line endings on each page.)

“I seek a poetics of research that is steeped in imagination,
research that attends to the rhythms of seasons and weather,
life and death, breathing and aging,
research that strikes out across the snowy marsh
like a blank page,
walking a path with an unknown destination.”

Carl Leggo, *Learning by heart: A poetics of research* (2019c, p. 112)

A Poetic Alphabet of Understandings & Observations

This chapter offers an original lexicon as a living framework for understanding and experiencing the exhibition readers have just viewed in Chapter 5, *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*. Inside the lexicon is a varied and valuable collection of what I have learned and observed in the process of coming to conceptualize, curate, analyze, understand, and present these learnings and observations in the afterglow of the exhibition. As Leggo once wrote, “I support a poetics of research by investigating ways that creative writing (including poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, lifewriting) contributes to knowing and understanding...Like Freire (1997), I am eager to ‘produce forms of knowledge that do not exist yet’ (p. 31)” (Leggo, 2019b, p. 67).

As a contribution to photography education and inquiry, the ‘Lexicon for *Against Disappearance*,’ an abecedarian, is indeed a form of knowledge that did not exist until it was written into existence. Informed by the sound of participant voices alongside my critical and creative noticings about the exhibition and the experiences and tonalities it evoked, the lexicon is a unique, scholarly, artistic form. The composing of the lexicon was a method that invited a particular style of lingering with and braiding together emergent, thematic, recurrent, rhizomatic, electric, and most significant threads to offer a lexical ekphrasis on the exhibition as vibrant data.

Rooted in a/r/tography, this lexicon is a composition that embodies “the kind of best practices that emerge in the writing classroom where the process of composition is promoted as a pedagogical journey that includes ongoing inquiry” (Leggo & Irwin, 2013, p. 150). As a method that may be useful for other researchers and a/r/tographers to unravel, illuminate, and present their data, this is an artful way of coming to know and reflect the data, the methods, the context, the participants, and the methodologist that produced them in an intimate, artistic way, particularly since that data itself is artistic – as such, form necessarily echoes form.

Based on our photographic inquiry in *Against Disappearance*, the lexicon and myself as the lexiconist linger with the photographs, the photographers, and our evocations and provocations in order to unveil complex layers of doing, knowing, thinking, ruminating, and sharing, understanding that the language around the image includes not only the image itself but also the context of its being taken, shared, experienced, exhibited, curated, and understood. Considering language (including visual language) as one contextual frame from which meaning is made, this lexicon offers a subjective new knowing about the inner workings of an exhibition and the ideations of eight photographers towards memory in the light of disappearance. Through a curated collection of artworks, reflections, and offerings emerging from the exhibition, they highlight some of the potential and problematics of memory work through collective photographic inquiry as well

as reveal the potential of lexicons to inspire new vocabularies of hope, meaning, and *seeing* within arts-based and other forms of research, notably a/r/tography.

The lexicon is built around my poetic observations as both a researcher and participant, offering an up-close view of both the processes and practices that come to bear on the data emerging from the exhibition and the interviews surrounding it. These observations are my way of creatively responding to, culling, and layering the data – observations that are infused with the contributions of the research participants where fitting as a way to highlight their insights alongside my own, as this was a shared experience and group exhibition. Alternating between narrative, short essay, poetic prose, reflective writing, image, list, and poetry, I write my way through the lexicon as a way of coming to understand in order to create new language around photographs and photographic inquiry. To give shape to the lexicon, I lay emphasis on: the things that stood out, important details, creative gestures, my perspectives on the show and each artist, and direct excerpts from artist statements as phrasings of note. This assemblage of writing styles and emphases attempts to echo the assemblage that was our show, speaking to the complexities in our work. This underscores the notion that to appreciate art is to appreciate its subtleties, variations, and tone and not to seek its commonalities, broad generalizations, or singular meaning.

Through the act and art of writing, I aim to give texture, mood, depth, and ambience to the work – and the work of artfully attending *to* that work – through image, language, emotion, and observation. The lexicon emerges from a place of listening, lingering, and leaning in and attempts to use language – and to *create* language – as a way to write meaningfully about art and honor the potential for the deeper understandings it provokes. It also presents itself at this particular time, place, and moment as one compelling style of knowledge exhibition and creative data analysis and data presentation. As such, the lexicon is a kind of lifewriting about this research. It is a subjective, personal, and inspiring sense-making exercise of looking carefully and creatively at the data with the eye of the artist, figuratively ‘photographing’ then juxtaposing a collection of noticings, field notes, and noteworthy moments. These moments emerge as significant, coming together as an *alphabet of deepenings* – pedagogical, methodological, artistic, photographic, and philosophical. Finally, the lexicon writing process involves the intentional fragmenting and collaging of ideas, themes, photographs, and motifs so as to recreate a new a/r/tographic composition in response to the first one (the show), arranging writings on the exhibition and how it can be seen and understood as something uniquely and necessarily different than before.

As a creative writer and lead curator of this exhibition, I position the lexicon as a way *in* to language through the artfulness and poetics of language itself. A lexicon is important in my work

because it is both expansive and intimate at the same time and because it offers a compelling way to gather, organize, compose, and juxtapose a collection of research fragments in an artistic manner. The lexicon is an alphabet of selective visual thinking, pedagogical possibility, linguistic play, poetic response, and creative research, all guiding concepts that help to further explore the exhibition itself. As a form, it is a way to respond to the exhibition and wider research project by creating photographic, a/r/tographic language inspired by and emerging from the data.

In this case, an exhibition of thirty-six images and one white chair (all *forms*) by eight artists, is framed by an A to Z abecedarian, each letter leaning on the next and the one that came before – all capable of being recombined and reimagined. One by one, I move us through carefully chosen words and phrases meant to inspire connections across the works; in some cases, terms emerged from the works themselves or conversations had about them, about our process as a group, or the exhibition. A decisive stylistic move to point out to readers is that I chose to dedicate one lexicon letter to each of the eight artists (with the exception of Paul Best and Joanne Ursino who have two) as a way to honor their contributions to the project. In doing so, I illuminate: a) the originality of each artist’s work and writing within the exhibition in the context of disappearance, along with a thumbnail image; b) the potential of the works and, in some cases, what I learned from each of them and/or what I feel they teach us; and c) what I suggest are promising, important aspects of their work to bring to light in relation to the research questions, the methodology and methods, and to the other artists. For the lexicon letters C, E, F, L, M, O, P, Q, R, V and W, noted below, the phrasings were created using narrative “In Vivo Coding to keep the data rooted in the participant’s own language” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 7) and are drawn from participant artist statements, artwork titles, or interviews, massaged only slightly for the purpose of poetic prose:

- 1) Kathleen Nash | “Conversations, Explicit or Otherwise:” On Teaching & the Topic of Suicide
- 2) Paul Best, Work #1 | The Ethereal Everyday
- 3) Matthew Sinclair | On the Weight of Forever
- 4) Andrew Smith | Landscapes in Parallel
- 5) Paul Best, Work #2 | Memento
- 6) Joanne Ursino | Offering
- 7) Hari Im | When Saying Goodbye is a Process
- 8) Joanne Ursino | Signature Quilt | “In the Hands of the Artist & the Photographer”
- 9) Niloofer Miry | An Art of Residue | Migration Photographs Inside “Third Spaces”
- 10) Blake Smith | Visual Lifewriting as Memoir | Collecting Photographs in the Wake of Lived Experience

To create the lexicon was a creative process in itself, as I made lists upon lists and played with words like a collage, culling my material and choosing what, out of *so much*, to write about and artfully how, attending to both the artistic and pedagogical potential of the work and weaving in the interviews in places where they could be heard⁴⁰. By lingering with letters, phrasings, and photographs, I was able to study the contours of their complexity with linguistic love and curatorial attentiveness – a second curation of the exhibition, in a way.

Through this process, I have learned the affect of words, the limits of language, the power of poetry, the importance of noticing, the subjectivity of writing and seeing – and that some things will remain unphotographable and unsaid. As Leggo (2019c) writes, “A poetics of research is not seeking a destination, an end-point. Instead, a poetics of research is a sojourn, a searching, a way of knowing” (p. 108). Uncovering and deciding which turns of phrase to use (and when and why and where) for each letter, artist, and idea was a highly selective, wildly demanding, and incredibly creative exercise, a “sojourn” “that acknowledges the integral usefulness of *logos* [logic], *ethos* [ethics], and *pathos* [heart]” (Leggo, 2019c, p. 104) in the process of ‘translating’ data.

From this close edit and because so much promising material was collected, *The B-Side Lexicon* was created (see Appendix B). Inspired by music and the B-Side of a record, this lexicon is another compelling form for the gathering of additional poetic material related to *Against Disappearance* that lingered still but did not make the cut. The presence of a second lexicon as promising additional data illustrates the expansiveness and potential of lexical thinking in/as creative research, discussed further in Chapter 8. I hope to return to *The B-Side Lexicon* in future research and writing emerging from this study.

In the ‘Lexicon for *Against Disappearance*,’ the emergent language of letters gives way towards creative, intuitive understandings of how art is, and becomes, its own language through an alphabetical poetics of meaning, making, and materials. Inside that language, and because of it, new vocabularies are built, as ways to garner deeper subject knowledge and to deliberately un-build, un-learn, and reimagine the languages that may have come to cloud our vision or stand in the way of our innate ability to know and learn and see in other ways. I offer the lexicon as a necessary innovation in the presentation of data analysis for it creates new room and holds space for the poetics of potential. In this study, an artful form of writing was needed as a way to respond

⁴⁰ Although their form and content are remarkably different, I was inspired by the work of Lather and Smithies (2018) in *Troubling the Angels: Women Living with HIV/AIDS* as to their presentation of participant voices from interviews throughout the chapters, along with a running subtext entitled ‘Our Learning Hearts,’ a researcher narrative/response presented below the interviews. This methodology of writing as a form of data presentation is helpful in understanding how researcher experiences and observations come alongside participant voices and the themes and considerations they call forward.

to the art forms in a way that mirrored the complexity, colors, and variation of its unique topography. Further, the lexicon as an artistic tool makes space for alternative ways of thinking of and naming one's work, for remembering the experience of being in the gallery, and for addressing the artworks and artists post-exhibition from a reflective, archival, and narrative stand-point.

In the 'search for memory' (the action-oriented subtitle of our exhibition), there is also a search for fresh language around method and fresh methods around language: here, visual lifewriting and/as photographic inquiry and memory work. The lexicon is a form of visual lifewriting through words on pages and invites poetic writing about photography. It also invokes an evolving vocabulary for photographic thinking and doing within a context of a/r/tography. However, not all understandings can be put to words and not all aspects of this project are narrated and named. Instead, the potential for fuller narration may live inside the depth of nuance or the places where verbal and written language find their edges or stay quiet. What lies beyond are other ways of speaking, seeing, being aware, and attempts at being heard. These are not polarities or foreign tongues; rather they dance, overlap, and deserve their own unique place-holding in the realms of personal expression, artistic communication, and raw awareness.

Sontag says we need "a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms" (1966, p. 8); thus, the lexicon employs close description throughout. Susan Sontag's writings are vast and among them is the seminal essay, *Against Interpretation* (1966), heralded as Sontag's root-growth to 'an unnamed theory' (Mitrano, 2016), from which our exhibition drew partial inspiration (notably, its title). In Sontag's essay, interpretation is discussed as a tool or lens for understanding a range of qualities that one might find or seek to comprehend in a work of art or an exhibition. For her, to 'interpret' might be to lessen the work, to take something from it (reduce it) by picking it apart, assembling the pickings in one's own way, not the artist's way – or in a way that an interpretation replaces or speaks *for* a work of art as if the art had nothing to say. Sontag might suggest that to be 'against interpretation' is to look less for formal form and content and look more for a vocabulary of meaning and an artistic language and context towards the work(s) being studied.

Since this lexicon touches on multiple works within a group show, the notion of how or why/why not to interpret the works and the artists' intentions is raised in the act, or invitation, of being 'against.' Sontag nor I are against *all* interpretation, but rather the notion that there is a single *correct* interpretation to draw out and the potential repercussions of seeking or claiming such an understanding. Instead of interpretation, perhaps a kind of translation or one person's intellectual and artistic offering of understanding towards another. Regarding interpretation, considerations arise, such as: 1) how to appreciate the works/show as they are, using the artist's own words as ways

in; 2) how to deepen one's own understandings through close study of the works/show; 3) how to coax out what is evocative, provocative, innovative, and even problematic in terms of photo-based memory work and being against disappearance; 4) how to appreciate and explore the language and relationships between the letters; and 5) how and what to see and how that necessarily differs based on each person's unique perspective, lived experience, and 'reading' of the lexicon as an art-text.

Moving through this lexicon, I invite readers to carry these considerations with them, knowing that each letter is an opening to a place I invite you to walk through *and* knowing there are many other compelling places to take this work as well as ways of getting there – as an artist composing, these were my selections. The lexicon is my poetic grammar of understandings and meaning around this exhibition, put forward instead of a mere summation, a singular essay about art, or list of words independent from, and not aesthetically linked to, one another. I am unable to offer one complete or singular interpretation as if I have a full grasp on the weight of offerings and complexities emerging from this work. Instead, I offer a series of unique translations and observances, with each lexicon letter speaking to its own potential, potency, and poetry, that come together to say something original about this exhibition. The offerings emerge from reflective thought, attunement, 'deep listening' (Nepo, 2012), and close observation. Through the flow of thematic and rhizomatic adjacency, they attempt to come to life through creative nonfiction writing as yet another way in. As a collection of words and letters from A to Z that speak to our work and some of the ways I have attended to it, this living lexicon is a creative method and personalized aesthetic framework for thinking and writing about *seeing* and the power of photographic inquiry.

In the process of creating it, it has become its own a/r/tographic rendering.

Before I open the lexicon...
a necessary dedication to the person who inspired it.

a

au revoir | *until we meet again*

I dedicate this lexicon to the memory of my dear mentor, Dr. Carl Leggo, who introduced me to the *abecedarian*, a writing method and form that inspired this lexicon. A great teacher of courage and an advocate of writing from the heart, Dr. Leggo fostered creativity and risk-taking at a delicate time during my graduate studies. He encouraged me along with his other students to ‘sing our credo’ and bring together the fragments of this research into a compelling, meaningful whole. He inspired me to express my voice as an artist and teacher, urging me to write with grace and the wisdom of lived experience, saying “Scholars do not need to imitate or iterate others. They need to pursue their passions” (personal communication, 2016). His love of language, thoughtful teachings, and poetic command of the art of lifewriting left behind a legacy that will forever stay with me as a teacher, graduate student, writer, artist, and human being. This lexicon bears the mark of his teachings and is composed in his honor.

*“A star shines bright only for itself and will burn out.
A legend shines for others and lives on forever.
I want to be a legend.”
~Blaze, a film (2018)*

au revoir

until we meet again dear sir...

there shall never be another you.

A

An Art of Memory

In this exhibition, we explore and compose from eight points of view, an *art of memory*. That is, we try to touch its edges, capture its tone, and give form to its lingering feelings and profundity, each in our own way. We make art out of the everyday and of the pieces left behind, writing picture poetry out of the lines we wrote across the albums of our past and the pages of our memoirs. From behind the camera or in the hands of a sculptor, we artfully caress the space that memory marks and makes: the space of yesterday as history, the space of remembering and/or forgetting, the space of loss, love, and longing, the space of exquisite and ever-escaping time, the spaces of preciousness, place, and pain, and the space of story. Through creative engagement, and in some cases entanglement, the artists in the exhibition make the materials of memory malleable, offering a series of artistic understandings (informed by the work of other artists and by each other) that explore the depths, contour, and emotional timbre of memory work through photographic and sculptural inquiry. As visual lifewritings and the photographers' autobiographical exhales, these explorational renderings center Sullivan's (2010) offerings around 'visual knowing' and the work of "the artist as theorist" (p. 149). This centering helps to frame an appreciation for the knowings that come from artists' and teachers' lived experiences that shape our approaches *to* and desire *for* working with memory as an art form in the process of being both *with* and *against* disappearance.

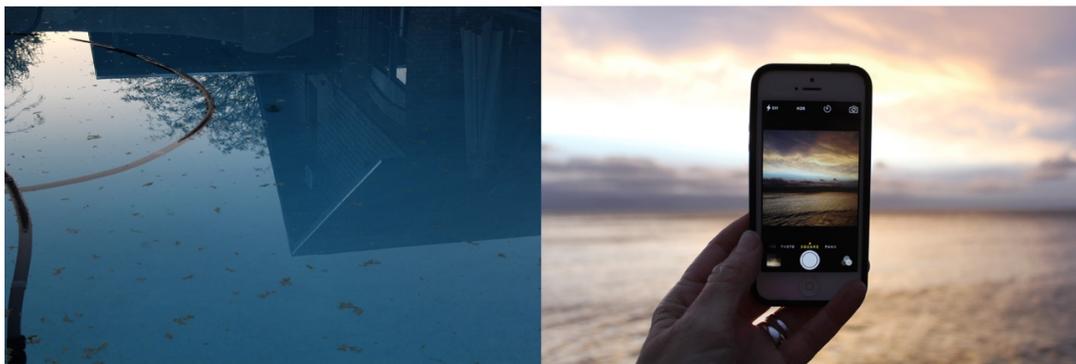


Fig. 61 | By Blake Smith, Untitled

A

Artists of Inspiration: *Another Kind of Lexicon*

A number of artists and specific projects of influence inspired artwork in this exhibition, all in some way connected to themes of memory, loss, and disappearance. As visual and conceptual references for my work and in some cases the work of others in the show, these artists offer inspiration towards our collective search for memory and meaning and help to frame our understandings of and approaches to photographic inquiry. Some of these artists' works were also shown in EDCP 405, now reappearing here. As a collection, they form another kind of lexicon:

Alfredo Jaar
Bryon Wolfe
Catherine Opie
Dan Eldon
Dana Claxton
Diane Arbus
Doris Salcedo
Edward Weston
Edward Burtynsky
Emily Jacir
Fred Herzog
Gordon Parks
Ishiuchi Miyako
Jacob Lawrence
Jana Napoli
Joseph Cornell
Ken Gonzalez-Day
Mark Klett
Michelle Van Parys
Nan Goldin
Paul Graham
Peter Majendie
Robert Frank
Romare Bearden
Sally Mann
Sophie Calle
Stephen Shore
Susan Meiselas
Vik Muniz
William Christenberry
William Eggleston

B

Beloveds: *Subjects in a Blue Key*



Fig. 67 | By Blake Smith, Untitled

In this project, we take a precious subject (the ones we love) and consider it in the light of potential disappearance. It made sense to me that, in a study about engaging memory from creative and pedagogical perspectives, some of us chose to photograph subjects near to the heart, and I came to understand that beloved (Morrison, 2004) means something different to everyone. As I look at the works in *Against Disappearance*, 'beloved' is a resonant theme running across the work of all eight artists: *beloved homeland, beloved quilt, beloved grandfather, beloved students, beloved education, beloved daughter, beloved dogs, beloved art practice, beloved places, beloved memories, beloved experience, beloved photographs*. To be against the disappearance of our beloveds is a difficult to impossible ask, if it is their existence and heartbeat we speak of. When someone passes on, the first thing so many gravitate immediately to is photographs. Recordings. Their hand-writing. Because, perhaps, something of their beingness lingers there and in a way we can still see them. To hold a photograph of one's beloved is to hold the sight of them, a physical reminder of a likeness we once knew and an image of their light before it went dark. *Perhaps photography is a visual mediation against loss*. To photograph one's beloveds is: 1) to try and un-disappear them; and 2) to try to capture a rendering, a portrait of their essence, which opens up possibilities for *what* and *where* can be considered a portrait. For example, inspired by artist Alfredo Jaar's photo triptych titled *Field, Road, Cloud* (1997), I honor the tragic death of a dear friend's son in a motorcycle accident by photographing one of the tall saguaro cactus plants on the road nearby his roadside memorial in Wittman, Arizona. He is not there, but the blue of my photographic memory remains. This was a way to anchor/honor both her loss and this place, a place that before held no meaning to me but now forever will: *Beloved*.

C

“Conversations, Explicit or Otherwise:” *On Teaching & the Topic of Suicide* *The Work of Kathleen Nash*⁴¹



Fig. 68 | By Kathleen Nash, *Conversations (Image 2 of 2)*. Photograph by Blake Smith

During a compelling walking research interview with Kathleen and her infant child in the forested woods outside of Squamish B.C. in December of 2015, we exchanged a meaningful conversation while photowalking as she introduced me to an eerie yet beautiful place off the main road, lush with thick greenery, tall trees, and the sound of big trucks passing by. In this moment, our walk in these woods was a revisitation to a place of double meaning for Kathleen (something inspiring and something painful), and she chose here for our interview site as a significant, picturesque setting for conversation, photography, and reverence.

Kathleen used to live in Squamish and, as an artist, always wanted to show me these trees – the ways the wet moss upon them glows iridescent green when illuminated by golden sunlight. Remembered for their beauty, this place also has a haunted history for her. As a hiker, she frequented these and other nearby woods. Once, she came across a body hanging in a tree, a death by suicide and a difficult memory that remains. Knowing this, our walk and photographs in this forest were laden with the knowledge of that story, framing a place I had never been as a place she has never left. As we walked, we experienced the delicacies, ethics, and potential of what she eloquently described as “photo walking as a form of inquiry in an emotionally and aesthetically loaded place” (Kathleen Nash, artist statement). Emotionally, due to the impact this place holds for her and aesthetically, in how stunningly gorgeous it was with the light streaming in from the

⁴¹ Kathleen’s work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 134-135.

afternoon sun across the mountain ridges into the dense forest area we were in. Talking about seeing that tree later on, she said, “It’s weird. There’s this dirty stuffed animal that looked like it was laying on the muddy ground for fourteen years, a stuffed animal of a snake by that tree I was telling you about where that suicide happened... And somebody nailed it to this tree” (Kathleen Nash, walking interview). Our process of photowalking enabled a gathering of data (the walk, the photographs, the interview, the memory) alongside of (and because of) a photographic practice that was against the disappearance of this place and her memory. I listened to her words carefully as we talked, taking photographs in/of a majestic yet challenging place, perhaps as a kind of grief work, and walking in the forest as a means of being physically immersed in a space, surrounded by tall trees, as well as putting our feet upon this land.

The pair of images she presented in the exhibition were large, referring to “the corporeal body” (Kathleen Nash, artist statement) and were co-composed⁴² as we walked, each gazing in our own way: she provided the setting and backstory for our being there, while I provided the camera and research opportunity. I remember taking the photographs. As we walked together, all three, a living portrait appeared in front of me. I said to her, “Wow. Hold on, I’m going to take your photo, this is a great backdrop. It’s so pretty. It looks like we’re in a magical forest... This is like a painting” (Blake Smith, walking interview).

Together, sharing my camera back and forth, we discussed the kinds of conversations art teachers could or should be having with their students, as we reflected on the suicide, the loss it represents in this place, and the challenges and importance of talking about difficult subjects like this one with our students. One image shows her with her two-and-a-half-month old son (a presence) while the other shows an opening in a forest, signifying an absence. The images intend to converse back and forth between loss and hope and the life of a new child and the death of others. It is in the tension between the images that the grit of her work exists, for there is no life without death and in this story, there are no woods without the wounds of haunted stories. Together, the two images speak back towards one another, creating a conversation among them, a fitting gesture given their title: *Conversations*. In some ways they represent her prior experiences in these woods,

⁴² My collaboration with Kathleen was one of two in the exhibition (the other being with Joanne). These were the only two cases where work was done together with another person, as the other works in the show were made individually. I was the photographer for these images, and at one point, I was challenged by the questions: “Whose picture is it? Does it matter whose picture it is? Is it ours? Is it yours? Is it mine? How do we credit this collaboration?” I wouldn’t be in those woods if Kathleen hadn’t invited me there. The images wouldn’t have been taken if we hadn’t been together on that walk for this research. I would have never known in my whole life that *that* road, that forest, that story even existed, if not for our conversation and her invitation to walk there. And now I do. Because of her. And now a memory has been created, and we have visual documents of our compelling conversation, resulting in photographs she ended up choosing for the show – the result of our photowalk and collaboration. I was grateful to walk alongside her.

from loss to light. In an interview later on, I asked Kathleen how I could describe this place and our reason for being there, as I felt uncertain how to write about it. She said:

There was only one person I found in those woods (that I physically came across) but there was a series of suicides in my life at that time. We were walking in the woods (from my interpretation) partially because of *that*, partially because the trees are so specific to Squamish and I wanted to show them to you, and partially because of the way that they illuminate and how significant they were to me and wanting to share that aesthetically and the sort of energy that they have not like anywhere I have ever been. I have been haunted by finding the suicide for sure but I've also gone on so many meaningful walks in the forest, and they're sort of a place for contemplation. We were talking about taking photographs and that was a really exciting opportunity for collaboration. For me it wasn't like there was just one reason. (Kathleen Nash, phone interview)

Challenged by how and/or if to speak of this experience compelled her to create the piece, *Conversations*, which emerged from our time in these woods together. Kathleen's photographic collaboration with me raises the question of teachers addressing tender topics, such as suicide, with their students and each other, or how to address them when they occur. In public space, modern classrooms, and conversation, she asks how (and if, when) to do this and considers the ethics of *not* making space for difficult pedagogy. On our walk, she raised the issue of students having something to say and needing to be given space to share their stories, even the trying ones, as if our walk in a once-difficult place stirred up questions for her as an echo of her own. Regarding an observation she made in an art class from her student teaching experience in a high school, she said, with passion: "If you open it up and you let these kids speak to their experience, can you imagine what they would make?" (Kathleen Nash, artist statement). As we moved along, our walking experience punctuated by the sounds of camera clicks, laughter, and her baby crying, she continued, talking about students' capabilities for handling or expressing intense content:

I don't think they give them enough credit for what they're capable of handling because they are handling a lot as it is... I think it's a lot more damaging to *not* give them the venue where they can talk about those things. I think it's far more damaging to not acknowledge...Or not let them acknowledge it, especially when you're like, 'What is the role of a secondary school then if they can't talk about their life and their feelings and what they're going through in their personal journeys, and whatever that looks like to them?' (Kathleen Nash, walking interview)

To that I replied, "Or helping them to develop a visual language to speak to what that looks like or feels like. It's a disservice to not make space for that." (Blake Smith, walking interview). Later, she continued with saying:

The thing that I find sometimes is that bridge between... And this sort of talks about what I was talking about with the challenges of personal content in art classrooms in

high school, is that fine line between your personal – what you're doing, your life, what you're interested in, what you're working on – and then what you are [going] to teach. I think that sometimes we're more successful when that gap is smaller. (Kathleen Nash, walking interview)

D

Diptychs in Duration

From instantaneity to the instant, the photographic image is therefore inseparable from a peculiar process and reinforces a radical gesture: a sense of performativity that, in a blink of an eye, cuts, immobilizes, fixes, and divides any flow, supplying a slice, a small block of life. Note, however, that the notion of instant, being one of the foremost qualities of the “photographic”, is not a quality that is enclosed in the (stationary and unique) image, because it does not exclude the experiencing of a certain duration, particularly one which stems from what is considered to be an extremely creative possibility: the imaginary projection of the image. Consequently, photography causes us to face this dual meaning: on the one hand, it suspends movement, petrifying the real; and on the other hand, it reveals that immobility is a relative impossibility, because the instant is alive with time and motion of the sort that the eye and mind always experience whenever they are provoked by fixity.

Sérgio Mah, [Introduction to] *Between Times: Instants, intervals, durations* (2010, p. II)

The ‘diptych’ is a provocative art form visible in this exhibition, used by five artists: Matthew, Andrew, Joanne, Kathleen, and myself. A diptych is a pairing of two images set next to, touching, or near one another whereby the artist has generated, or is suggesting, a relationship – that in the two there is a new image being formed – and/or, that in the two, there is a back and forth conversation, one image speaking to the other. In “Regarding Diptychs,” Wilson (2016) says when the viewer encounters a diptych that s/he forms *the third image*, thus completing the work essentially as a triptych (three images) in a triangle of image, seer, and seen. By arranging images in sets or pairs, the artist can discover and reveal the relationships emergent among them.

There are twenty-five diptychs in *Against Disappearance*, nineteen of them belonging to me – a form I chose to highlight the fragmentation of lived photographic inquiry, frame by frame. By creating and selecting images born at different times (years, seasons, moments, emotional events) and juxtaposing them, a new dialogue is made between them: a third meaning can exist. As Wilson writes, “The diptych is a wrestling” (2016, n. p.). In that “wrestling,” duration (Bergson, 1988), as an aspect of both lived time and photographic time and a key artistic element in the exhibition (how photographs are both with and against the disappearance of time), then becomes part of the narrative lexicon of these works as a powerful element of photographic language as well as an a/r/tographic rendering of significance.

E

Ethereal Everyday, The

*The Work of Paul Best*⁴³ (Artwork 1/2)

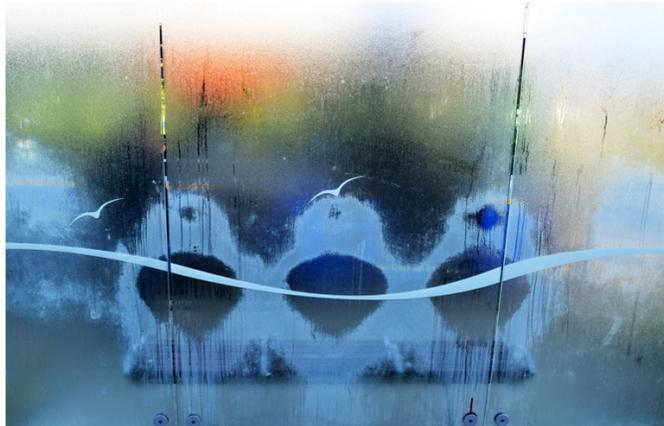


Fig. 69 | By Paul Best, *Untitled (Bus Stop #15)*

Several artistic approaches to ethereality and the everyday are explored in this show, made visible through photographs and written text that speak to that which may fade away. The photographic work by Paul Best in *The Bus Stop series* invites consideration towards how we might notice, mark, or make memory of the ephemera of “temporary presence” (Paul Best, artist statement) in the everyday and how, photographically, we might pay closer attention to subtle yet familiar nuances of everyday life. He draws our attention to the silhouettes on the glass bus stop as a place of passage and pause: an ethereal image in an everyday place. Paul writes:

As I thought about *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*, I was more focused on aspects of someone having previously touched an item. Not in a historically significant way like the work of Japanese photographer Ishiuchi Miyako, which features clothing and objects affected by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Rather, the everyday interactions of people with the things around them. (Paul Best, artist statement)

His photographs of local Vancouver bus stops offer a creative take on the disappearance of ephemeral objects, bodies, spaces, and time, showing that the search for memory might be just down the street if we look carefully enough. Paul writes of having “watched the Bus Stop for several days, waiting for the right weather conditions before seeing my desired composition” (Paul Best, artist statement). In his second interview, Paul told me more about making his photographs:

⁴³ Paul’s work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 124-127.

The idea of what I want to get across was the shadow people, the brief sort of candlelit seat those people were sitting on the bus stop and then had moved on. I think it worked well for the against disappearance because it really *was*...It was more literal than a figurative thing. It was kind of a literal interpretation...It was slightly figurative because you didn't know what that pattern was...The story for me, the people who were sitting against the back of the bus stop. It was implied that they were there once and then gone. But how I photographed it was more to do with the pattern and the shape rather than telling the story... I think we should go back to the way you plan your picture like you plan a painting...Because you are painting with film. So you frame it out. (Paul Best, interview)

Paul's attention to his craft and to detail is evident in our conversations and in studying his work, both as a researcher and once as his teacher. To "paint with film" as he said is a lovely way of describing one method of creating photographs that might echo a painting or painted nature. That sentiment resonates from Paul's work in that I became aware of his intentional compositions, rendering them almost like paintings, with a focus on lighting, texture, color, shape, pattern, as well as the theme 'against disappearance.' His "heat signatures" (Paul Best, artist statement) against cold glass leave their delicate mark in his photographs and upon our visual memory as if refusing to disappear. His camera captures colors of light through raindrops and three glass silhouettes of once-waiting, anonymous bus passengers. He writes, "Their temporary presence recorded by their heat signature against the frosted glass wall of the stop, a ghostly memory of their existence" (Paul Best, artist statement). The "ghostly memory" of their bodies against glass remains visible for a brief moment in time – faceless, nameless figures en route to a somewhere we will never know and can only imagine. Paul described his photographs as "a bench by a bus stop, which is used by people not as a permanent seat but as a passing ... [it's] a visual memoir as a person comes for a moment, for a fragment of time they occupy that seat and then they disappear" (Paul Best, interview). He said, "[It's the] *transience* of it and that's what I like about it. With kids, in fact, I say art doesn't have to be something that stays forever as a monument. It could also be a transition, a filament of time, a flicker of time that is there and then it's washed away" (Paul Best, interview).

Photographic ephemera of the everyday is now forever etched into memory through these beautiful, ethereal photographs; I have never looked at a bus stop the same after seeing them. Perhaps all presence is temporary, as we are in some constant state of coming and going. Yet, his timely and patient photographic observation of the bus stops discovered an in-between: the "heat signature" as the moment just after, people having paused in their daily movement in this place of passage for a brief duration, leaning back if just for a moment, then gone – an afterimage of human presence with the bodies now absent, the photograph now present. Like the work of Jaar and Miyako, this human imprint is all that remains: the lingering silhouette of the *present absent*.

F

Forever, On The Weight of
*The Work of Matthew Sinclair*⁴⁴



Fig. 70 | By Matthew Sinclair, *Forever*

A Poetic Response

*What is the weight of forever?
Of something that weighs, waits, wanes?
That bears the weight of an experience
(perhaps the weight of an image)
the weight of the ones we wish to keep sacred,
or the ones we choose to share?*

*I am thinking of the weight of memory,
the forever of heavy weight,
the forever and weight of waiting...
Was it the forever or the weight of these photographs,
Or the forever of posting online?
What if the potential future of something (its weight)
is forever?
How long is that duration?*

*My imaginings are mere propositions,
maybe projections,
towards a private unknown.
Only the photographer knows.
Our understanding must exist
“outside the picture frame”
beyond context, perhaps unframeable.*

⁴⁴ Matthew’s work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 117-119.

*Two more poignant questions, he asks:
“Do I have the consent from someone not yet able to speak
to make the image public? ...
Does our privacy disappear when we open ourselves to the world?”
I don’t know how to reply to him. Do you?
I do think a piece of it, of us, does disappear.
At the same time, something is being archived – maybe forever.*

*Some time has passed
since we took down the show
Photographs now off the wall,
tucked away or mounted on another
and his thought-provoking questions linger still.
I wonder what she will say when she is older
and will it matter that he asked?*

What is the weight of forever?

~

A play on the two titles of Matthew Sinclair’s works in the exhibition (*Weight and Forever*), ‘The Weight of Forever’ is an invitation to engage with his ideas and what I perceive as a relationship between his two images, although this is my own supposition. In his artist statement, he shares with his audience an honest reflection as the father of a young daughter, a father and a son who is also a photographer and secondary visual art teacher, as he grapples with some very important questions that come to bear upon not only himself, but also his students, family, and to members of this research group participating in our own inquiries alongside. I appreciate the rawness of his personal artist statement and the intentional ambiguity, I sense, in his photographs: we are left only to wonder what is “the real, the better story” (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement) as he challenges us to let go of the desire to even know, or to see *more*. He shared with me that his works are “autobiographical art pieces that try not to reveal too much personal information” (Matthew Sinclair, interview). Although we know he is the photographer, he enacts his own act of disappearance through boundary-setting, cropping, and titles that leave us asking ourselves what they mean: the weight and forever of what, or when? What is the forever he seeks, means, says? We the viewers are left standing “outside the picture frame” (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement), in a space of unknowing and wonder. About his own art practice, Matthew described it as follows:

Working throughout the last couple years and I think particularly in your class, it helped me figure out my practice has often been about the reflection...I don’t think a lot of the time the artwork I create is in the moment – it’s a reflective practice. I can think back to some of the paintings I’ve done in the past...but they’re always based off of a personal narrative that has already happened – they’re not a futuristic look to the world, they’re not an in-the-moment expression of the world, they are ‘This is what I’ve been through, this is what I’ve gone through, this is my life and I’m telling my own story the

way that I'd like it to be told about what's happened.' (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

Surrounding the life of, the life within, and notably the life beyond the borders of a photographic image, Matthew sheds light on disappearance in a way that reminds us we still have a choice – that sharing images, context, and stories is not required, while also asking a question (in his artist statement) that is highly relevant to our lives today, regarding social media: “If I don't post it, did it even happen?” (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement). Of image context and what is not decidedly shown/known about these two images, he says:

This will be forever outside the picture frame, private, just as it belongs to those who enjoyed the moment the most, never to disappear from our minds. Against becoming just another image in a flood of lives shown bare. Against us disappearing into that flood. When we share so much with the world our personal images are no longer just ours. We are at risk of having all seen the same images and no longer have something to call our own. (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement)

Through his work and in relation to it, I am invited to reflect on my own image sharing and framing practices, considering what it means to live in a society and, as a fellow photo educator, to teach students how to take pictures when so much is at stake. In a “flood” of images, how can we “have something to call our own” (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement) and not drown or disappear? Is there a disappearance of privacy? Of self? As teachers, I wonder if we are teaching students how to traverse these waters or even to recognize them. There is a certain modern anxiety around image floods and how to navigate them, so Matthew's work offers insightful commentary on some key areas of consideration for photographers, the photographed, and photo educators. In his second interview, he shared this about his work: “A big part of it for me was to help my parents understand why we don't want to post pictures of our daughter online...Which, I think they completely understand” (Matthew Sinclair, interview). In that same interview, he addressed the question included in his artist statement that deeply resonated with me, “Do I have the consent from someone not yet able to speak to make the image public?” He said:

I think for me, it's more about consent with a young child...it has more to do with how an image can define who somebody is. I don't want that development of what she looks like, how she is, who she is, what she's involved with now and then every time somebody sees her, they're always going to bring up those same things again...I'm talking about how it's harder to change something that is out of your control. And so people will continue to define you as somebody who they think is someone else, but not as who you actually are. [I want] her to have the choice to be who she is. Think about what that means every time you put something out there. (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

My conversations with Matthew inspired an appreciation for the ways each artist in the exhibition uniquely and personally addressed the same theme of ‘against disappearance’ in their

own ways, making the process personal while taking their work public at the same time. His work raises ethical issues around permissions, borders, and the decisions artists (and parents, research participants, etc.) get to make about what others see of their work. Part of what Matthew puts forward in his parental, pedagogical, and artistic contribution to this exhibition is that he wants us to *think*. He adds complexity to concerns around consent and content, seeing, ethics in posting, what it is to ‘frame something’ while unframing something else, access to information about images, access to children, and being woke as a teacher, an artist, and a parent in a contemporary digital and social media age. Through his work, a paradox emerges and a boundary is drawn; we must stand on the other side. He reminds us we can and should perhaps still draw them. By edging lines around what is seeable or knowable, he limits our interaction and potential voyeuristic ways while at the same time creating tension between seer and seen, alerting us to the fact there is more outside the frame, and we can never know what it is: we will have to “wait” and carry this “weight” of not knowing...for “forever.” He raises questions through his inquiry: When we overshare, or bare it all, what is left or gained? Is it possible – and what are the ramifications, if so – that we have in fact placed ourselves “at risk of having all seen the same images and no longer have something to call our own?” (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement). He leaves us asking more hard questions, like any good teacher should.

G

Gestures of Going Home (An Observation):

Eight Autobiographies on the Wall

One day at the gallery, I mapped the locations where these 37 works were created and/or the places they seem to be connected to geographically. In doing so, it became apparent we had each, whether knowingly or by happenstance, brought a piece of *ourselves* to the project of memory and disappearance. I observed (in noting where everyone is from and where their photographs were taken) that we had each drawn invisible lines from our works to some semblance of home or homeland, although not always pictured – the autobiographies (stories of the self) were evidence in this connection to home. Others may have left places of home behind or live in more than one place at once. Of note, five of us made physical returns to significant places to produce work for this exhibition, all of them in some way connected to home (Paul, Hari, Kathleen, Niloofar, and myself), suggesting a desire to be against the disappearance of home, or what home represents as a place, a

memory, a feeling. In sharing pieces of story connected to home or homeland, we offer a small temporal glimpse into our worlds, our places of longing, and our photo diaries. Through these works, we can (re)trace narrative lifelines in a person's history: they take us back while simultaneously bringing us forward. These artworks provoked responses to memory and disappearance through travelogue or perhaps group memoir. As Joanne once said to me, referring to the images in the show, "The lifewriting is on the wall" (personal communication, 2016).

Such mapping reveals overlapping cartographies of connectivity among a diverse group of participants as well as the ways we each may have carried a piece of home in our pockets, or visualize (or seek) home through our camera lens, sometimes using metaphor to get there. It also reveals a possible reason for why people may choose to join a group and engage in a group art project, for the sense of community this can (and in this case did) offer, especially for those coming from, born in, or living far from other places, seeking belonging and perhaps missing home.

For me, these works suggest an autobiographical, perhaps currere-inspired (Irwin, 2018a/2017; Pinar 2010/2004; Strong-Wilson, 2008) relationship between photograph and photographer, sculpture and sculptor, with so many of the works in *Against Disappearance* being personal and tied to stories of the self and to home. For some reason, this surprised me, yet I came to understand that each work also had its edges. I came to appreciate the level of intimacy this sharing of the storied self called forth and became aware of the vulnerability required in this process. The willingness of the members of this group to engage on such a personal level with me, with us, with the public, for the purposes of photo-based, a/r/tographic research revealed their own courage, creativity, and capability towards artistic engagement and, in a way, brought us closer together.

As a group of practitioners, this kind of autobiographical visual exchange made room for more than one story against (and with) disappearance, sparking curiosity, empathy, conversation, and a depth of listening towards the lived experiences of others, including their experiences being at, away from, and missing home. Through these exhibition photographs and one white chair, we came to honor, witness, and appreciate the multivariance of human experience. To walk this gallery with us was to walk the longitudinal and latitudinal lifelines of eight photographers with cameras pointing in multiple directions at once – and all, in some way, pointing from the heart, towards home.

Our autobiographies were on the wall...

H

Hope, Six Ways of

In this study, an exhibition against disappearance is also an exhibition against the disappearance of hope. As artists and educators, we are in the business of keeping hope alive, giving breath to the possibility that there is hope and there will be hope – that *to hope* is a generous offering, that *hoping* is believing, and that *hope* is a necessary life-giving dream in uncertain times.

In the context of the exhibition, I locate at least six ways of hope. Borrowing Sontag's brilliant method of 'cubist thinking,' I imagine each of these ways as one side of a six-sided hopeful cube. This cubing framework allows for six views on a single subject to be considered at once, highlighting further possibilities, juxtapositions, and complexities around the concept and image of hope. Hope comes to bear upon our photographic inquiry into memory and disappearance in a number of ways, including:

- 1) Hopeful images of ancient residue that speak back against "cultural disappearance" (Niloofer).
- 2) An art teacher hoping for open conversations *on* and space to be made *for* challenging topics, including suicide (Kathleen).
- 3) The hope of a father for the photographic life his young child will grow up in (Matthew).
- 4) We learn of a quilt-maker's desiring "hope for a future without poverty" (Joanne).
- 5) Hope as a remembering "memento" against disappearance in *Untitled (Student Chair)* (Paul).
- 6) In a visual memoir, we bear witness to a photographic "rumination on hope and loss" (Blake).

These ways of being hopeful suggest the capacity of our artistic efforts to express sentiments of hope, to mobilize and render hope, and for photographs made in the absence of hope to be a way of speaking back. As photographers, perhaps we are 'lifting'⁴⁵ hopeful artifacts from the 'remnants' (Simon, 2014) of our own lived experience, being against or in some cases with their disappearance – hoping our artwork might *do* something, *say* something, *mean* something. Hope as photographs of the things we believe matter. Maybe hope is a way of staying alive, of breathing into another day, of learning to see differently. Critical hope as both a twinkling light and troubled belief in shadowed times. A photographic search for some tangibility of hope in an era shaped by losses. Hope to be seen, heard, and remembered. Hope to find what we were searching for...*hope as a verb*.

⁴⁵ The concept & act of 'lifting' in this context borrows directly from didactic photographs I took at the exhibition *Walker Evans: Depth of Field*, a retrospective photo collection of American WPA/FSA photographer Walker Evans. The exhibition was organized by the Josef Albers Museum Bottrop and the High Museum of Art Atlanta and presented from October 29, 2016 to January 22, 2017 at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The day I went, I remember happily running into participant Matthew and his family there.

I

Intention, Numbers of

5,002 photographs and counting
484 proofs printed at Costco
50 estimated number of guests at our opening reception
36 photographs in the exhibition
21 images of *The Visual Memoir Project*
13 one-on-one interviews
11th & 12th of May, the days we hung the show
9 Artist Statements (8 individual, 1 group)
8 participants
(Season) 8 of [PBS Art21 on 4 artists in Vancouver](#)
7 months of preparation for the show
5 focus groups
4 seasons to mark this moment
4 key adjustment layers in Adobe Photoshop: Saturation, Hue, Levels, Curves
3 black Moleskin research journals, filled and saved
3 methods in artful triangulation: interviews, observations, artwork
3 graduate students
2 collaborations
2 children
1 found poem: this lexicon
1 readymade sculpture
1 chocolate lab, my walking partner
1 unforgettable trip to Dadaab, Kenya in 2014
1st of October, 2016 the last time our group came together
photowalks: unknown and many
regrets: a few
Countless conversations about this project and exhibition with others
More mountains climbed than I can count
A 'castle of paper'
A thousand tiny rainbows
A visual journal of our lived experience
A shift in perspective (several)
A series of deeper understandings
A journey of lifelong learning and yearning
A memory to remember

J

Juxtaposition, The Art of Dynamic

Juxtaposition as an artistic gesture and transformational technique was employed in the exhibition curatorially, within certain artist's works (namely Andrew, Matthew, Kathleen, and myself) and in the way our eight individual perspectives were brought alongside and set in contrast to one another. The artworks were positioned around the space of The Lobby Gallery in a meaningful, dynamic way so that they could form connections linearly, diagonally, visually, and conceptually, as well as bounce off one another in terms of statements, imagery, and ideas. As each artist's work was mapped out and organized in the gallery space (first on paper, then on the floor, then hung), new dialogues emerged from work to work, artist to artist. As each room filled and more work was hung and placed, works were displayed to be in conversation with one another across the room, in parallel, next to, and nearby to evoke and provoke viewers and conversation. In other words, the placement was deliberate, invitational, and intentional of a curatorial layout that would hopefully activate the rooms as people moved through them. In discussion with the participants, there was a method to the curation that involved the art of dynamic juxtaposition in the hopes of demonstrating the complexity and creativity of being with and against disappearance from eight unique points of view both singularly and all at once.

As a research project of a/r/tography, the artistic and intellectual synergy within a group endeavor among artists and educators also creates a kind of compelling juxtaposition: a dynamism is evoked by the juxtaposition of the art and the group, the making and the learning, the seeing and the doing, the one and the many. I regard the term *dynamic* as in: alive, synergistic, repositionable, and capable of dialogic and aesthetic movement back and forth. I believe our work reflects our collective sense of "dynamic pedagogy," a phrase I learned from conversations with Dr. Samson Nashon (personal communication, 2016), that emerged not only from the exhibition but in our focus group conversations before and after it: our learning informed our making, our creativity informed both. By engaging in a pedagogically-artistic activity together in a way that honors each person's contributions while at the same time juxtaposes them to evoke further conversations, the reach of our work can grow beyond itself as we embodied the relational framework of a dynamic, creative community of practice that a/r/tography nurtures.

K

Kenosis {Inspired by Sontag on Barthes⁴⁶}

On the Art of "Emptying Out"

Barthes's late work is filled with signals he had come to the end of something – the enterprise of the critic as artist – and was seeking to become another kind of writer. (He announced his intention to write a novel.) There were exalted avowals of vulnerability, of being forlorn. Barthes more and more entertained an idea of writing which resembles the mystical idea of *kenosis*, emptying out. (Sontag, 2001, p. 87)

Upon reading Sontag's words, I was struck immediately by the feeling that perhaps the series of photographs and the sculpture created for this exhibition – or how some of them may have arrived – were a form and/or result of *kenosis*, a kind of self-emptying. In the way that creativity involves a pouring of the self into the thing one is making, be it writing (Goldberg, 2005), be it art, or be it both, we emptied the contents of our *selves*, excerpts from our *lives*, upon those walls, in that glass-walled space and into this research process. There were many selves to consider: the participant self, the photographer self, the self that a group becomes when in unison, and the self as an evolving being in motion. Our work was in some ways against the disappearance of the self – to place an image on the wall was to announce "I am here. This is what I saw and it matters."

Thinking photographically, if there could be "...an idea of writing which resembles the mystical idea of *kenosis*, emptying out" (Sontag, 2001, p. 87), then I imagine there could be an idea of photography which resembles an emptying out: specifically, *visual lifewriting as kenosis*. This is a way to write of one's life by emptying its magnificent, complicated contents into pictures. Such photographic *kenosis* is an exhalation of imagery that attends to holding on and letting go at the same time, breathing out an image while breathing in a memory of its making. The emptying out may be necessary as a response to fullness and oversaturation and/or it may be in preparation for a coming release, a catharsis, or a reclamation or process of recovery. In some ways, memory is emptied into/onto images while kept, stored in, and projected upon them at the same time. Thus, the *kenosis* is fluid: both a drawing out and a filling in.

The acts of creating and gathering these artworks then the act of releasing them out into the world involved an emptying of ideas, an emptying of the contents of our cameras, an emptying of our understandings at that time, and an emptying of any certainty at how they might be received. In that emptying, we made room for new images, selves, and understandings to appear. To compose then hold up in public vulnerable view pieces of ourselves and our pasts that made their way into

⁴⁶ From Susan Sontag's 2001 essay "Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes" in *Where the stress falls: Essays* (p. 63).

our art, the self-emptying that is photographic kenosis, then to write about them alongside, is an act of creative excavation.⁴⁷ Excavation, then, as a significant emptying: not only to sift from one's own inner visual archive but also to actively excavate meaning from the emptying process itself. The kenosis was an excavation of mind, art, and body that, perhaps, was enacted as a revelatory act of memory work, made visible through the photograph – an artifact now emptied yet at the same time ever so full. To do this took courage and required an attunement towards the ways in which what (or who) was emptied could be seen, held, and understood.

The kenosis of our exhibition process produced new writing and art, original compositions, clarity, and promising opportunities for deepening relationships with the self, the group, and sometimes those who encountered our work. We have each emptied out a piece of ourselves for this artistic research dissertation and the bodies of understanding it hopes to contribute to. In doing so, we give and empty in order to *become* and to be a part of something greater, while at the same time emptying (shedding) the self we once were. Our collective meaning-making might provoke meaning for others, perhaps giving way to further kenosis. As our group sojourns through educational, creative, and life pathways towards the places we are each heading, long past that summer of 2016 and each in our own unique direction, we can move forward with the knowing we have archived, through *photographic kenosis*, a living history of ourselves in the making.

⁴⁷ Akin to kenosis, I was inspired by New Orleans jazz musician Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah on the notion of *creative excavation*, noted in the opening to the second song of his band's [NPR Tiny Desk Concert on YouTube](#), October 20, 2015. In that song, he describes wanting to musically excavate stories from his past. [This performance is one of many on my dissertation playlist as generative music for writing, thinking, and composing. Listening to inspiring, soulful, stirring, and emotional music like this, as well as binaural beats, played an integral part in the writing of my dissertation.]

L

Landscapes in Parallel

*The Work of Andrew Smith*⁴⁸

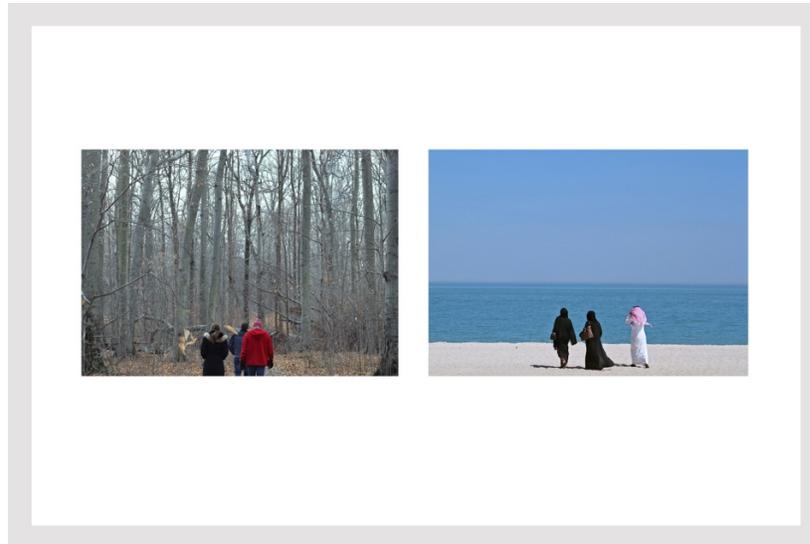


Fig. 71 | By Andrew Smith, *Parallel Landscapes I*

Andrew Smith's series of diptychs (*Parallel Landscapes*) addresses what may otherwise have become lost in the digital life of photographs and speaks to the ways we might find parallels in disparate places, in real time and in returning to them *over time* with and through photographs. He writes:

One of the benefits of having family members living in different corners of the globe is the opportunity to experience new places during visits. Each trip saw me unload hundreds of images into file folders, often without filtering or editing until much later. This project ensured that I went back into the folders, allowing for an artistic approach that was *Against Disappearance*. (Andrew Smith, artist statement)

I find his artful act of returning (rescuing, perhaps) to be a thoughtful, unique practice. It struck me that not only the images themselves (as family album, portraits of place, and travel documents) could be against disappearance but that the “artistic approach” (Andrew Smith, artist statement) could be, as well. Creatively, I am called to wonder: *What are other promising artistic approaches to disappearance? Like Andrew's and the work of Hari Im, in what ways might those artistic approaches involve a process of going back, an act of return?* Presenting photographs he took from trips abroad

⁴⁸ Andrew's work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 120-123.

visiting family, arranged in three sets of horizontal color diptychs, he shares with us how he makes sense of these images and memories:

As time passes, I don't necessarily remember a place as a unique experience, but end up comparing it to what I know and have seen previously. As someone who has moved several times throughout my life, finding those similarities and differences is what activates the landscapes...These images aren't just a snapshot of my own personal archives, but to me they are the living and breathing experiences that remain." He tells us "my images are a form of fragmented visual memoir. (Andrew Smith, artist statement)

In two of his works, there are groups of three people photographed from behind. Walking near or traveling alongside, we see them as he sees them. As if we might enter these postcards and be there, walking with. His works offer visual comparisons from vastly differing landscapes, yet the distance seems to stay steady in looking from afar, capturing a wide expanse of nature (desert, forest, lake, mountain, tall trees, blue water, snow, sky) with the closeness of those walking ahead. Of his pairings, he says, "At the time of shooting, as well as during the selection process, I chose the images that I found visually striking" (Andrew Smith, artist statement). With him being an outdoor educator, it made sense to me that these were some of the places and imagery Andrew chose to include in the exhibition, with the outdoors and remembrances of travels abroad almost like a second home. Perhaps we recover tiny fragments of home in these kinds of pictures and in the act of going back in digital files to find them, in search of a memory that might place us back there, walking in parallel to our beloveds and time past, bringing ourselves alongside as lives in tandem in a certain kind of human echo. For Andrew, rediscovering these images from his existing archives was an artist's act against their disappearance – and perhaps his own as well, including them in the exhibition as a way to ensure their longevity and highlight their importance in his own photographic search for (and discovery of) memory. Andrew's work makes me wonder about relationships, ethics, and the potential parallels and even the perpendiculars of experience, memory, and photographs. He encourages me to reflect on the ways photographers make sense of the pictures they take, how we might come back into our own photographs and image archives over time, and the kinds of memory held in the landscapes we have traversed – and how memory itself is not only photographic but also a kind of landscape itself.

In terms of visual and conceptual relationships evident in the exhibition, I reflect on the ways Andrew's work is a potential parallel inquiry to others' in the group, specifically to my own. We both assert visual memoir, we both (without planning it together) present diptychs (images of two, meant to 'activate' one another) of landscapes we've moved through and been affected by, and we both teach and make photographs. Our understandings are vastly different, yet with some

similarity: we both have had the pleasure of having walked behind the ones we love in order to photograph them; we both have photographs of desert, water, and sky; and we both revisited our digital archives to select which images for this show could be uniquely brought together as one. Relationally and in our linked history, I was once his teacher and he my student; he now teaches me about what photography as both “content and form” (Andrew Smith, artist statement) might enable, inspire, and evoke both for the one taking pictures and the one writing about them. At the same time, his work suggests a unique relational parallel from teaching to research where former students turned research participants become teachers to the research itself through a dialogic, relational, and, here, photographic exchange.

What I also find interesting is that we see images of specific picturesque landscapes from The United Arab Emirates to Banff, Alberta in Canada, yet another emerges through his own discovery in returning to digital files in folders once saved – the landscape of “living and breathing experiences that remain” (Andrew Smith, artist statement) as recalled through these particular photographs and what, for him, is embedded in them. Here, the active paralleling of one journey to another. They have a second life in this exhibition. A third when his family came to see them printed, framed, and hung, experienced in person (again, alongside) in the gallery. Perhaps a fourth, in wherever they are now. In his pictures, time becomes compressed, and we are able to travel across landscapes and years in the space of mere inches denoted by an accumulation of pixels bearing the memories of those moments. He too, travels from this moment backwards then back again in a temporal sense-making that became ‘activated’ in the search to find them – to bring them in parallel and into the present. This show, produced for this study, then, provided Andrew a space to reflect and to revisit images once taken – in a way, he engaged in a kind of rephotography. His praxis became his poesis. Together, they inform his photographic practice, pedagogy, and potential search for future parallels.

M

Making

Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory is the product of eight individuals making art for the purpose of an exhibition and for research. The process and practice of making was crucial and critical for our group, as it enabled each one of us to pursue a personal creative project while being part of a collaborative group production. We were not only making art. We were also making a statement as a group about the power of learning beyond coursework as well as a visual commentary about disappearance via photographic inquiry through an a/r/tographic lens. In my second interview with Matthew, we were discussing art making as an experience, and he said something that has stayed with me. He said “I think about the experience of art making. I think that's just a tough question to answer, because we are making ourselves” (Matthew Sinclair, interview). He makes a valuable point about how we ‘make ourselves’ in the art making process, a journey of self-discovery, reflection, and personal expression that demands much of the maker in order for those things to be made. Making art, then, is “making ourselves” as we are in a process of becoming something we are not yet.

M

Memento

*The Work of Paul Best*⁴⁹ (Artwork 2/2)



Fig. 72 | By Blake Smith, *Additional views of Untitled (Student Chair)*

⁴⁹ Paul's second work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 114-116.

As shared in Chapter 5 in his artist statement, Paul writes:

I was thinking about “Against disappearance: A photographic search for memory”, in a way that was not a photograph, but could be photographed as a memento. I was influenced by the work of New Zealand sculptor Peter Majendie, *185 White Chairs*. He created a temporary readymade sculpture in Christchurch city centre in 2012 with a different style of white chair to represent each person that died in the February 2011 earthquakes, from a baby carrier, bar stool, office chair to a La-Z-Boy lounge chair, all representative of a victim who may have used that type of chair...I thought of all those students who travelled so far to New Zealand and died, crushed in their classroom, which is partly why I used a student chair. (Paul Best, artist statement)

Exploring memory in both two and three-dimensional form, Paul’s readymade sculpture is both an artist’s memento and poetic reminder of the one hundred and eighty-five beloved lives lost in a 2011 New Zealand earthquake. Sharing with us his own experience of interacting with and photographing the white chairs in the [art installation of artist Peter Majendie](#) in Christchurch, NZ, we become reminded that some memory is both private and public. Originally from New Zealand, Paul is close to this work in a personal way: as a fellow countryman, a parent, a teacher, an artist, and a student. Through his sculptural-emotional negotiation with this tragic event inspired by Majendie’s rendering, he invites us, with the compassionate heart and hands of a talented artist, to be in the presence of their disappearance, somewhat akin to Alfredo Jaar’s and Ishiuchi Miyako’s approaches to disappearance through a present absence. We remember them because he remembers them, and Madenjie before him. Whereas Majendie’s work held one chair for each person who died, Paul’s chair (a school chair given to him by Matthew in our group) is a memento in honor of them all, particularly the seventy language students who died. It seems that some creatives have a way of working with loss as if its residue is a raw material to thoughtfully reshape into new memory, like the denim jacket and the way it hangs, life-like, on the back of that chair.

Paul teaches us that visual memoir does not necessarily have to be a photograph. In his interview, we discussed this idea. He said:

You could use photography to underpin your visual memoir but the final piece of work doesn’t have to be a photograph. Our visual vocabulary is not just photographs. It can be a painting, a drawing, a piece of printmaking... Because ...this is a/r/tography... where it’s a journey [and] when you get there that’s where all the learning’s done. It’s where you are reflecting on what your artwork is and also you figure out a way of teaching it...Your end result doesn’t have to be a photograph in the frame...it could well be a piece of sculpture. (Paul Best, interview)

I learned, from Paul, that a “photographic search for memory” (group artist statement) does not mean the search itself or what comes of it would be photographic. He helped to bend my artistic understandings and challenge my assumptions for the project (thinking it would be solely

photography) by offering a fresh perspective on the exhibition's theme 'against disappearance' and using new media, this time three-dimensional. This understanding also instantly opened up new possible horizons for visual lifewriters and visual memoirists by expanding the "visual vocabulary" (Paul Best, interview) for this kind of work in that one can be a visual lifewriter and not necessarily be a photographer, or that one can be both. From Paul I learned that artists speak in many forms.

I noticed after the show, ironically, that all four of Paul's artworks (the bus stops and the student chair sculpture) were places for sitting and passing through. Both evoke a "ghostly presence" (Paul Best, artist statement) through the genre of still life and possess an eerie sense of loss: both involve inanimate objects arranged for a composition, in places where bodies once were. In fact, life is held still in Paul's artworks, and he has successfully and aesthetically activated the invisible human body (a ghost) in each. For me, it feels like the passengers and the students, like his notebook, are somehow still there. In this ghosting, for some a sadness or haunted feeling comes. One significant thematic through-line that emerged once the show was on the wall and his chair was in the space was a shared sense of *melancholy* connecting or suggested by many of the works. Paul's Untitled (*Student Chair*) has a certain evocation as a melancholy memento as we imagine the great loss of the students' lives marked by this single white, painted chair, and perhaps the lost lives of others. Andrew shared this observation in our final focus group:

I went back to the show when no one was there. I went with just my brother and his wife, and had time to be with a lot of the work without as many people around. There is a certain element of, I know it's reflective and I know that you were using photos of spaces that were significant to you, but it wasn't a happy show. In my perspective there was a certain amount of, I don't know if it was loss, or sadness but it was like the remnants of something. Almost melancholy that had happened and that it was done. Even the photo of [Matthew's daughter's] feet, it was a playful image but it was like she's growing up past that, it's done, it's something that has happened. Hari had one of her apartment and a reflection of 'this used to be my home but it's not anymore.' It had that element to it...It wasn't in all of the work, but I definitely found that in certain ones. There was some heavy content in there I think, that linked a few of them together. For sure the chair. (Andrew Smith, interview)

On the last line of Paul's artist statement, we learn that this white chair, with its "jacket loosely hung on the back and a small pile of notes left on the seat" is in fact "painted white and made to be photographed" (Paul Best, artist statement). So I did. I was not sure if Paul had already photographed it, and I felt beckoned, and somewhat worried, that it needed to be done soon, as the show was to come down in August of 2016. That single line in his artist statement felt like an invitation to engage with his work, bringing my photographic inquiry alongside his. As well, I knew that we would need some kind of photographic "memento" (Paul Best, artist statement) to include in my writing about the exhibition, specifically in this dissertation, in lieu of the chair itself.

In the final two weeks before we took down our exhibition and he picked up his chair from the gallery, I spent several hours in the company and afternoon light of this solemn chair in the courtyard outside the gallery. I tried to photograph it from all angles in order to capture as many subtle details as possible, hoping to render an accurate portrait of this hauntingly beautiful chair from my photographic memory while chasing the late-day light, much-needed to illuminate the piece. Later, I emailed the digital contact sheets to Paul to show him the photographs and always meant to get some of them printed for him. I recall, when he and his sculpture left the gallery, that it might end up being placed outside in his garden, which I have thought about over the years, wondering where the chair ended up. Maybe we can rephotograph it together one day...

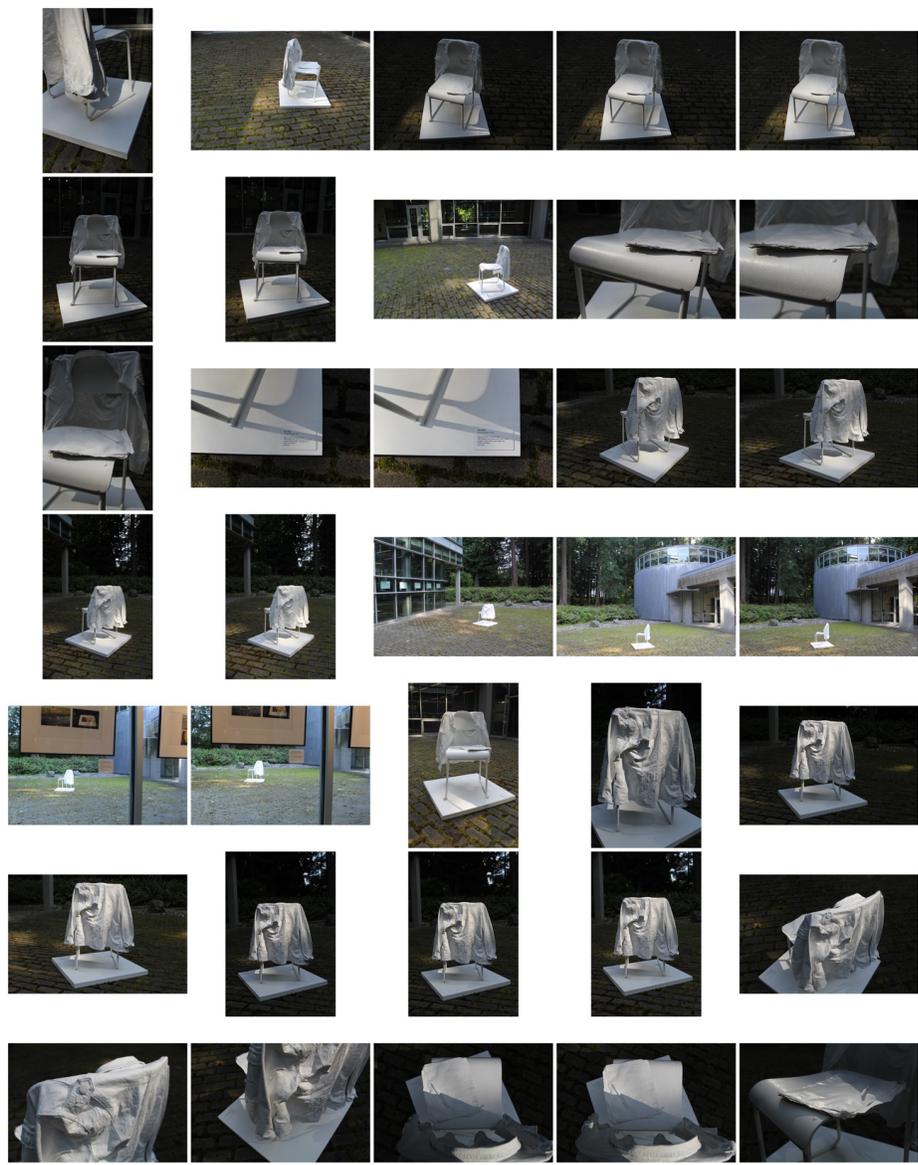


Fig. 73 | By Blake Smith, *Contact Sheet (1/3) of Untitled (Student Chair) by Paul Best*

N Narrative Definity

*In this exhibition,
we resist this,
I think.*

In this project, thirty-six images and one white chair are linked together by our lived experience of gathering the works, ourselves, and our ideas together. Our collective artwork forms a contact sheet that is a collage of many expressions and an expanse of views, with no single story besides the one that unites us. The notion of a group exhibition, here, relies not on narratives that we can nail down and fully comprehend or sequence in a definite chronology; rather, it relies on shared commitments to imagination, discovery, being emotionally moved, *and* resisting a singular finite understanding of any one artist, image, idea, theme, or body of work shown. Instead, the definition is in the details. As narrative guides, artist statements open the doors to walks in certain directions and where you go or where you end up are part of the storyline we invite viewers to write as they (as we) walk with the art – both in the context of their original display and in books, exhibition catalogues, or here, in an academic dissertation long after the works have come down off the walls. The work, the show, and how I have tried to write about them afterwards have all been kaleidoscopic in reach and against narrative definity (or, against the ‘definiteness’ of a single or correct narrative) by intention, with the lexicon being one way of giving the kaleidoscope of understandings some poetic structure while maintaining its intentional fragmentation *and* resisting the hold of total certainty which art does not give.

While I challenge a single defining narrative about our group, one consistent feeling that I am certain about is that we cared about and tended one another in this process, coming to understand the story we were writing by embracing it and narrating it together in community. Joanne offered this observation:

I think the show was informed by the fact that we took care of each other over time and came to know that we were able to take risks with our artwork, or open it up, offer it in a way that maybe we wouldn't have done otherwise...There was *resonance* as a result of the relationships built, and a sense of commitment to something that was a group... She continued: In the *doing* of it, in the happening you get busy in your, you know, get this done and edit that and now it's like I look back and I go, 'Wow!' A whole year and there were a lot of layers. In some ways it hasn't disappeared, it's coming back to be given again. I like that... All the ways in which we're attending to it, it's against and with disappearance maybe. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

In this show, a definitive storyline leading visitors from A to B was non-existent, although each of the eight artists has his/her own through-line, intention, and variation on the theme of

disappearance. As Paul shared in our final focus group, “Superficially there was no real link from picture to picture, but they were linking in another way, and it was the way each of us tackles a subject from a different perspective. I think that was linking things, so it was really eight points of view and that was linking us together” (Paul Best, interview). Instead, there is a collection of statements made visually whereby each work invites us into another past brought forward into this moment through the photograph and, in one case, a sculpture. As some kind of fragmented narrativity, the alignments amongst and between these artists and in these works are across time and place and relationships, visual punctuation marks along a significant between – where we began and where we ended up. The storylines and narrative knowings, some told some not, linger in the abyss of the things we can try to understand or remember but may not ever know, or know fully. A photographer keeps some secrets forever, keeping the closure of narrative definity at bay.

N

Nuance (n.)

In this body of work,
one of my strongest impressions
is the degree to which *nuance* is present:

as an **essence...**

*an intuitive feeling, a certain kind of rawness,
a delineation of form, the beating heart of something,*

as a **variation among variations...**

*the range of observations, stories, compositions,
interpretations, iterations, metaphors, echoes*

and as a collection of **small subtleties...**

*the colors of meaning, narrative intensity,
texture & voice, scale of proximity & importance,
tone, tonality, emotional hue, affect*

that,

when regarded as both a whole and
a series of interrelated **fragments** held together

by *the glue of collective imaginings*

and the efforts of *participatory practice*,

offers expansion, insight, &

quite **personal artistic doorways** into rooms
where memory is/once was held... or can be.

The nuance, then, is in the *noticings*.

O

Offering

“I am making bare my soul.” (Joanne Ursino, interview)

Thinking *through* and *with* the lexicon, each letter and the work of each artist expands our understanding of a vocabulary of the possible, adding nuance, definition, and style. In some cases, a single word carries our imagination and nearly invites its own lexicon and rhizomatic potentiality. In this context, both for the exhibition and the research group, *offering* is such a word.

As a gesture of giving, my writing on the concept and method of offering throughout this dissertation emerges from conversations and time spent in the company of participant Joanne Ursino, who is also a close friend. From her initial offering to the EDCP 405 class on book making, to opening the door of her home for the focus group meetings, she was a pivotal group member as the work unfolded. I am grateful for this as the offerings she made were invaluable.

Joanne shared with me an embodied spirit of offerings as a regular practice of loving exchange and a humble giving of the self. Through relational dialogue and the “critical intimacy” (Bal, 2002, p. 286) of colleagues who are also neighbors, artists, classmates, and friends, it gave me pause to reflect on generosity. I learned that the giving of heart, home, hands, time, and conversations over tea and bread can be the nest that holds something (a project, a group, a person) together, almost like stitching on a quilt. Together, our work demonstrates how the intersection of two offerings (a course and a guest artist) and the crossing of two paths (hers and mine), can be both a productive and compassionate unfolding of happenings when we remain open to the things we do not yet know, but say yes anyways, accepting offerings given as well as giving back. In a sense, how offerings inspire other offerings and become propositional in nature.

Because of her offerings and the impact of this concept upon my work (further articulated in Chapter 7, as series of seven offerings around the notion of *trace*), I feel it is important to include Joanne’s voice here to describe what offering might mean. Rather than a finite definition, I suggest this is a starting point for considering what else offerings might entail or become. What follows is her response to an interview question, an excerpt from our conversation, held at her kitchen table in the yellow house, just around the corner from my last home in East Vancouver. Before we began her interview, I remember taking a photograph of the food on the nicely prepared table, another offering, as we conversed over hot coffee in the early morning light.



Fig. 74 | By Blake Smith, *Offering: Interview at Joanne's table*

Blake: Can you elaborate on what you consider as an offering because I love the way that you talk about it... what do you mean when you think of that word? Is it a verb? I think it's an action to offer.

Joanne: Offering implies a relationship with the other person – there's an openness to whether you want to receive it or not – there's a sense of you don't have to take it...

It's personal – you're getting something of me in this offering, in this *giving*. I am making bare my soul. Maybe it is our humanness or being in the world – maybe it also addresses a dynamic that in offering something may come back...

Maybe the purest form of an offering is this sense of not knowing what can happen or is not yet imagined. I have faith that something *will* happen or *can* happen or *might need to* happen or not and that will be either okay or I can't hold that moment in the future so it's the best that I can bring in the present...

The piece with offering that I think is complicated is the expectation. So, in the giving what do you expect back? In my experience it's been generative...and not to be completely linear, it's been generative in both directions. I have found that the more I offer in the book arts and have offered in for example, my quilting practice, the more I learn.

I think what happens to me in offering is that I struggle so much with my own thoughts on what's beautiful or what's well-made. Underneath is this sense of my own troubling around notions of good enough and the sense of good enough brings me back into the work of Winnicott and 'the good enough mother': what is good enough? The good enough teacher? There is this constant sense of judging myself against the ideal – and maybe an offering forgives that space a little bit and makes it possible (for me) to actually *do*. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

It is with this generous description of what an offering might *be*, or what an offer can *do* as an exchange between two that I frame the term offering within the exhibition as well as the greater research study. Through this lens and thinking with Joanne, I see our work a collective and original offering of ideas, images, and statements on disappearance. I also see it as an offering of ourselves, our journeys, our hopes, our passions. Our works demonstrate the power and pedagogical promise of multiple offerings made towards a shared theme and towards each other, each artist with his/her own offerings being made and a shared offering set forth as a group. Together, we present concepts and our understandings as an offering of new knowledge and knowledge forms that illustrate the potential of photo-based memory work and/through group inquiry. Our offering, we hope, inspires other offerings.

O

Opening Night

On May 20th, 2016, we held an evening public reception for the opening of the exhibition as golden sunlight streamed into the open gallery space on a long weekend. It was the first time we as a near-complete group research group had experienced all the works hung up at once, a major moment of pride after months of hard work and the shared labor of producing our own exhibition. We saw family, friends, mentors, colleagues, and former students, as well as met members of the public who came to see the exhibition and were introduced to us and our work for the first time.

As you entered the space at The Liu, the sounds of a cello being played were heard in the air, music by cellist Alexis Douglas, creating a sonic and emotional ambience I was after for the viewing experience in wanting the musical tone to echo the photographic one, being slightly melancholic, textured, and blue. The works were on display and rich dialogues ensued for the artists, engaging with the public about our work, fielding questions and listening to connections viewers were making with the works, some sharing stories of their own photographs or things and people they wished had not disappeared – for some, including a friend of mine, the show seemed to trigger emotional memories. As the curator and event host, I was somewhat distracted by the details of running the event and had less time to engage in such conversations, regrettably, although I did have some. At our final focus group, Andrew shared his thoughts on the opening:

... I found the discussions with the people who came really interesting... There were a few, I don't know if they are professors, or PhD candidates or people that I didn't know and that was one of the times that I've had work up, and you're standing next to it,

almost like the show and tell science fair...I think you get some deeper questions and ones that you actually have to process and think about in your responses, about the themes and ideas and what you have on display, which I found to be a pretty cool experience. Because it was beyond that sort of supportive relative who's there – it's someone to engage with your work who you don't know on a completely different level. (Andrew Smith, interview)

At one point, we invited the attendees into the Multipurpose Room for a welcome introduction, slide show, and question and answer session with the artists. The group was introduced to the audience, and Matthew Sinclair spoke on behalf of the group about our experiences participating in the study thus far. Something he addressed was how the group stayed together after the photography course and how it was a beneficial experience to continue our conversations, saying there is a valuable social aspect to learning. In his second interview, Matthew recapped some of what he said at the opening:

Most of the time you never see what happens to the people in a course, with what they've learned in it. So once the class is over, nobody really knows what you did with the knowledge. So this was a way for us to reconnect to see where everyone went with their class work. Their knowledge. What they were doing in that class and to continue it outside of a traditional environment – just so often you never see anyone again. So it's a way to make the community, and learning is a social experience... there is a social aspect of it, so if you just never see those people again, that social aspect is kind of lost... (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

Overall the opening was a big success and a rewarding relational experience. Joanne said, "I could really see that the opening night was very, very important...I felt it. And I felt that there was a real moment of meaning making that happened at the show. Both in relation to the art that people were sharing and in terms of their own subjectivity as teacher-artists" (Joanne Ursino, interview). Paul said this for his impressions of the opening: "I enjoyed it. It was nice to be part of a community like we are and celebrate our work together. That was my first impression. Second one, it's nice that we have lots of people around looking at bits of art. It's nice to have a crowd" (Paul Best, interview). Kathleen said:

One thing that struck me was the conversations that we had with people that attended the exhibition and with each other as well, but I was impressed with how intimate it felt even though it usually felt really chaotic and there were a lot of people there. I thought it was really beautiful and that a lot of the work was more related to one another, as I wasn't really sure if it would be or not because there were so many people going in different directions with their ideas, but then it also felt like a cohesive piece. (Kathleen Nash, phone interview)

Regarding our collaborative group, Matthew said, "You can't have an art practice without having other people that you work with. You can't work in isolation...If you never share the results of your

work you're missing out on one of the biggest, joyful experiences of any form of work really, whether it's writing, music... (Matthew Sinclair, interview). He continued, sharing the following:

I found the whole thing rewarding, since I spent the night talking to people that I hadn't seen for a while and being able to present to the audience and things like that... The more and more you go over that same thing with people, saying what the pieces are about, what the show is about. Just going over the same thing all the time exactly, became mentally exhausting. A big part is explaining this which is also really good in a way because it does force you to confirm and solidify what you were thinking about in a way that's way more profound than just doing stuff in a sketchbook or taking photos for yourself. It's on a wall. You had to say something... (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

And indeed we did. Overall, I feel it was a productive evening to showcase our work and another learning event inside the wider learning event of the exhibition and the research study. It offered the artists an opportunity to engage with our audience personally through intimate conversations, to be seen, and was a crescendo of sorts for the work of our research group. From that moment on, the show would take on a life of its own, being out of our hands and into the world.

P

Pride in Participation

At our last focus group, I asked group members what they were most proud of with regards to the exhibition, including the art that people produced, the opening, our process, and the research group as a whole. As the project facilitator, I told them I was so proud they all took on the challenge of participating and that I felt we had accomplished our goal of a successful group exhibition. Seated on a couch and chairs in Joanne's living room, as we went around the room, there was a sense of temporality as people were looking back and looking forward, reflecting on our journey to that moment. As Joanne noted, "there was an acknowledgment of the meaning making that had gone on over time" (Joanne Ursino, interview). Sharing more of her reflection, Joanne said:

I'm really proud of our *process*, that we were tenacious, that we kept coming back. That we really did stay present to each other for a long time. People had lots going on in their lives. They kept coming back. In the middle of classes and family stuff and they came back...I guess that's the piece is that when I think about how I feel about the pride with this group, it's about, there's a more holistic piece to it...And when I did intervene [in the final focus group], I really wanted to be specific to how this work is generative in a completely other way. So by attending to it, it comes back to you, so it's a way of saying thank you. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

Kathleen said:

I guess I'm most proud of participating and being a part of this group. I feel like I wish I could have been more involved, but just to be involved has been a privilege. I really value that. I don't have another creative community and have no other artists in my life. I'm not making a lot of artwork at this time in my life in terms of an art practice, so to just get something out there and have these types of conversations and be part of a research group, is something that's important to me. It's been just great to be a part of that in any way...It's been really valuable for us to meet and talk...it's pretty specific to combine the two things: artists and education. It's a really weird balance. (Kathleen Nash, phone interview)

Andrew shared this:

I take a lot of pride in showing my work in a gallery. Although it had an academic feel to it, I felt like I was a part of an academic project, which was pretty cool both on an artistic level and an academic level as well, being a part of those realms, while showing my work...It was a really unique opportunity being part of this show. This has been a benefit to me as a new teacher and as an artist able to exhibit my work. (Andrew Smith, interview)

Niloofer stated, "I'm proud because of the collaboration, especially in [my] last semester of UBC, for attending to this class [EDCP 405] and this group...Another thing – this is the second series of *Residue* that I made for this show, and in this class Blake pushed me to make the second series of this project (Niloofer Miry, interview). Continuing the share their thoughts on this process, Joanne added:

I feel like I've been a part and it's been a privilege, and I also know that I'm different in the group. There's been spaces made for that difference that helped me to be alongside. I really feel that describes how the experience has been for me. I like the feeling of completion that's happening, because I so often don't give myself permission to complete...This process made me realize that if in community work, to do something together, you would tend to it through time *together*. Even when you might not want to, you show up and you show up again, and you show up again. When you feel like you're skidding and someone else says, 'Just come along. You'll be all right. Let's do this part together.' It worked, and I feel relieved. It's pride, and it's also gratefulness I'm noticing. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

Matthew said, "I was proud of the fact that my parents came down because creative endeavors in my family have always been something hard to justify. I am the only member of my family, extended family as well, whose gone down the creative pathway of this sort" (Matthew Sinclair, interview). Paul expressed, "I was most proud of the reaction from my own family members, who for years have been giving me a hard time about my inability to take a decent family photograph. One of them, I think my daughter said to me, 'That's not bad, dad. That's quite good'" (Paul Best, interview). I asked Paul in our second interview what this study and exhibition had afforded him in terms of an opportunity professionally and as an artist. He said:

You know, I've had my drawings and stuff in newspapers all around the world at different times... and it's a real thrill when you open up a newspaper and you see your cartoon, it's an unbelievable thrill. But it's a different thing when you actually have a piece of your artwork on display. It's something quite different. And I never had that before. So for me to say this was gosh, I wonder what it's like to be part of an exhibition, it's something I'd like to be part of. No, it was quite a thrill actually... (Paul Best, interview)

Hari shared a similar sentiment:

For me it's pretty much similar too, to participate. I'm very grateful for that, and it is a privilege, because for me...I've been producing my work just personally. Before I did photograph constantly but I didn't share it in this exhibit level, so just to have that opportunity was great and to be a part of this community is also like what we talked about before, that you can't really make art by yourself. It's really important to be in a group, and the whole thing reminded me of all that. Also, to be a part of a research group was interesting. The whole process of it...To get a hands-on experience and to be a part of it in a small way...it was very interesting, and I'm grateful for the experience. (Hari Im, interview)

P

Process, When Goodbye is a

*The Work of Hari Im*⁵⁰



Fig. 75 | By Hari Im, *The process to say a proper goodbye*

Hari Im's photograph (above) is an echo of one taken seven years ago in her hometown in Jeju, South Korea, a place she returns to every seven years to rephotograph. She writes, "I

⁵⁰ Hari's work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 132-133.

photograph to assist the process of the present's becoming a memory. The act of returning to a place of the past was another process of remembering" (Hari Im, artist statement). Regarding this act of return as "an uncanny act against disappearance" (Hari Im, artist statement), Hari's work evokes a portrait of her once-home as still being there, yet in some ways disappeared with the fade and distillation of time, a new layer of paint, and the fragmentation of memory. If a photograph in returnment is one way of "saying a proper goodbye" (Hari Im, artist statement), perhaps there are other ways as well – and moments when goodbyes are not possible, or when we might have more or less to say. All goodbyes have a context. Here, we are offered insight into one artist's photographic and emotional process of returning to a once-home, where the rephotograph, the photowalk, and the reflection on her experience each perform as intimate gestures of remembering, touching time, and letting go, ideas expressed in her artist statement. In her second interview, Hari shared this:

The reason I wanted the artist statement to be poetic was because it talks about memory. It is a very fond memory that I'm talking about, so I wanted the artist statement itself to be an art form as well. I think I cherish the artist statement a lot because it's a reflection, a reflection of the whole process, a reflection of the image and the whole thing, the whole experience. (Hari Im, interview)

When I look at the first rephotograph (2009, shown in Chapter 5 in her artist statement), I see a palette of blues and pale pink, shot from an angle and further away. In the second, her image for the show (Figure 75), I see white, cream, and wintergreen, with the photographer closer to her tender subject that fills the frame. Perhaps she uses distance to try to get closer to something already beyond reach. Hari said, "I guess I was just photographing everything. Things that are new, things that are of the past that stayed the same, or anything that showed me a little bit of traces of time" (Hari Im, interview).

Facing the front of an apartment building, we feel the trace of time as we stare up at the once-familiar place she used call home; it is as if we are invited to stand there beside her, facing more perhaps than just a building. Compositionally, there is a certain largess and simplicity to the flat white façade of the curved building overhang above the entrance, evoking a towering blank canvas and a sense of the unknown. When we were discussing her work after the exhibition, Hari said:

It was definitely a shot that I liked because it kind of speaks for it all. It speaks for the whole process that I'm going through. I felt blank, I felt it's empty, I felt it's set to zero again, and it felt like a disappearance, a disappearing feeling. It's all white, and it's at a stop before being painted over into a new color. (Hari Im, interview)

Brushed with a luminous pattern of Eastern sunlight and soft shadow, this image captures a certain temporality in her own history: a history of returns, of looking again, a process of walking back. It was a singular moment captured photographically into memory, marked by the year of its making, the hi/story of its maker, and the click of a camera while walking in contemplation (Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015; Solnit, 2002). That white architectural expanse seems to hold nothing and everything at the same time, like a projection screen for the movie we carry inside and the movie we write through enactments such as returning home. Of the apartment building twice repainted, she tells us “I was the one who couldn’t see the residues but only a projection. The place of the past became another place for the present” (Hari Im, artist statement).

Hari’s work speaks to the ways and the whys photographers might create personal site-specific imagery over a chosen duration while pursuing an ongoing self-reflective dialogue of awareness, particularly around their own process of creation and coming to understand. She said, “As an artist, I document things a lot in writing or in photo...I document my whole life. Because I think it’s a way of living for me – it’s like writing a personal diary. Why do people write diaries? Because they want to record things and reflect on it...I record a lot” (Hari Im, interview). Her dialogue of record emerges in triptych, between image ‘fragment,’ place of meaning, and photographer. As viewers of the work, we make a fourth wall, or perhaps break it down, akin to theatre and film experiences that invoke their audience. Through this dynamic triangulation (or quadrilateral), we become aware of the learnings gainable through artistic acts of remembrance as well as some of the expectations, the potential for confrontation, and the personal risks and rewards in going back. We come to understand, in this instance, that to say goodbye is a *process*, both complicated and endearing.

To pursue a life as an artist and as a teacher is to pursue a life of bravery and a certain ‘baring of the soul’ (Joanne Ursino, interview); Hari’s work reminds me of this each time I encounter it. Such a pursuit illustrates not only a commitment to a project (both her own and our group) but also an openness towards returning⁵¹ as an artistic gesture that she describes as “re-seeing” (Hari Im, interview). I wonder if she left a small piece of herself in Jeju and in this photograph, both as

⁵¹ Like the work of Matthew Sinclair, I am reminded that the return (in this case) is a choice made by an adult, and I acknowledge that the act or process of going back in some cases could potentially have been painful or triggering for some. We are bound by the boundaries they both (Matthew and Hari) have set for us and for themselves – the rest is “beyond the frame” (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement). What I admire here is Hari’s willingness towards vulnerability, in photographically and geographically stepping forward into a known unknown. She admits that things had changed, including herself. Hari did not have to share this tender photograph and private understanding with us yet she did; she did not have to go back but she *chose to* as part of this study. Hari said, “If I didn’t have that reason, I might have not gone back. It gave me a reason to go back. Because people were asking “Why are you going? and I said ‘I’m a part of a research program, and I need to photograph. That’s why I’m going.’ I had my reason to go” (Hari Im, interview).

'fragments of memory.' Upon coming back to Canada, looking at photographs, the place appears to resonate with new meaning. When we talked more about her work, Hari said:

I think you look at memories to understand yourself. I think the whole process of it and how photography plays into this whole process, it makes you realize who you are, and it makes you realize what changed and where you were before and where you are heading. Because it makes you realize the whole process and it makes you understand yourself more, I think it adds to who you are going to be later on...Because I have this understanding that I actually moved on from all of this, it makes me realize how memories are really a big part of how a person is built and also how photography can also become a tool to actually give you that courage or give you that means to actually go back and to have a hard look at your memory and to come to that confrontation to move on and to understand yourself. (Hari Im, interview)

We learn, from Hari, of some of the difficulties, delicacies, and moments of surprise when photowalking with memory. I can identify with her in my own work around the rephotograph and in returning home. Her work invites us to wonder: In going back, how we can search for something (or someone, some place) yet not always find it still there, or still the same, or still *the same there*. We may find that *we* are the ones who changed, a recognition that the sundial of time continues to rotate no matter where you are in the world. It does not stop even if we want it to. She reminds us, as surfaces are repainted again and again, perhaps so are we. From that photowalk in Jeju, we learn that her photographs and the process of returning

...pointed to changes of the person behind the lens. I was the one who was vulnerable to the changes caused by the present. I photographed as a stranger. I saw and captured things differently. And it made me realize that I was a foreigner who returned home and did not have the key to her own house. It didn't matter if I was the first dweller who smelt the fresh new paint of the apartment. The place was repainted 7 years ago and it was repainted again when I returned. I was the one who was painted over.
(Hari Im, artist statement)

Q

Quilt, Signature

“In the Hands of the Artist & the Photographer”

*The work of Joanne Ursino*⁵²



Fig. 76 | By Joanne Ursino, *Matters of Text(ile)*. Photograph by Blake Smith

As we learn from Joanne’s artist statement, the quilt, *Women United Against Poverty*, points to a pivotal social justice moment in Canadian history. Photographs⁵³ of it, within the exhibition, help to archive this quilt in contemporary times in an act against its erasure from public memory. They highlight some of the intimate relationships layered within and around the quilt as a material, historical, political, and artistic object. Joanne says that “quilting is about a narrative through textile” (Joanne Ursino, interview) and as an archival handmade document, it bears the names, signatures, handwriting, and devoted work of many women’s hands, including her own. Stories and names sewn into cloth become an act against the disappearance of the self – a self-made known through participation (signing, sewing, photographing, making, exhibiting, writing) and a refusal to go unseen. A signature is an expression of self, temporal in the moment of its signing and longer in its longevity as a crafted artifact now photographed with one of its makers⁵⁴. From her artist statement, she writes about her ‘why:’

Why do I think it is important to care about this march and quilt? To speak and make and write against its disappearance and slipping away over time, is an act of love. I am moved by what stories *do* in their telling and in listening how the stories in turn nourish

⁵² Joanne’s work is presented in Chapter 5, pages III-II3.

⁵³ A selection of these images are included in Joanne Ursino’s UBC Master’s thesis (2015), [Piercing memory – marking history: the National Women’s March Against Poverty and the quilt Women United Against Poverty 1996 and 2015](#), highlighting various stages of her making process: *smoothing, knotting, cutting, threading, pinning, stitching*.

⁵⁴ The quilt top was created by Alice Olsen Williams from Curve Lake First Nation and Joanne Ursino.

my own activism. I do not tire in this work – in part because of what becomes possible: how in this work of writing and making I make myself again. And, because stories and photographs have power. (Joanne Ursino, artist statement)

Of making, Joanne said, “The making continues to ground me – there’s a meditation and a mediation...and in the making you’re making other things possible” (Joanne Ursino, interview). There is a sincere, devotional purpose behind the hands-on justice-oriented work she has done and continues to do with the dual lens of an activist and an artist-scholar, living what she described as “a reflective, reflexive life” (Joanne Ursino, interview). In so many of my conversations with Joanne, she brings us back to themes of relationality, materiality, intention, and ways of troubling, themes evident in her work. Situating herself in this work, she writes that it is

...against the loss of women’s political voices and actions most often seen and heard on the margins, and with what it seeks to represent in a public archive. This work is also against the disappearance of the work of the hand, and the intimacy of touch and the gesture – fabric once at the fingertips of those that marched is held again in the hands of the artist, and then again in the hands of the photographer – it is an engagement with memory and stitch and the quilt as text/ile, work that is poetic and political. (Joanne Ursino, artist statement)

In working together to create *Reading Embodied 1 & 2 and Matters of Text(ile)*, we expanded the number of women circling this quilt, adding nuanced narrative layers to its history as we both left our handprints upon this work while leaning on the other person to complete it: as it says on the quilt, “Women Together Making A Difference.” Indeed, that was one desire. My hands holding the camera, hers upon the quilt. Together we hold and behold that moment in time and these images as intimate artifacts created as the result of our many conversations, invitation to collaborate, and willingness to be alongside as artists engaging side by side in the photographic search for memory. *To be able to offer her my eyes and offer me her hands was a performance of offering by way of intentional exchange and reciprocal giving and gifting.*

As such, this work bears a co-signature. Mine is photographic: the gesture of visually composing Joanne, in physical and emotional relation to the quilt, through my camera lens, created a visual memoir of that day photographing an artist, my friend, in her home studio. We captured close-ups of the quilt back and body as well as moments of her making process, vital towards an understanding of how and why and where the quilt was completed over time and, perhaps, what she hopes it will do moving forward. The photographs reflect Joanne’s making process back to her, as if the quilt has a visual echo. Her signature is a material touch (both material *and* touch): the loving labor and craftsmanship of working the fabric and tools, the quilt-maker’s hands caressing the quilt before it was sewn, pausing for all that matters and is storied in this cloth and in this work.

I remember the soft lavender hue, the goldenrod yellow, and the clean white incoming natural sunlight as it fell upon the fabric and her pale skin, creating a soft diffusion that revealed tonal subtleties while emphasizing always *her hands*. Her hands, the embodied signature of an experienced maker at work and the tools for making memory.

As a collaboration, it is important to mention the camaraderie we share and the trust that is born of years of knowing a person: our work was/is against the disappearance of our deep care for one another and respect for each other's craft. This relational opportunity became possible because of time spent in the company of kindness and love, because we are both a/r/tographers, and because our collaborative act was mutually beneficial. It was my first time photographing a portrait of a living artist this way, suggesting further autobiographical and memoir-pointing potential for visual lifewriting – particularly when the life being 'written' is not only your own and, instead, is one you are living together as friends and colleagues. I believe it was her first time being photographed with this quilt in this intimate way. The camera – her ask and my offer – along with the trust we have for one another to do good work, allowed a new layer of close access to both of our creative processes simultaneously while framing the materials, artists, and space in a single shot: an a/r/tographic triangulation. We were poised in relation to each other and the quilt as it sat between us, joining us together in images now forever archived of this time – another stitch in the making and the made.



Fig. 77 | By Blake Smith. *Portrait of Joanne with the quilt-back Women United Against Poverty*

R

Rephotography

*The Artful Return, The Art of Return*⁵⁵



Fig. 78 | By Blake Smith. Untitled

“We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospect.”

Anaïs Nin

⁵⁵ **On ways to rephotograph:**

To juxtapose then and now. Before and after. To observe, in duration. To rephotograph a piece or place of history. To photograph a duration, same place, different times. To create a series of images of the same (something) across time (ex: the chair above) to notice its changes and metamorphosis over time. To compare present-day imagery with archival imagery of the past. To notice changes: seasonal, time-bound, emotional weather. To overlay them or place alongside or in sequence. To go back. To keep going back. To be unable to. To photowalk. To find. To notice. To carry. To return. To photograph – again. And sometimes, again. | For an exemplar that introduced me to rephotography and inspired some of my rephotographs, see the work of Mark Klett, Kyle Bajakian, William L. Fox, Michael Marshall, Toshi Ueshina, and Byron Wolfe on *The Third View Project: [Third Views, Second Sights: A Rephotographic Survey of the American West](#)*, 2004.

R

Residue, An Art of

Migration Photographs Inside “Third Spaces”

The Work of Niloofar Miry⁵⁶

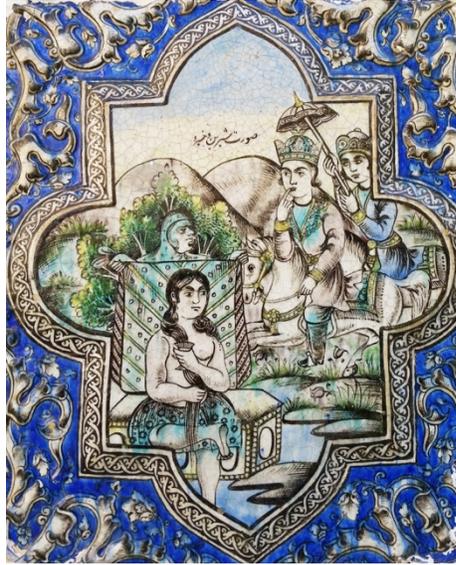


Fig. 79 | By Niloofar Miry, *Residue #2*

Through photographic inquiry, Niloofar Miry’s triptych *Residue #1, 2, and 3* reveals elegant visual evidence of still-remaining historical residue in Tehran, Iran, captured within a framework of its slow disappearance, yet halted by the act of photography. In a personal study of ancient tile artifacts from her homeland, her imagery “references decay and decreasing interims of the actual thing: tile and cultural disappearing” (Niloofar Miry, artist statement). Because the tiles have withstood, partially, the test of time, they also suggest a sort of refusal to disappear: preserved once by the museum in Iran where they are located and preserved again in her photographs and this exhibition. Traces of hand-drawn pencil lines, chipping paint or pigment, and colorful renderings of traditional people are visible on the tiles’ flat surfaces, carried forward in these pictures while speaking back to a previous time that is no longer.

With these three works, Niloofar expanded on an earlier series of *Residue* photographs that I was first introduced to the summer before in her visual journal from our EDCP 405 course (2015). Then, as her instructor, I encouraged her to continue the series as we both sensed there was more to be collected and more kinds of residue to photograph. We both knew there was the potential for

⁵⁶ Niloofar’s work is presented in Chapter 5, pages 128-131.

a wider series here, and I suggested she continue to photograph living artifacts of Iran each time she went back home. Of note: For the members of this research group and the order I present their work within this lexicon, Niloofar's triptych marks the fifth person in our group to embark on a return. As a collection, over time her images could form a visual catalogue for and against the passage of time, "life before and after the Revolution" (Niloofar Miry, artist statement); for her, they make up part of her "visual autobiography" (personal communication, 2015), marked by returns.

To me, Niloofar's work straddles a line somewhere between still life and found landscape photography. For the show, she chose to print them (three color digital prints) on watercolor paper, which evoked a near 'painterlyness' to the photographs. In this way, she makes artful photographic residue out of existing residue from another artist's rendering, a tangible result of her own creative production and inquiry around memory. Niloofar shared with me, "As an artist, my first role is to educate people about something maybe they don't know about it or if they know, they might not really care about it" (Niloofar Miry, interview). In my conversations with Niloofar, she educated me as I learned her work is inspired by philosopher Homi Bhabha's writings on 'the third space'⁵⁷. To place this series in context, in her wider body of mixed media, sound, and installation work, she often addresses the theme of migration, an experience she understands as she continues to traverse the migratory pathway from Canada to Iran and back again, doing so even during our exhibition. In a way, she positions her camera as a unique yet distanced voice inside that liminal, migratory space and, as such, her artworks themselves become and evoke a 'third space' that are neither here nor there – they are somewhere in-between. To me, her images render one example of migration photography as the images themselves have migrated here in an artist's act against the disappearance of her culture, timely photographs made as the paint on the tiles continues to fade, chip away, and slowly disappear. "This is part of our history," Niloofar said about the tiles in an interview, and her photographs of them remind us to remember them. Her photographs archive that history and time in a way that preserves a piece of her own life story and culture in/through this exhibition while bringing a piece of Iran to Canada, solidifying their (and her) place in the history of our group's work. Her photography is its own kind of contemporary residue that is against the disappearance of other variations and iterations of residue.

I remember in our last focus group Niloofar referred to the show's artworks in a special way, saying "I think all these works are timeless and even maybe ten years later if we had the same show

⁵⁷ In her artwork and in her writings on migration, Niloofar shared with me in class and in her interviews that she finds inspiration on 'the third space' from the work of Homi Bhabha. See: Bhabha, Homi K. (2004). *The Location of Culture*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

in other places, they are still fresh...I found it very timeless” (Niloofer Miry, interview). In agreement, Joanne shared, speaking of The Lobby Gallery’s glass walls, “The gaze in that space brought us into the photograph on the wall, but beyond the wall. Niloofer’s comment about the timelessness of this work means that it continues to hang on the wall even if it’s gone” (Joanne Ursino, interview). This speaks to the residue of our show, the residue of memory, and the residue of each person’s work where it once hung on the wall and what happens – and what lingers – after it is gone. That sentiment around “timeless” has stayed with me for a long while, and perhaps being against disappearance is a timeless act or a photographer’s act against time. Niloofer suggested that our group might be able to come back to these images or the notion of disappearance years from now and that our works might still resonate then, unconfined to this moment. Time will tell...

S

Search, The Photographic



(v.) etymology of search: c. 1300, from Old French *cerchier* “to search;” from Latin *circare* “go about, wander, traverse;” in Late Latin “to wander hither and thither,” from *circus* “circle”

(n.) etymology of search: c. 1400 “act of searching;” early 15c. “examination of...; a search through an area or a place,” from Anglo-French *serche*, Old French *cerchier* (see above: v.).
(Search, n.d.)

Thinking about a ‘photographic search for memory,’ I remember talking to Dr. Carl Leggo, about this project after the exhibition had taken place, seeking the guidance of this poet’s mind and teacher’s heart. Through our discussions, something that stands out was what he said to me about *the search*. He said something along the lines of: *‘It is interesting, isn’t it Blake, how every artist [in the exhibition] was searching for something different – and searching differently? Searching for their own something? That might be worth paying attention to.’* Grateful for his words and insight, I agreed.

We were, in fact, each searching for something, photographic or otherwise. We searched in differing ways to differing ends, all arriving at a single end point of shared offering that was both a reflection of our work and a series of potential diffractions spawning from it. As I reflect, these were questions I failed to ask the participants. Yet, if we look at their images and artist statements, I think we can gain a glimpse into the answers. In hindsight, I might have asked: *What were you searching for? How was the act of searching part of the process of coming to understand? Why/how did you search?*

A poetic rumination on search:

To search
Acts of searching
Reasons for searching
A search as a means of seeking
The search as a process of unfolding and unearthing⁵⁸
Searching for memory through photography
How, why, where, and when to search
Searching as a journey
To search for meaning, and
What to do with what you find – or don't
Maybe we were searching for...
Somehow to be heard: A way to roar
Synonyms: walking, tracing, kenosis
Scholarship through art making
Snapshots of our own existence
A way to express the soul
A sequel, a second chance
Sunlight on cloudy days
Metaphors for seeing
Strength to carry on
A sense of belonging
Self-understanding
A shimmer of hope
A sense of purpose
Selective memory
A way to be seen
Visual selenium
A sense of place
Selfish reasons
A self-portrait
Sense-making
Truth-seeking
Serendipity
This story.

⁵⁸ As a related artistic example around the notion of search is how documentary film makers search for a story, a way to shape their portrait with accuracy and illumination. The poignant 2010 documentary film [Nostalgia de la Luz \(English: Nostalgia for the Light\)](#) by Patricio Guzmán was shown at the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES) Open Spaces for Education Film Screening (2016) where I viewed it and speaks to this notion of *the search*: the film is an artistic rendering of such. Using a film and filmic inquiry as an exemplar in memory work and its visuality, this film is an emotional piece about memory that relies on the physicality and desperate act of *searching* in honor of one's memory, perhaps as a way to redeem a loss. This poignant film features Chilean widows who have been searching for the buried bones of their loved ones for over twenty years in Chile's Atacama Desert where former dictator Augusto Pinochet may have had them mass buried. The film shows the mothers' return day after day after day, these tireless elderly women digging, searching, and digging more, sparking empathy while also raising questions of loss and cinematic spectatorship. To witness this was painful for me yet also full of hope, an example perhaps of "beautiful suffering" (Reinhardt, et al., 2007) and a heart-wrenching search that may never *unearth* what they seek. Yet they still do. Every day. While their search is not photographic, the incredible physically act of (searching by digging) for the bones of their beloveds across a thousand-mile desert in hot heat is itself *against disappearance*, even if what or who they are looking for might long-since be disappeared. [See also: Epps (2017) "The unbearable lightness of bones."]

Trace

By nature, to trace is to leave another kind of mark (the trace of the trace). Photography is one art form able to do this and an art form that, for many, is the reason why many engage in it: to freeze time in a picture, to leave a visual record, to archive history, to trace an essence of something, to mark time. As photographic gestures against disappearance, the works and artists in this exhibition each enact a trace of some kind: *Joanne* traces her own making history with the quilt, itself a traceable artifact and trace of all who are a part of it. *Niloofar* traces cultural artifacts from Iran and the self that remains rooted to them while traversing ‘third spaces.’ *Matthew* traces moments with his daughter, mentor, and father in a tracing of personal experience through photography. *Hari* traces her previous home – the rephotograph is compelling form of retracing the past. *Andrew* traces travels with his family and the memories they evoke; he traces the self in natural landscapes and in the landscapes of memory. *Paul*, in two works, traces the essence of the human form once there and no longer. His works trace the ghost of absence both in photographs and sculpture. *Kathleen* traces the memories attached to certain woods and what came up from our photowalking there; her trace is both emotional and photographic. My work (*Blake*) traces the ephemerality of the everyday and the linger in loss; the photographs are a visual trace and selective record of my lived experiences. As a collection, our works evoke a gathering of artistic tracings of time and speak to the variations on methods of trace through photography, visual lifewriting, artist statements, and other means of touching time by tracing it.

⁵⁹ Regarding the letter T, a comment about selecting words/phrases for the lexicon and why I chose to stay close to the things that resonate most. For every single letter or combination of letters, potential candidates made for a lengthy collection of what now are meaningful off-cuts of gathered poetic material, or **The B-Side Lexicon (See Appendix B)**. For T, there were certainly a few, all of which merit as thinking directions to pursue and yet, too many. In fact, they began to compete with one another for my writer’s attention, which inspired a change. As for the other T’s (*the art of dynamic triangulation, tracing time as a timber-text, visual tool, temporality, tone, transience*), I had to let them go, although each would add such richness to this process and in a way, form a secondary frame. The process of deciding which letter or turn of phrase was most impactful or resonant within the lexicon was a challenging endeavor, one that reveals the layers upon layers of meaning and potential inside this work and the different directions it could be taken. Each letter beckoned in its own way, and what remains are what lingered...the most salient traces of my lexical thinking and the building blocks of a poetic lexicon that speak to the holistic, intricate, and subjective nature of this work.

U

Unphotographed / Unphotographable {An Unfinished List}

The concept for this letter is inspired by a similar yet shorter list in photographer Byron Wolfe's book: *Everyday, A Yearlong Visual Diary* (2007), a key inspirational exemplar for this study. During the course of this project and in preparation for the exhibition, I kept a list of things I wanted to photograph but don't know how, chose not to, or simply could not, for a variety of important reasons. This is a list of thirty-six, a symbolic number in honor of the number of photographic works in the exhibition. They are crossed out deliberately, for their inability to be photographed – although, in some cases, I tried.

- ~~1 wonderments and whys~~
- ~~2 sounds of children's laughter~~
- ~~3 the weight of one year~~
- ~~4 distance between seeing and feeling~~
- ~~5 time as a distance we move through~~
- ~~6 transformations of note~~
- ~~7 the shape of uncertainty & stillness~~
- ~~8 someone else's point of view~~
- ~~9 portraits of certain beloveds~~
- ~~10 all of their faces, especially F & D~~
- ~~11 the nature of a profound experience~~
- ~~12 the oceans crossed to get here~~
- ~~13 lost time, found time, emotional time, felt time~~
- ~~14 what it means to know great love and live great pain~~
- ~~15 intensity, on a spectrum~~
- ~~16 form as a language~~
- ~~17 some polarities: belonging & isolation, resonance & dissonance, breathing & suffocation~~
- ~~18 the e/affects of this duration~~
- ~~19 a self portrait of my own understanding~~
- ~~20 efforts made~~
- ~~21 how to move gracefully through loss~~
- ~~22 how not to~~
- ~~23 how to write the wound (which one)~~
- ~~24 how to archive the experience of us~~
- ~~25 how to walk without her~~
- ~~26 how to write a book of the things we may wish to remember~~
- ~~27 how to discern, regarding the anxieties of difficult documentation~~
- ~~28 how to remember all of this~~
- ~~29 how to stay inspired~~
- ~~30 how to build a small boat and sail to a somewhere in the direction of your dreams~~
- ~~31 how to build community where, at first, there wasn't one~~
- ~~32 how to listen and how to be heard~~
- ~~33 how to make sense of what we were seeking and what we found (and didn't)~~
- ~~34 how to let go~~
- ~~35 how to measure meaning~~
- ~~36 how to photograph that which keeps disappearing~~

V & W

Visual Lifewriting as Memoir

Collecting Photographs in the Wake of Lived Experience

*The Work of Blake Smith*⁶⁰



Fig. 80 | By Blake Smith, Untitled.

Variance on a Theme
'Vita Contemplativa'⁶¹
Visual lifewriting
View, Point of
Vulnerability
Violence
Vision
V⁶².

The idea of creating a visual memoir through the ritual of everyday photography (Currey, 2014; Johnstone, 2008) was inspired by photographer Byron Wolfe's *Everyday: A Year-long Visual Diary* (2007) whose work I was exposed to in a photography class at Arizona State University and by '365' projects that photo-document one year. I designed my inquiry as a long-term

⁶⁰ My work [Blake] is presented in Chapter 5, pages 98-110 and 136-145.

⁶¹ From Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), translated as 'the contemplative life.' Contemplation is an important concept in my photographic practices of visual lifewriting and photowalking.

⁶² This visual poem is an example of the many possible selections or lexical lists tied to a single letter, as noted in the footnote for letter T. It speaks to the complex relationships among varying and important concepts, as each one offers unique insights and subjective framing towards a particular term, idea, body of work, or artist.

autobiographical creative endeavor centered around the method of visual lifewriting (Sinner & Owen, 2011) as a way to visually archive the self and write my life (Leggo, 2010) in pictures, creating both extended a/r/tographic research and art at the same time. The series began as a place to create and collect real-time imagery emerging from the pictorial and emotional landscapes of my life and, in a way, has never quite ended. These photographs, as seen in the exhibition, *are* my poetic observations, and they are a built archive of the things I love and wish not to disappear. However, not all photographs were saved, shown, printed, or taken, as not all moments in this life are photographable. A photo diary *in search of memory* is being written in pictures – yet it is a diary that, admittedly and inevitably, is flawed and incomplete (Smith, 2018). An excerpt from my artist statement describes the work further:

The project is much like one extended image about presence/absence, and while it has changed over time, its through-lines have remained the same: *a rumination on loss and hope and a marking of the passage of time in photographic form*. Spanning four years to date, I have created, collected, and juxtaposed a series of ‘everyday photographs’ in an effort to slow time and to locate the beautiful in the banal. Through the reflective and routine act of taking pictures ‘everyday’ (or every day I could, or could bear), a common world of things found, felt, and seen have been brought closer, savored. Thinking photographs as visual testimony devoted to the recovery of experience, they are what Roger Simon (2014) might consider image ‘remnants.’ (Blake Smith, artist statement)

With hope and intention, I embarked on this intuitive journey of photographic inquiry via the writing of visual memoir, a promising kind of visual lifewriting that offered a way to document lived experiences, stretch my own skills and understandings about photography, and stay connected to a practice during graduate school in a meaningful, intentional way. As aforementioned in Chapter I, my experience in an a/r/tography course at UBC encouraged the use of artistic modes of expression as part of thinking through, research, making, and writing. There, I was introduced to the ideas of positioning art making as research and *living your inquiry*, two understandings that frame my work. The early iterations of the project involved still life photography; it grew into a memoir as one year turned into more, and I kept taking pictures. The part that was unexpected was what this project has taught me over time, not only about photography but also about the nature of loss, of looking, and of learning to let go. I also learned about myself as a photographer, a researcher, and a teacher as the lessons learned along the way informed my practice in each of these overlapping roles. The memoir became my teacher.

Methodologically, I combined several creative methods for the inquiry as a way to collect photographs as the visual artifacts of memoir: near-daily photowalks, rephotography, visual lifewriting, visual journaling, extended images, poetry, and a concurrent photo series on Instagram

(see @blakesmithcreative, #thevisualmemoirproject), including photos from my walks. I was greatly influenced by the works of several artists as well, described in earlier parts of the dissertation and in letter A of this lexicon. As the archive grew, I needed a poetic container and aesthetic visual form to hold the works as well as a way to distill thousands of digital photographs into a smaller collection, so many of which were taken on photowalks and many with my chocolate labrador Kaylah. Specifically, I needed a way to select and present a series of my photographs from *The Visual Memoir Project* for the exhibition and share my visual lifewritings with a public audience for the first time in a gallery. Thus, I selected the diptych (where two images are side by side or atop one another) as my primary form for the series⁶³, utilizing dynamic juxtaposition as an artistic technique for bringing together singular, unrelated images to create a new image and poetic form.

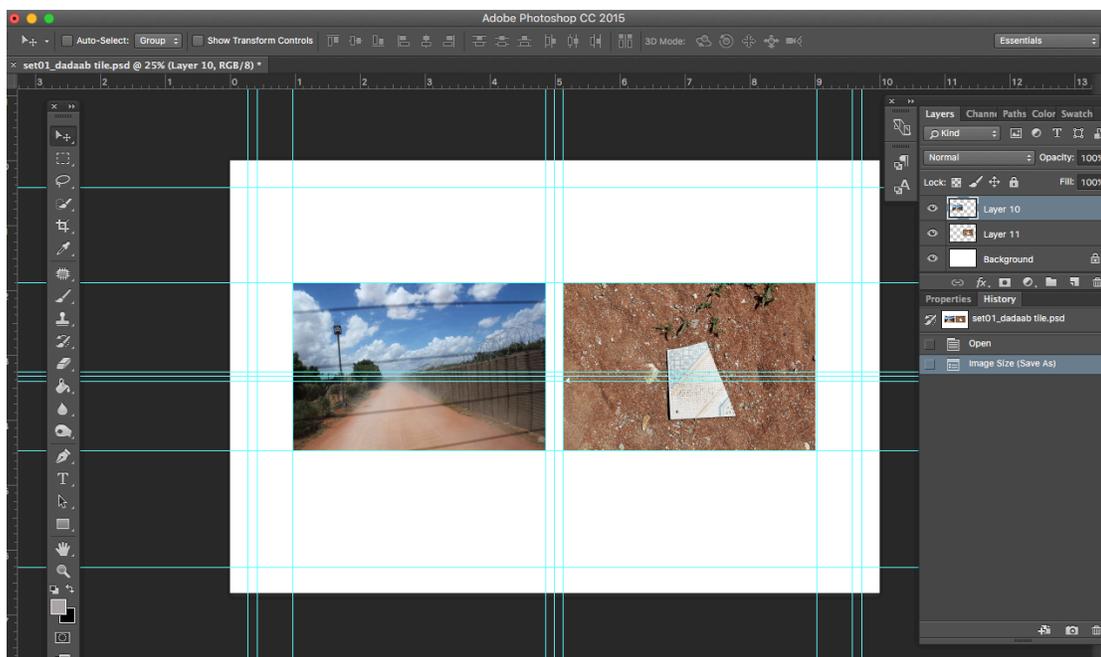


Fig. 81 | Blake Smith, 'Behind the scenes' screenshot of a diptych from *The Visual Memoir Project* being created in Adobe Photoshop, playing with juxtaposition

⁶³ This stylistic decision was inspired by two teachers, one I know and one I do not: first, Michelle Van Parys, in a diptych college photography assignment and second, Byron Wolfe's photography assignment *Same Person, Same Place* (a project of diptychs). It was a creative way to bring sets of seemingly disparate images together to form a new visual, conceptual, or emotional relationship, thus creating a new composition of meaning and memory. The two images join as one, creating conversation and sometimes even tension with one another back and forth. Using the diptych as a visual form speaks to the fragmentary, poetic nature of lived experience and allows for new possibilities to form when joining photographs. As/in a sequence, my works evoke time as a duration through which a series of images might have been taken at different times, seasons, or years then were juxtaposed. The diptychs, triptych, and quadtych in the exhibition were first arranged as 4x6" proofs on my living room floor so that sets could be arranged, rearranged, and contemplated from a bird's eye view, then were brought into Adobe Photoshop [see image above]. Choosing which images to use, then which and how to juxtapose, was as much part of the creative process as shooting them initially. Arranged in a single row, they can be read as a film strip of solitary images sequenced together as a visual poem.

In some ways, I find it challenging to write of my own work, as the ability to separate oneself from an artwork or research project of your own creation is not fully possible. Partly, it feels like this project is part of who I am, having worked on it so long and having approached it with such intensity, both behind the camera and behind the keyboard as a writer. I took on this visual lifewriting project in a deliberate artistic move as scholarly work, knowing it would be long-term and knowing I would present and position this series of personal photographs inside both the exhibition and this dissertation, itself a compilation of visual lifewritings. Some of the privacy of personal memoir work is lost in this doing; however, I aim to reveal a deep photographic intimacy in my photographs that works against this loss. From my experience, I feel we should have *more* intimacy, closeness, and vulnerability in educational research as well as more windows into artistic process as iterations of creative thinking and doing over time. This decision to keep the work personal while making the work public shaped how I took pictures and the edits, selections, photowalks, and ethical decisions that followed.

To borrow Joanne's words, this series was my visual 'lifewriting on the wall:' photographs of beloveds, of places walked and moved through, of longing, of things noticed and noted, of emotional color, of my search, of significant encounters – of me not in the photographs yet always behind the lens thus, still there. A pseudo self-portrait illuminated through and emerging from the act of visual lifewriting as memoir, perhaps. In my artist statement I wrote:

Unexpectedly, this work has become an emotional (sometimes heart-wrenching) process of photographing things I am afraid to lose and always want to remember, thus complicating the possibilities and highlighting the impossibilities of the visual memoir in/as creative research...I used to think the photographs could help to hold on...but the longer the project continues, I begin to face the fleeting nature of these brief but magnificent moments which have all passed, leaving these photographs in their wake.
(Blake Smith, artist statement)

The twenty-one works from this series shown in *Against Disappearance* each mark a special moment and memory of my photographic life during certain years, and they are twenty-one among many others. They are visual mappings of significance, each one a place, a person, a moment, a lingering, a longing, a loss – all as aesthetic statements holding presence against their own disappearance. As poetic visual fragments that make up the landscape of my “emotional cartography⁶⁴,” I behold them

⁶⁴ Sometimes, another artist's work allows you to find kinship and to see yours in a similar light. I was introduced to the photographic work of Kenyan-born photographer Mimi Cheron Ng'ok in her series called “Everyone is Lonely in Kigali.” It is described beautifully in an article from the African art magazine *Contemporary And (C&A)* about [her London, UK exhibition](#). The article states, “Tiwani Contemporary presents Everyone Is Lonely in Kigali, a solo exhibition of work by Mimi Cheron Ng'ok, whose practice expresses what she describes as ‘an emotional cartography’... Everyone is Lonely in Kigali explores the universality of emotional experience, with location having little effect on the manner in which love or loneliness is felt. Intended as a means of collating spaces, people, memories, place, desire, loss and

and write of them in the hopes they will not disappear while surrendering to the knowing that they likely all, in some way, will. Although some of the subjects have since faded away, the memory of their presence lingers still, visible in what remains: *the photographs*. When words failed, they were “the things it is not possible to say to someone” (Solnit⁶⁵, 2013, p. 64) and were photographed instead. As photographer Angela West⁶⁶ once wrote, something that speaks to my work:

*“That these photographs may one day provoke pain
is an unqualified implication of photographing
a person and a place that you love.”*

For me, this body of work and the research study it is presented inside of are art and research in pursuit of deep meaning, a result of teaching, learning, looking, and being alive. In some ways, the endeavor recalls Grumet’s “bitter milk, a fluid of contradictions” (Grumet, 1988, p. xi), for the art did not arrive without the pain, nor the rainbow without the storm. The endeavor, then, is bittersweet. With an unexplainable longing to feel with and through the photograph, a prolonged visual statement is laid out from a woman who teaches, makes, and studies art; she wishes to somehow hold on and let go at the same time. We see excerpts from her photo diary about ‘the everyday’ but it inherently fails to include every sadness, joy, and lived moment – everything, in real life, that might be the real diary, yet these are *the unphotographable everyday*s.

Looking back, I contemplate what a long-form photographic rumination deeply anchored to my life and vocations has called forth: new understandings and restorative acts against loneliness, honoring losses; a poetic archive marking an educative experience in/of duration, one of teacher, learner, maker, re/searcher; some big questions (dreams) and methods (dreams put to work) towards reframing ideas of vision and what it can mean *to see*; a series of reflections emerging from a/r/tography and *grounded practice* involving ethics, memory, and pedagogy; and possibilities for visual method/ologies of awareness, from photowalks to photo lifewriting to photo exhibitions.

absence, the resulting installation presents a non linear collage of vignettes that can be reinterpreted and reimagined retroactively. Unmoored, the viewer must draw on their own experiences to find a visual anchor within the world these images map out.” I was pointed towards this artist’s work by my colleague, the talented poet and scholar Juliane Okot Bitek. Julie is also someone influential in my work and helps shape my understanding of memory. See Bitek (2012), “A chronology of compassion, or towards an imperfect future (For Barry, whose last name I still don’t know)” and Bitek (2016) *100 Days*, nominated for several Canadian book and poetry prizes. *100 Days*, a collection of poetry, was shown at The Lobby Gallery and is [Bitek’s poetic response](#) to Kenyan artist Wangechi Mutu’s photography on the twentieth anniversary of the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

⁶⁵ An excerpt from the following quote by Rebecca Solnit in *The Faraway Nearby* (2013): “Writing is saying to no one and to everyone the things it is not possible to say to someone. Or rather writing is saying to the no one who may eventually be the reader those things one has no someone to whom to say them” (p. 64). I consider my photography in the same way.

⁶⁶ Angela West is an Atlanta-based photographer, as quoted in the *New Photography* exhibition guide for The High Museum of Art, 2006.

Last, this incomplete photographic memoir brackets what might be otherwise-unremembered 'picturesque' (Sontag, 1977) scenes from a fragile time I wish to always remember.

X

A/r/tographic Axis

If lexicons help to expand the intricacies and intimacies of language within a context (here, an intentionally photographic one), then perhaps inside the language of letters are other ways to read them. Such as: a letter can be a shape for visual thinking within the lexicon. Since the letter X is also a two-dimensional shape, the crossing of two straight diagonal lines (/ + \) creates a central axis and a location from which to pivot outward – or hold still. This axis is an intersection made at their crossing, both a coming together at a point of juncture as well as a place of departure, lines leading outward in opposite ways and/or lines crossing, touching. As we follow the directions each line is headed by way of an imaginary compass, at least four new directional paths open up. Sometimes the lines cross, and we keep going our separate ways; other times, the axis forms a stronger bond and an intersection keeps an active pulse, forming a bond. Using the X as a shape for visual reference, I envision a significant a/r/tographic axis point emerging from our group and perhaps a series of them, somewhat like the rhizome.

This X is where our eight lives (eight lines) crossed paths one summer in a university photography classroom, then again in a research group. In a way, this exhibition is a result of that first intersection and what came because of it. We are both held together by this crossing, as the story of this work and the exhibition will live on in other ways. As we parted ways in the fall of 2016, each person followed a line in a certain direction and none the same way; some stayed closer and others strayed. The X as our axis is the history of our togetherness, the crossroads of time and place, a locking of our learning, and a touchpoint of memory. It is an intersection of our lives and our longings, one that is generative and feels still alive as I write this. It is a representative marking of other intersections present in this work: scholarship and inspiration as/at the intersection of ideas, meaning, and education; creativity as/at the intersection of curious experimentation, devotional intention, and artful activity; a/r/tographic understandings as/at the intersections of art, research, teaching, and curation; images as/at the intersection of photography and memory; and last, methodology as/at the intersections of poetry, innovation, seeing, and form.

In this case, I and perhaps our group will be forever reminded of the productive events and

new memories that became possible when two lines or more, two lives or more, intersected, finding their way and aligning with one another in a meaningful manner that has legs beyond the close of a single event, such as a course or an exhibition. In our final focus group, Joanne offered the following reflection that I think speaks to this and to the rhizomatic reach of our group's process and intersectionality in two ways: 1) when we were last together (our lines touching synergistically at our a/r/tographic axis point); and 2) as we begin to imagine the numerous paths each of the eight artists (and their artwork) have travelled since then. It also speaks to how this experience is generative and something we each will carry with us in some way – our lines moving away from that axis, now forming other X's with other projects, people, and opportunities. As Joanne said:

I'm just really recognizing right now we are all together. This is really great. Thank you Blake for the traction and for the grit...You held us and that's something that's not easy. It's not easy with artists, and it's not easy in this city, and it's not easy given all the transitions that we were going through. We will carry this with us in so many ways, so thank you. When I hear others are thinking about going on and doing research, or continuing with their art practice, all of us continuing with our art practice, moving into teaching roles...This is informing our work in ways I never even imagined.
(Joanne Ursino, interview)

Y Yearn⁶⁷

There was a particular yearning among the participants in the exhibition *Against Disappearance* and in our research group – a yearning to be seen, heard, understood, respected as artists, and to have a personal and professional development opportunity like this to participate in. I sensed this in our conversations, once as their teacher, and through the work and research process itself. We all had something to say, work to show, and lived experience to speak from. Admittedly my own yearning for an exhibition and a community were also undercurrents driving the process. There was a yearning for teachers to have time to make art and a yearn for something beyond the course – a yearn to be together and a yearn to create art. This project was a way to satisfy these yearnings and a chance for personal growth and the expansion of knowledge through a unique collaboration with others. While the yearnings, or what one might yearn for, vary with each participant, a through-line is our collective desire to engage our artistic selves fully in a public project and to see it through to the best of our abilities. Upon reflecting, Matthew shared this on

⁶⁷ Participant Joanne suggested 'yearn' for the letter Y.

the experience, illustrating a certain yearn for this kind of group learning opportunity:

I think it's been an enjoyable experience. It's a new experience. I don't think you'd find this in any other context even in doing a group show. You're never going to have this component to it, so it's a really unique and interesting thing to participate in. It feels like one of those things that more educational experiences you should allow for. So once you leave high school, or once you leave university, you could be invited to become part of a group of people who still comes back to that same place. So university, the same thing. You know, people graduate, and how often do you see those people ever again? It doesn't even come up as an educational opportunity. This is the first time I think I've ever heard of anyone asking people in class if they were to come back and do this. (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

Of note is that the word 'year' is inside the word 'yearn.' This group worked together for close to one year to bring *Against Disappearance* to fruition. Our collective visual lifewritings bore the timestamp of the year we spent as one, evidence of our autobiographical years tied up in the artworks of and conversations around this show. *Inside our collective yearn was that year (2015-2016)*.

Z

Zero (and Beyond)

If zero is the absence of all measurable qualities, then this exhibition is its opposite, for it bears the presence of so much that is not zero, not nothing. This 'not nothing' includes:

care
leadership
collaboration
creativity
celebration
poetry
ethics
difficulties
new discoveries
problem-solving
transformation
being remade
listening
trust
beauty
communication
learning by doing
new photographic language
and most of all *the love and labor of many*.

From my perspective, there is no room for zero here – only a question of what lies *beyond* zero, including in what ways zero brings us around again in a circle of understanding, seeking, wonder, possibility, and wholeness. Z also calls us to consider how to explore absence (zero) as a productive space within a packed project where so much is present. ‘Zero’ invites the question of what it might mean *to complete*, to bring something significant *to completion* – for example, to complete the learning moment and bring it full circle, seeing it from the ground up or perhaps at a surveying distance of holistic appreciation. It might also be an invitation to begin again at zero, to be at the beginning again as a starting point, regarding, for example, what we would do differently in this project (and how) if we had to do this exhibition, the lexicon, or perhaps the study, again.

The letter Z, due to its less common usage, challenges me on where to go from here in terms of how to close the lexicon in an artful, heartfelt way – and how to write and think of ‘the beyond’ of this work as well as the completion of it. In this case, Z is not the end nor a fixed understanding or offering but is instead a starting point for exploring new potentials emerging from this work. We have travelled this lexical road from A to Z and now have the opportunity to look back, look inside, as well as look ahead. All of the previous letters and phrases come together to draw out a way to speak of this project that is built with the architecture of its own language.

When I asked the group in our final focus group what kinds of art educational experiences are made possible from the ways we had engaged in photographic practice and pedagogy (through our work as a group and in the exhibition), Matthew shared the following:

Everything that we did for this show was guided by the course or a relationship with each other and the conversations we had. It couldn’t have turned out any other way, because of what things we were talking about, and how those all guided what we decided to put into the show, what kinds of photographs we were taking. In the same way that this experience we’ve all had together is what I would describe as *an art of photo experience*. You can’t have it unless you consider it one before you enter it, right?

You told us what we were going to be doing, and we said yes or no. We assumed from the get go that this is the kind of experience we were going to have, and we had it. Regardless of the fact that we had slightly different experiences, it was an ongoing story about being an artist, right?... It’s a question that’s already been answered by the question itself almost. The question set up the answer for it, but it’s impossible that without this narrative that we’ve created for ourselves, and continually meeting up, having a show...We have a story now. Our group has a legitimate story. It’s a narrative. It has a starting, beginning, and it has a pseudo end. (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

Perhaps arriving at *Beyond Zero* is a kind of “pseudo end” to this story, opening doors into the unknown that come after an exhibition and a lengthy lexicon are brought to a close. Or perhaps another one emerges in its wake, where the end of one is simply the beginning of another – where *beyond* is the place we were already headed or were in the process of arriving at, or becoming inside

of. As Paul said, reflecting on the end of this study and our group’s time together, “For me the end ... It’s not actually the end. It’s actually the beginning of something else” (Paul Best, interview).



Figs. 82 & 83 | By Blake Smith, Fig. 82 (Left) Photograph of our guest book table with postcards and coffee stains, taken towards the end of the exhibition. Fig. 83 (Right) Remnant of the back of an exhibition postcard I put up along Commercial Drive. This is what was left a couple of months later.

~

Ending with Z, we have come to the end of the lexicon, although clearly more could be written about this experience, its makers, the artwork, our process, and what was learned through the research, writing, and art making experience.

Centered around the concept of *offerings*, the next chapter intends to zoom out and take a panoramic view at the whole work by tracing its lingering notes in order to locate some of its more impactful moments, meanings, and memories as they come to bear on theory, research, and practice. As a way of selecting key understandings important in the study, I present seven significant offerings emerging from this research that rise to the surface as prominent and promising. The first is about the lexicon itself and what, as a poetic form, it offers towards a/r/tographic and other forms of artistic research as well as creative translations and presentations of data, including visual art and participant experiences.

In many ways, Chapter 7 speaks to *the beyond*.

Chapter 7

The Art of Tracing Pedagogy Beyond Rooms: Lifewriting Our “Learning Selves”⁶⁸ in Seven Offerings of Meaning, Method, & Possibility



Fig. 84 | By Blake Smith, *Close-up of Paul Best's Untitled (Student Chair)*

⁶⁸ From Elizabeth Ellsworth's *Places of Learning: Media Architecture Pedagogy* (2005, p. 1).

“A Pedagogy of Trace:” A/r/tographic Offerings Made Visible

This chapter reflects holistically on the journey of this research experience and presents a series of seven thoughtful offerings as *traces of pedagogy beyond rooms*, each introduced by a photograph from the exhibition. I repeat the seeing of these images intentionally to emphasize their importance in this work and to draw our attention to their presence, to the words they speak without saying them, and as a way to extend the moment of our being with them in lieu of the exhibition itself now long being over. Along with the images, the offerings are both *the what lingers* at this moment in time, and they are some of the significant new a/r/tographic understandings emerging from this work in terms of what resonates and carries weight moving forward as well as what resonates in terms of looking back. Like the lexicon, the offerings are another collection of ideas, phrases, and frames for thinking, this time further distilled and discussed in greater depth and length. They are meant to come alongside and follow the lexicon as the threads that run through it, extending some of the ideas presented in the lexicon and exhibition while also offering some broader strokes around the architecture, assemblage, and forms-as-methods in this work.

Using the verb *tracing*, I highlight within the research significant interpretations, reflections, and big ideas as a way to gather, sequence, compose, and juxtapose the bones of this experience as I have collected them in a meaningful way. ‘Trace’ emphasizes the a/r/tographical nature and spirit of pedagogical tracing and draws on the notion of trace in several ways: on the photograph as a trace of memory, on photography and visual lifewriting as the tracings of time and lived experience, on the seven offerings as some of the traces of this research, on photowalking as an artistic method of trace, and on this dissertation as a tracing of the exhibition, our group’s conversations, *and* a trace of my learning along an inspired path⁶⁹ of coming to know.

Influenced by the work of Prendergast, Lymburner, Grauer, Irwin, Leggo, and Gouzouasis (2008), I use “pedagogy of trace” (p. 59) to frame these ‘tracings as offerings’ as the lingerings and longings of my pedagogical practice, passion, and purpose. Asking “where do the vestiges of our teaching go?” (p. 58), they write:

A pedagogy of trace is therefore the creative and collaborative process of superimposing teaching stories one over another so as to track the breaths, hints, intimations, ghosts, shades, suggestions, suspicions, tinges, tastes, touches and whispers left behind by our own pedagogical praxis. (Prendergast, et al., 2008, p. 59)

Tracing through-lines that may have begun in the EDCP 405 course and run all the way through the research group and exhibition is a way of attending to the *residue* of this experience, to the

⁶⁹ In Latin, ‘dissertātiō’ means ‘path.’

“whispers left behind,” following the lives and artistic expressions of eight individuals, teachers and artists committed to a photographic life. As Prendergast, et al. (2008) state, “As practicing a/r/tographers committed to artistic processes of inquiry, these pedagogical traces are most likely to reveal themselves in arts-based forms” (p. 59-60). Prendergast, et al. (2008) continue, saying, “The overall intentions of such tracings is to resist the potential of fixed individualism within self-study processes in inquiry practice through recognition of the inherently fluid relationality of pedagogical experiences” (p. 60). In this work, the traces of our endeavors are evident in the artwork produced for the exhibition *Against Disappearance* as well as the lexicon. Together, they offer a fragmented portrait of a shared learning experience, made visible through photographic inquiry and made pedagogical through our collaboration and visual dialogues on disappearance.

As a reminder of where my inquiry began, I posed this question from the beginning: *How might creative engagement with photo-based memory work: a) evoke meaningful experiences of teaching, learning, and art making; and b) provoke contemporary, critical conversations on ethics in art and photo education?* Addressing gaps in the literature, this two-prong question was a starting point that, over time and with data and through conversations and artistic actions, guided me in new and varying ways as I sought to behold, unravel, and make sense of the complex learnings and deep understandings born of this work. In turn, that unraveling inspired new and different questions, discoveries, and concerns, thereby extending the inquiry and its creative offspring into fresh directions ripe for further pursuit. This added complexity and nuance to the initial research question so that it, too, became extended. As an a/r/tographer, I seek not finite, measurable, or known answers to my pursuits and wonderings. Rather, I explore, deepen, stretch, braid, push, rupture, create, diffract, internalize, and reimagine what it is I and we came to understand as a result of doing a/r/tographic research in order to push the boundaries of knowledge, practice, and pedagogy. In these new knowings, further possibilities and potential persist and exist, while I continue to evolve my understandings in light of a process of *becoming* for both researcher and research. Neither stays the same, and as I return to the work again and again, like a rephotographer, I see it differently each time as we (the work and I) become different ourselves.

The seven offerings put forward in this chapter reflect a view of the research that resonates at this time, drawing both on my reflections on the study and my translations of the data as meaningful tracings of the research story. They intend to capture some essence of an evolutionary process of learning and yearning, both individual and collective, coming to form across a measurable duration. As such, I offer these offerings as a collection of new knowings towards photography education, practice, and research that draw on new understandings in this study.



Fig. 85 | By Hari Im, *The process to say a proper goodbye*

Offering No. 1

Tracing the Lexicon: *On Lingering with Language, Love, & Liminal Spaces*

The imaginary flutter of shadow-drawings upon a curved awning echoes the soft and sharp outlines of nearby trees projecting their likeness above. Below the awning, the top of two glass doors is propped open but the photographer does not enter, instead drawing our attention upward to the image within the image, a white surface like a movie screen upon which shadows dance. Outside and facing an apartment building, the artist and research participant Hari has returned here, a here that was once her home, as she lingers in the liminal space just beyond the doorway of entrances and exits. From this viewpoint, her main subject is this white expanse (or perhaps herself, in projection), photographing as the nearby trees in grey silhouettes write picture poetry there.

**“Imagine yourself wild with words”
(Leggo, 2019c, p.107)**

This image and the artist statement that accompanied it are special placeholders for tracing the ‘Lexicon for *Against Disappearance*,’ as they pursue an intentional lingering through photographic image and language within multiple, connected contexts in a similar way that the lexicon does. These contexts include: *duration, going home, the rephotograph, the unphotographable, ephemerality, kenosis, saying goodbye, the photographic search, residue, trace, and yearn*. To think so much can be bound up in a single image is to begin to understand and unravel the dynamics and unspoken tongue of the photographic image and the kinds of lexicons that can be constructed from one. In my lexicon for this dissertation, I have worked to vocalize the visceral and visualize a curated collection of the resonant phrasings, words, contexts, concepts, themes, observations, codings, and visuals emerging from the study’s data, namely the exhibition and the research conversations had around it. As Lasczik Cutcher and Irwin (2017) express, “A/r/tography allows researchers to potently consider how data is apprehended, comprehended, and generated in, with, and through image, objects, reflections, interpretations, and actions, and further, how such experiences are rendered” (Lasczik Cutcher & Irwin, 2017, p. 1). Like the dancing shadows fluttering upon the white awning in Hari Im’s photo, I draw the reader’s attention to a series of important understandings that highlight only some of the delicate distinctions, certain challenges, and great love and labor within this work. I linger in order to understand, collecting a/r/tographic, photographic field notes in the liminal spaces between letters, between individual offerings from the eight artists, between image and text, between presence and absence, and between beginnings and endings. In these between, *invisible* poetry exists that I attempt to draw out here...

**“I know I can’t render what I see, must
surrender to the limits of language,
my words no more than exasperated
expiration, a hint of impossibility,
everything seen in a mist”
(Leggo, 2019c, p. 101)**

“Poetry,’ Leggo teaches, ‘invites us to slow down and linger with stories and rhythms and silence and possibilities.’ Leggo knows that ‘learning always begins with lingering” (Pinar, 2019, p. xii). This tracing considers the luster and promise of lingering poetically within the context and creativity of the lexicon as the emergent language of the study (and the study of language), a form for *the art of noticing*. Through an alphabetical A to Z narration of poignant possibilities and poetic observations, I employed language as a flexible compositional tool for text-based and photographic

visual lifewriting whereby the letters invoked an imagery of their own as a picturing (and repicturing) of this research, albeit subjective and incomplete. How the A to Z phrasings come together to create a fragmented whole or new language is an essential aspect of this form and one of the more challenging attributes of composing one.

“language is not the whole world

**language lines the holes
that let us see the world**

**to hold onto wholeness
as the world goes on and on and on”
(Leggo, 2019a, p. 154)**

Considering the lexicon as a creative methodological storytelling vehicle for the narrative of one’s research, Leggo writes, “...Our stories need to be told in creative ways that hold our attention, that call out to us, that startle us, so we know our stories and the stories of others with renewed attentiveness. Lifewriting and poetic inquiry are ways of living in the world” (Leggo, 2019b, p. 67). The composition, ‘A Lexicon for *Against Disappearance*,’ is a form and reflection of living *poetic inquiry* (Bitek, 2016/2012; Irwin, Hasebe-Ludt, & Sinner, 2019; Galvin & Prendergast, 2016; Sameshima, Fidyk, James, & Leggo, 2017; Speedy, 2016; Wiebe, Butler-Kisber, & Stewart) that swims in the liminal seas of narrative language, memoir, aesthetic experience, participant voice, artistic choice, gestures of note, and disappearance upon the photographic landscape. Where I have lingered are the places that invited me to: the pedagogical places, the artful places, the difficult places, the hopeful places, the places that stirred me and beckoned for more.

To linger in a lexicon or for the purpose of creating one is to spend slow time with the concepts, ideas, and possibilities that rise to the surface (or seem to be missing) as important in shaping an understanding, or an offering, of the research without reducing it solely to interpretation as to what something means instead of appreciating what it does, what it evokes and provokes, and what it says without speaking. In a dedicated search for a vocabulary of meaning and “a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms” (Sontag, 1966, p. 8), I suggest this is a way to make poetic one’s ‘findings’ or to cultivate and report them in a highly creative manner so that form more closely converses with method. The written form, then, echoes and artistically juxtaposes the image poetics it speaks to; both are attempts at the art of description and together they form another diptych. I agree with Leggo (2019c), who once wrote “This is the kind of writing that I want to pursue – a meditation that involves the wholeness of my attending” (p. 97).

**“In language I calculate the world.
I build intricate equations
With unknowns of x and y, ...”
(Leggo, 2019c, p.103)**

In a stylistic move for the alternative presentation of data (Eisner, 1997) and *danda* (“aesthetic facts,” Pepper, 1945, p. 7) analysis and reportage, the lexicon evokes writing as a form of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and invites an emergent, fluid architecture of method, meaning, and mindfulness. It represents an artful, heartfelt and collector-like gathering of my poetic observations, excerpts of conversations with participants, and my personal researcher/teacher/curator/artist responses to the artwork, writing, and experience we created and lived through. The lexicon’s kaleidoscopic fragmentation is a kind of sense-making lens as well as an intentional, reflective writing practice whereby the parts make up the whole, a colorful gestalt made up of many pieces, piercings, and ponderings. It is also a reflection of my fragmented self writing towards wholeness in a process of coming to know, showcasing a desire to express this work authentically (Four Arrows, 2008) with curiosity, commitment, grace, originality, and creativity.

The lexicon is important in my dissertation for it gives form to this a/r/t/ographer’s emergent photographic language – and this photographer’s emergent a/r/t/ographic language – addressing ruminations on teaching, research, curation, and making that surround, are embedded in, and emerge from the exhibition as a transformative and sometimes challenging learning event. Performed through visual lifewriting in one elongated poetic alphabetical expression, it releases an exhale of potential becomings (Irwin, 2013; Irwin & O’Donoghue, 2012; LeBlanc, Davidson, Ryu, & Irwin, 2015; Leggo and Irwin, 2013; Sinner, 2013), generated from earlier becomings located in the data, inspired by the experiences and beings that produced them. In composing the lexicon, I coaxed it to emerge through living inquiry in response to and in conversation with the data as I reflected on my lived experience of doing, seeing, and living this research. In doing so, I created new data: as LeBlanc writes, quoting Irwin, “I was creating ‘the possibility of bringing something aesthetically into sight that was [previously] out of sight’ (Irwin, 2003, p. 76)” (Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, & Belliveau, 2018, p. 46). *And*, through dynamic juxtaposition, the lexicon can and was designed to become more than itself by being artfully combined, reordered, and reimagined to create even more becomings and evoke new ones. As Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, and Belliveau (2018) put forward:

A/r/t/ography, as potential, is a dynamic and ongoing experience that incorporates text, the visual, and/or artistic form in order to challenge, provoke, and frustrate the desire for one, final, stable, or fixed meaning...As something that cannot be expected, or measured, its potential is inexhaustible. This speaks directly to the aliveness of the work. (p. 50)

Inspired by a/r/tography's commitment to seeing and manifesting inherent potential within creative works that destabilize fixed understandings, some examples of those juxtapositions and artful combinations (as potential photography and/or writing assignments) from the lexicon could be:

Landscapes of Hope, Beloved Residue, Diptych: The Rephotographs, Conversations on Duration, Going Home: Notes on A Process, Everyday Offering, Visual Lifewriting: Kenosis, The Unphotographable Yearn, Memento: A Photographic Search, and Tracing Timbre Texts.

**“...always with a sense of the extraordinary
at work in the ordinary, and seek
wonder
by attending to the inexorable,
inevitable experiences of every day,
always effing the ineffable.”
(Leggo, 2019c, p. 106)**

As a varietal collection of meaningful chosen moments marking resonance and durational movements across this study's cartography, the lexicon offers a series of invitations as offerings for engaging in photographic inquiry and practice that stem from but are not forever tied to our exhibition. They could be applied to or inspire others, and more than one lexicon can be generated for a single project, letter, or observation, as it is an iterative, responsive, and creative process of attending to words and worlding that suggests infinite possibilities and combinations towards a multitude of “imagistic evocations” (Leggo, 2016, personal communication).

We can also imagine how the lexicon and the exhibition upon which it is based offer a unique set of pedagogical and artistic frames (or lenses) that could be useful towards photo-based memory work, including visual lifewriting. Embodying and performing a ‘poetics of research’ (Leggo, 2019c) from a multi-lens perspective (curator, artist, researcher, teacher, and learner) *and* within a collaborative research group of artists and teachers, one key invitation is to linger with and through photographic language and the language of photographs as a generative way of seeing *seeing* (or perhaps for photo educators, of *teaching seeing*), while acknowledging certain blindness in the things we cannot or did not say or see.

“for wisdom in the present
and hope for the future, knowing
always the possibilities of verbs.

this is the teacher’s way”
(Leggo, 2019d, p. 194)

Inspired by the ‘poetics of research’ and ‘the possibilities of verbs,’ I end this tracing with *a lexicon for a lexicon*, offering up an array of potential qualities and gestures for artful lexiconists to consider when composing, reading, studying, imagining, or translating one:

Against unoriginality
Barthes’s ‘beginnings’ (Allen, 2003)
Caress the edges with care & creativity
Depths & deepenings
Eloquent evocations
Form(s)
Gorgeous grit
Honor your subject
Integrity & illumination
Juxtaposition
Kaleidoscopic view
Linger with language & possibility
Meaning & messiness
Nuance & narrativity
Offerings as “openings” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx)
Poetic observations
Quest/ions
Renderings & reasons why
See/k connections
Trace your through-lines
(New & novel) Understandings
Volition
Wunderkammer (Cabinet of curiosities)
eXcellent attempts
Your perspective matters
Zone of significance



Fig. 86 | By Andrew Smith, *Parallel Landscapes 2*

Offering No. 2

Tracing the Exhibition:

On Understanding Against Disappearance as a Provocative Learning Event

The title of this piece is Parallel Landscapes (#2) and in it we see not only two majestic expanses from different parts of the world set in parallel, but we also see the traces of human movement in two vehicles of travel. On the left, a handful of tiny red canoes, behind them the lines of their slow wake left visible on the green lake's surface, a scene shot against towering tree- and snow-covered mountains. On the right, a wavy sea of orange sand, dotted with a fleet of small white sport utility vehicles all headed in the same direction, making tire marks upon the desert earth, some lines crisscrossed as evidence of prior travel. Although movement is implied, both photographs capture a moment of stillness in two scenic environments juxtaposed and frozen in time.

Useful as a visual metaphor for landscapes of learning, Andrew's diptych is helpful towards thinking about the potential of the exhibition *Against Disappearance* as a provocative learning event, addressing the question of where and how does meaningful learning occur? What does it look and feel like, and how will we know? Does it occur at once or over time? In thinking about learning as

an inspirational and pedagogical experience (Cohen, Porath, Bai, Leggo, Meyer, & Clarke, 2014), and in writing of an event that has already occurred yet left the *imprint* of learning, Ellsworth's words are helpful:

What has already happened was once very much alive: the *thinking-feeling*, the embodied sensation of *making sense*, the *lived experience* of our learning selves that make the thing we call knowledge. Thinking and feeling our selves as they make sense is more than merely the sensation of knowledge in the making. It is a sensing of ourselves in the making, and is that not the root of what we call learning? (2005, p. 1, italics in original)

Ellsworth (2005) writes that “the ‘self’ is what emerges from the learning experience. We must look for the experience of the learning self” (p. 2) and she says we must “figure out how to address a learning self that is in motion. To do that, they must set the concept of pedagogy itself in motion into interdisciplinary spaces...” (p. 7). The public dissemination of my research in the form of an art exhibition for a PhD dissertation at The Liu Institute, an interdisciplinary space, was a way to “set pedagogy in motion” by showcasing our artwork *as and for* learning, by moving a learning space from a classroom (EDCP 405) to an art gallery (The Lobby Gallery) and positioning the exhibition as a pedagogical project with invitations and possible implications for those who teach. The exhibition also offered ourselves as a research group and the public, including many students and teachers as UBC who attended, an opportunity to dialogue with, reflect on, and potentially learn from our collective artistic research gesture. The ‘motion’ was in the juxtaposition of images and artists, in bodies moving in and out of the gallery (many pausing to read and view), in dialogues and conversations that opened up, in transformations that occurred, and in the movement of ideas in that space and over time. We presented art several ways: as data, as a/r/tographic artifact, as living research, as/with statements of intention (artist statements), as knowledge form, as an experience, and as educational in the hopes the artworks and statements might “gesture beyond themselves” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 9), opening up new possibilities for photographic inquiry, education, and research. Ellsworth (2005) writes that “the self is understood as a becoming, an emergence, and as continually in the making” (p. 4). Our artwork, the lexicon, and the seven offerings are evidence of our “learning selves in the making” (p. 10) as we were shaping our learning in the same way it was shaping us.

In this project, the art gallery, housed in a lobby, a place where people pass through, became a parallel yet alternate learning landscape to the higher educational art classroom, as we transformed the glass walls into a series of visual conversations through and about photography. Those conversations, including the written text of artist statements and didactics, became a way of engaging in and inviting pedagogical wayfinding for artists and viewers alike to address and

illuminate complex, unexplored terrain around what ‘a photographic search for memory’ could mean or might look like – in this case, from nine unique points of view: eight artists and one group statement. As noted in the group artist statement, the “pedagogical intent” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 6) and offering of the show was, in part, to think critically and artfully about: a) the concept of disappearance; and b) photography’s role in marking and making memory, including difficult memory, while considering the creative and disruptive potential, implications, and ethical dilemmas of doing (and not doing) photo-based memory work within exhibitions, research, and, potentially, in classrooms. As learner-participants engaged in the event (Garoian, 2014; Roth, 2013) of art and learning, these artists and art teachers produced photographs and artist statements, in part, as a way of being invited to think about how, if, why, or why not to bring aspects of this project into their teaching or other practices, considering how the work done in this gallery setting might be transferrable and impressionable upon a classroom or other educative setting. In other words, if the pedagogy of the exhibition might be further ‘put into motion’ elsewhere so that our photo-a/r/tographic living inquiry might become expanded in ways and places we have yet to imagine. As Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, and Belliveau (2018) write:

Living inquiry plays an integral role in a/r/tography because it welcomes entanglement. Relational and reflexive in character, it is a continuous state of movement that is not about an arrival, but is about lingering in the emergent, unforeseen, and unexpected events that it provokes. (p. 50)

As educators and artists, we are inspired by the transformative power of learning and the power of transformations. As such, what the writing, creating, collaborating, and researching suggest for this group of individuals is the nature *of* and reasons *for* doing a/r/tographic inquiry, whereby teachers and artists move through the cycles of making, sharing, reflecting, collaborating, and imagining that then may have resonance on their current and future teaching practices, art practices, and ways of being in the world. In this case, through affected teaching and experiential learning events such as the exhibition and research group, this research suggests the learning and professional/personal development of the teacher/artist can inform the future learning of that teacher/artist’s students. Here, the backwards, forwards, and iterative trace and tracing of a learning event and its provocative potential becomes evident, and an active helix emerges.

The exhibition and the research study that anchored it offered a series of invitations, many of them pedagogical and artistic in nature, including those set forth from the beginning and those which emerged in *the doing*. Our (and my⁷⁰) experience of learning (or the extended lived event of

⁷⁰ As a learning experience for me specifically, the exhibition (and its related stages: the planning, creation, curation, framing, hanging, writing, reflection, opening reception, interviews, take-down) inspired new understandings through

our learning) was collective as well as individualistic, as we learned how to create, write, inquire, and perform interdisciplinarily; how to approach a complex array of themes photographically; how to create art for/as research; and how to be in kind relation to another's learning and becoming. We learned about ourselves as artists and teachers. Through artist statements, we learned why words and intentions matter. Through experience, we learned about the possibilities and difficulties of collaboration. In all, we learned more about photographic, a/r/tographic inquiry by *doing* photographic, a/r/tographic inquiry.

Birthing in an active in-between space, discussed later in Offering No. 7, this research endeavor was an “event-in-the-making” (Roth, 2013, p. 390) and became an extended learning moment wherein we are now changed from having participated in it, made different by the teachings of the group, the show, the artwork, our process, the transformative event of our learning, and the holistic exhibition experience *as* art. Overall, this unique experience revealed previously unknown, intricate layers of nuance, capability, and artistry as well as unexpected layers of discomfort, disappointment, and even momentary failure, as these were all places where impactful learning occurred. *The weight of this learning is still with me.* As their teacher for EDCP 405 and in a way, for this project, I have witnessed our and their “learning selves” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1) evolve across the span of two summers and all that fell between, as each of us found meaningful footing in our respective art educational journeys, developing, performing, and beholding over time “a sensing of ourselves in the making” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 1).

creative practice, teamwork, and hands-on, grounded efforts that involved (somewhat like teaching) communication, group leadership and project facilitation, organizing the events, encouraging and supporting our group members in preparation for the show, and owning the mistakes, messes, and assumptions made. Maintaining all of these roles at once became challenging and at times overwhelming, although I navigated the balance as gracefully as I could or as best knew how at the time.



Fig. 87 | By Blake Smith, Untitled

Offering No. 3

Tracing Disappearance: *On Pursuing Artists' Echoes & Photographic Inquiry*

On the right is a portrait of my father, Robert, walking on the grey and white granite surface atop Stone Mountain in Georgia, where I am from. Photographed from the back in black and white and at a distance as he walked ahead, I wanted to capture this moment in my photographic memory. It looked like he was ascending into heaven. Moving towards an edge where the clouds meet the rock, the photo is divided into two parts: ground and sky, with my father as the silhouette bridging the in-between. This image speaks to a daughter's longing for a father's presence to remain and is a rendering through visual lifewriting of that which I love and wish not to disappear. Like the work of participant Andrew, I, too, often photograph loved ones from behind as they walk. Through photography, we hold still these tender moments, forever emblazoned into our visual memory.

On the left, a lone branch lies in the ocean sand as the evening tide rolls out at Third Beach, and the light begins to fade along the Pacific horizon. Another silhouette, a branch that once belonged to a tree, is photographed against the shimmer of sea and sky also in black and white, its subtle reflection visible upon the soaked earth. From a distance, I observed its curvature, almost as if sleeping or forlorn, as it swayed slightly when the tide came in then went out again. Composed

as a diptych, the two dark forms in these images (my father, this branch) arch away from each other, both leading out of the image towards an edge that is beyond sight.

As a pair, these two images form a single picture that freezes time, light, and feeling in differing ways for me, resonating with my own personal journey of photographic inquiry as an emblem of the beloved. In these images and in others, the camera became an instrument for lifewriting and coming to terms with felt experience. As markers of time and tenderness, the photographs are ways of holding on, if only for a brief moment longer. Visual lifewriting – an artistic act against disappearance – becomes a way to collect and compose an album of unforgotten yesterdays and dreams of imagined tomorrows. This process renders an extended, complicated, and stirring extended image of a life being lived, or perhaps a life once lived or hoped for. This kind of photography “reminds us visually, in ways that text alone cannot, about the many unspoken, yet living, stories we all carry in our hearts” (Sinner & Owen, 2011, p. 80). Photographic lifewriting – perhaps a variation of or akin to what Souminen Guyas (2008) calls “writing with photographs” or “photo-writing,” (p. 141) – has encouraged a particular closeness and intimacy, where photowalks and photographs became the currency of my everyday.⁷¹

⁷¹ *In poetic prose, I remember ways of photographically paying attention to the everyday, or every day I could bear:*

Through deep photographic ‘listening’ (Nepo, 2012), I heard the sounds of my life as they sang to me, trying always to respond, camera oftentimes in tow: I heard calls to move through, whispers to notice, screams to take pause, laughter to remind, birdsong to look up, photowalks to slow down, echoes and sunsets to chase, the feet of running children to stay present, and beckonings daily to remain attentive and attuned to the landscape of this life, this moment.

Photography is a way to write poems as the art of my observations: love letters to all the spectacular things I wish always to remember. If they might one day disappear, I will photograph them into memory and hold onto them by way of pictures. Living artifacts of the self left behind, so that a way of seeing this world might be archived, remembered, kept.

In time, seeing became a vehicle for being. I was seeing from behind the camera, in fragmented detail, visual portraits of or visual metaphors for my own and perhaps others’ lived experiences. Experiences of beauty and pain...of place and perception...of beloveds and letting go...of presence and absence...of picturesque outer landscapes and difficult inner longings...of long walks and returns home...of innocence and aging...of rising flowers and decaying debris...of my grandfather and best friends...of memories of being alongside and knowing one day we won’t be...of living and dying inquiry...of certain great losses and certain great loves...of dreams and deserts in Dadaab...of hope and catastrophe...of time passing and the duration of being alive...of solitude and soliloquy...of the fragility and capability of human life – and how humbling and daunting it is to try and photograph the vibrant essence of all of these remarkable these things, before they and I fade away into oblivion.

As a visual lifewriter, these photographable fragments make up part of the whole of my being and in some ways, to collect them is to collect parts of myself I may have found, lost, and gathered along the way – or perhaps unearth some of the parts that are buried within.

Through deep photographic ‘listening’ (Nepo, 2012), I heard the sounds of my life as they sang to me, trying always to respond, camera oftentimes in tow...

These calls to pay close attention (described in footnote 71) and to stay attuned are the result of a long-form commitment to photographic inquiry that graduate school and a/r/tography further ignited for me, a practice involving walking, noticing, collecting, observing, composing, pausing, reflecting, and, all the while, writing alongside. Over time and as I reflect, this experience of art-as-research has become a transformational self-assignment through which the a/r/tographic lens has provoked, evoked, and deepened my own understandings about photography *through* photography. In turn, this has affected the work done with this research group and how they have been provoked, evoked, and hopefully deepened.

Reflecting on Triggs, Irwin, Beer, Grauer, Springgay, and Xiong (2010), I consider the ways a/r/tography comes to bear on and inform this work, creatively, methodologically, and pedagogically. They write:

As an art form itself, a/r/tography is part of a dynamic process always moving outside of formal definitions. Necessitating a co-mingling of the materiality of learning and practice with the aesthetics of artmaking and research, a/r/tography reconnects visceral, vital experience with both image and text in a way that offers a wide framework for understanding. A/r/tographic methodology does not attempt to do away with other methodologies but recognizes, again with Massumi (2002), that no single logic or theoretical framework is flexible enough to encompass the concrete abstractness of experience. (p. 303)

As a photographer and photo educator, I have been able to engage a/r/tography to productively reflect on, research, and live my own practice as part of the arts-based research process while bringing that art practice alongside the art practices of the research participants. Through the engagement of purposeful photographic inquiry in *The Visual Memoir Project* (initially a solo endeavor) and *Against Disappearance* (a group endeavor), this coming-alongside became possible while forming yet another compelling diptych. Celebrating the notion of *a/r/tography as an art form* (Triggs, Irwin, Beer, Grauer, Springgay, & Xiong, 2010, p. 303), capable of reconnecting “visceral, vital experience with both image and text in a way that offers a wide framework for understanding” (Triggs, Irwin, Beer, Grauer, Springgay, & Xiong, 2010, p. 303), this project offered a way for my personal photographic, a/r/tographic inquiry to become extended from one to many.

This effort widens the expanse of possibility towards photography and learning by expanding the number of voices and textures of visuality around the table (like Joanne and I around her quilt) *and* in The Lobby Gallery. It also frames what we accomplished as an art form itself: the art form of an exhibition, the art forms of group collaboration and dialogue, the art forms of new learning, and the art form of photographic inquiry into disappearance. These art forms are all connected to a visual lifewriting practice, itself an art form, because they have each created new

portrayals of research and knowledge that are both image and text, visual and story, and represent some of the significant lifewritings in this work. In a way, our group became visual lifewriters together, co-writing a narrative of coming to see differently and coming to understand.

Doing so allowed for a way of accessing new depths and facing new concerns available in this work – those of meaning-making, of artistry, of visual and emotional language, of difficult inquiry, of ethics, of teachability and traceability, of collaborating, and of doing personal as well as shared photographic work in the academy as research. Furthermore, through visual inquiry, the images and exhibition event, along with their processes of coming to form, offer fresh takes on seeing, invite us to confront our perceptions and underscore both the educative, artistic potential and the challenges of method in photographic inquiry and visual lifewriting.

A/r/tography has also come to bear on this work *artistically* in the way that the work of three significant artists featured in this dissertation – Ishiuchi Miyako, Alfredo Jaar, and Byron Wolfe – marks a significant aesthetic space from which creative currency and lineage is drawn. In this way, we can trace the artists’ echoes – the echo of one artist’s work in and across another’s – as they resonate throughout the photographs in *Against Disappearance* in the same way their echoes resonated through me from the teachers who introduced me to them. As such, a torch of artistic expression and artist knowledge was passed on from one teacher to another, leaving behind a trace of photographic pedagogy⁷² whereby influences are noteworthy and in many cases noticeable.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Miyako and Jaar address disappearance in their works in direct and indirect ways, and I trace them again here, along with Wolfe: Miyako photographed objects left behind from Hiroshima and her mother’s belongings, her photographs as gestures against the disappearance of our collective and her personal remembering. Jaar uses documentary photography to capture post-war scenes of destruction and hope, his images as historical reminders, social interventions, and counter-narratives to disturbing disappearances that have occurred. And Wolfe, influential throughout this work and my memoir series in particular, photographs his everyday in the form of a visual diary, each image a captioned snapshot as a memory against its own disappearance, generating a fragmented portrait of his and his family’s life across one year. All three of their artistic approaches to photo-based memory work are in the name

⁷² Coming full circle, it is important to note that the works of Miyako, Jaar, and Wolfe as well as other artists were shown in the EDCP 405 class, so the echoes of their artistries within our work is possible and likely. In my work specifically, they are of particular influence and their echoes are evident: Miyako (objects, beloveds), Jaar (absence, metaphor), Wolfe (memoir, the everyday). As well, other artists had echoic influence in the show, such as New Zealand sculptor Peter Majendie’s piece *185 Chairs*, the muse for participant Paul Best’s piece *Untitled (Student Chair)*. Tracing this artist’s echo through Paul’s work, Paul extends a meaningful poetic conversation with the artist in making his offering towards disappearance, rendering the white chair as a visual echo and conceptual sentiment of Majendie’s white chairs, one for every victim. In a way, Paul’s work marks chair #186.

of creative remembering/remembrance (Batchen, 2004; Keightley & Pickering, 2012) and in some cases forgetting (Connerton, 2008/1989). Together, they refuse a certain kind of disappearance. As historical visual artifacts and art, they are against their own erasure from social memory.

As I imagine the prospective echoes and artistic reverberations of these works and our exhibition offering as a whole, it is possible such echoes and reverberations (be they artistic, pedagogical, methodological, poetic, and/or personal) may find their way back into the classrooms, both mine and those of my participants who teach, perhaps informing new photography, affecting ways of seeing and photographing, and/or impacting future research, writing, art, and pedagogy. The beauty of this reverberation, especially when positioned in art and photo teacher education, is in its potential, for we know not where or how far educational and artistic echoes may travel, what/whom they might affect, or how (and how long) echoes of significance might stay with a person as markers of influence or inspiration over the duration of their educational and creative lives. In a way, these artist's echoes are *photographic traces of pedagogy beyond rooms*.

~

Through photographic inquiry and visual lifewriting, our group has come to know, delicately, the material of memory as a supple yet ephemeral object or essence. In this work, the process of inquiring through photography and visual lifewriting enables us to consider both memory and disappearance as a site and “scene of pedagogical address” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 99) whereby the images, image-making, and image-sharing process and the context of their becoming became both teacher and teachable. Disappearance itself is not an easy subject, as it invites a knowing that there is a loss or potential loss and, in that way, a disruption or rupture. To be *against* disappearance, then, is to be *against* that loss – to fight for what has already been or may be lost or left behind – and/or to fight for what or who or where should remain and, therefore, not disappear. Thought another way, to be *with* disappearance is to be with or alongside an absence, a process or reason for disappearing, or perhaps to fight for the right for something to disappear, be disappeared, erased, or be let go.

The artistic approaches to photo-based memory work emerging from our exhibition and study deliver a suite of knowings that chase (and trace) the echoes of disappearance, some of them born from intimate closeness with some kind of loss or potential loss, such as my longing for foreverness towards the black and white photograph of my father atop Stone Mountain. They became mediated through the production and presence of the photographic image and, in one case, a sculpture. As Joanne thoughtfully noted, “The image is what actually is against the disappearance” (Joanne Ursino, interview). Indeed, the photographic act can be considered an act

against disappearance, as many of the images in our show are against the disappearance of the things photographed – and in some cases, the photographer.

Revisiting the group artist statement, we can remember the ways each of the eight artists (and all eight artists collectively as one) approached disappearance in the exhibition, imagining the potential resonations or echoes from each artist and work and, in some ways, how they echo one another:

Collectively, the works attempt to narrate, personalize, and perhaps even complicate photography's role in *marking* and *making* memory, including, in some cases, difficult memory. As a group of artists and arts educators, we seek to explore photography's creative and disruptive potential as an agent to memory in a time where disappearance takes many forms: *the disappearance of the traditional darkroom and printed matter, the disappearance of slowness, the disappearance of ourselves behind screens and smartphones, the disappearance of memory, the disappearance of stories (including stories of disappearance), the disappearance of our beloveds...and the disappearance of time itself.*

These images hope to collectively illuminate, from 8 different points of view, what might become possible through photographic acts *in search of memory* and *against disappearance* – one still frame, one remembered moment, and one fragment of memoir at a time. (Excerpt from our group artist statement, presented in Chapter 5)

As a curator, I juxtaposed our works in the gallery and do the same here, borrowing lines from some artist statements to offer a sense of the artists' approaches to disappearance:

Kathleen's work is against the great loss that is suicide and, by confronting it, is against the disappearance of human life and critical conversations on important, challenging subjects (such as suicide) in art education and beyond.

Paul's sculpture, *Untitled (Student Chair)*, speaks to a mass disappearance that has already occurred and cannot be undone. In its place is the white chair, a memento against forgetting the lives lost in a tragic earthquake and the students who no longer sit there.

Niloofar's photographs of residue are against cultural disappearance, a visual metaphor for decay and the destruction of a previous life in Iran.

Hari's rephotograph of her once-home is a fragile revisitation, through photowalking, to a place of memory, “an uncanny act against disappearance” (Hari Im, artist statement)

Joanne's work is against disappearance threefold: 1) the quilt and memories of the march; 2) the “loss of women's political voices and actions...on the margins;” and 3) “the disappearance of the work of the hand, and the intimacy of touch and the gesture” (Joanne Ursino, artist statement).

Andrew's parallel photographs of juxtaposed contrasting landscapes engage “an artistic approach that was *Against Disappearance*” (Andrew Smith, artist statement). His

work is against the loss and digital disappearance of those experiences in photographic, archival form.

Paul's Bus Stop series performs a search for memory through an artistic act that is *against* and at the same time *renders* disappearance. He captures the now-gone bus passengers' "temporary presence recorded by their heat signature against the frosted glass wall of the stop, a ghostly memory of their existence" (Paul Best, artist statement).

Matthew's work addresses the disappearance of privacy and children's innocence. He is "against becoming just another image in a flood of lives shown bare" and "against us disappearing into that flood" (Matthew Sinclair, artist statement).

Lastly, my work (*Blake*) is a visual lifewriting project of memoir and "a rumination on loss and hope" that is against the disappearance of all the precious "things I am afraid to lose and always want to remember" (Blake Smith, artist statement).

Together, we have approached 'being against disappearance' and the 'search for memory' in eight very different and aesthetically complex ways, creating a rich research collage of photographic thinking and doing that, now made public, may echo elsewhere. We employed artistic approaches *to* and renderings *of* disappearance that evoke and provoke conversation and further consideration for photographers, teachers, researchers, curators, students, and others. When juxtaposed, our statements and our images create an invitational third space where the contrast of ideas, the gradation of understandings, and the creativity and subjectivity of photographic expression blend, bend, and sometimes blur. As a collection, I believe they become enriched and deepened because of the unique variations on a single theme and how they are aligned as a multi-layered visual lifewriting⁷³ crafted with material, memory, and meaning emerging from the texts and textures of our lives.

⁷³ The lexicon also attempts to speak to these variations and multiple layers, unravelling meaning while at the same time working to caress it into a new form that can hold and behold the poetry and pedagogy of its entanglements.



Fig. 88 | By Matthew Sinclair, Cropped selection⁷⁴ from *Forever*

Offering No. 4

Tracing an “Ethics of Seeing” (Sontag, 1977, p. 3): *On Cultivating Visual Awareness*

In this image, we see two little feet in black shoes dangle loosely from the denim legs of a small child, likely swinging on a swing set in a gravel yard as a single streak of pale yellow sunlight falls diagonally across the picture as her underline. Perhaps caught in mid-swing or in a moment of stillness, this memory is now photographically archived in time – an imprint of innocence. Cropped just above the child’s knees and placed at the top left corner of the composition, the photographer, participant Matthew, limits our view of this tiny human (his daughter), establishing a photographic boundary for knowing and seeing. A simultaneous act of protection and artistic license, his move to remove part but not all of her from the scene is both aesthetic and ethical as he makes visible his concerns for what Sontag (1977) called an “ethics of seeing” (p. 3) regarding his young child and perhaps others, while creating a playful cropped image of

⁷⁴ The idea to crop Matthew’s piece entitled *Forever* and present an image only of this photograph (1 of 2 in his diptych) came from a conversation I had with participant Paul Best, who suggested the strength of the single square image.

swinging feet. This photograph suggests the pedagogy of the image in what is teachable here with regards to images as access to others, consent and young children (in photographs, exhibitions, and academic dissertations), potential voyeuristic vision, and photographic and pedagogical responsibility and creativity related to ethics. These issues, along with others, speak to the importance of developing, teaching, and understanding the dynamics of visual awareness in photographable and viewing contexts, particularly with vulnerable and young subjects.

Matthew's photograph and the artist statement that accompanied it help open up conversations on an "ethics of seeing" (Sontag, 1977, p. 3) by highlighting some of what is at stake in the photographic image from three points of view: subject (a young child), photographer (a father and art teacher), and viewers (the audience and consumers of his work). Together, these three vantages form an unscripted dialogue of curiosity, risk, vulnerability, intrigue, control, artistry, and desire all in relation to a single image that places consent and seeing as its forward feet. As arts educators who teach photography and take photographs, the members of this research group learned, in part through Matthew's work and others including Kathleen and myself, of the responsibility we have in educating our students and ourselves on issues of ethicality and thinking about the consequences of posting our lives (and children) online, understanding that part of our pedagogical impact and artistic efficacy relies on how we attend to ethics. Where ethics fits or could fit into existing and emerging curriculum is a question I raise, understanding the need for curriculum to keep up with modern times and the medium it serves (Gude, 2007); in this case, a complicated one, thriving in a rapidly-shifting digital and networked environment that art and photo educators and teacher educators must keep up with in order to keep up with their students and the times.

As a pedagogical project, the exhibition *Against Disappearance* works to address the challenge of ethics in the digital landscape by embracing the creativity, complexity, and subjectivity of doing photographic memory work in/as/for research. Through the practice, teaching, research, curation, and an exhibition of photography, our group has come to learn how ethical decision-making is present and important throughout all of these processes, presenting an array of issues that required our attention, response, and care. We also came to understand how much more there is to know and learn.

As a researcher who teaches and makes art, this research evokes, reflects, and challenges my pedagogical perspective in terms of how I am thinking about ethical questions as they relate not only to this work but to the work of others, including visual researchers, photographers, teachers and teacher educators, and students who work with photography. My interest in ethics draws on my experiences teaching photography, including a lack of education on the topic at one

point and mistakes I may have made in not teaching ethics at times when I could have. It also draws on my experiences both behind the camera and in the gallery as a curator engaging with other photographers' work and ethical codes – the variety of which is stunning in its disparities in terms of how ethics are interpreted and where they are expected to apply. These experiences shape how I come to view this research. They frame my perspective in how I see ethics as a teacher, teacher educator, photographer, curator, researcher, and graduate student as well as someone who is worried if it is being talked about enough in learning spaces. My interest lies in the in-betweens of these roles and the ways conversations on ethics thread, or could be threaded, amongst them.

In some ways, my writing here is a testimonial towards my experiences trying to teach and learn and live ethics, alongside my desire to engage in critical conversations on ethics in photo and art education, acknowledging a necessary learning curve. Having explored and considered photography from many different experiential roles, there is a longing to address the here and now of photography through a contemporary lens, while noting a gap in the current literature in art and photo education whereby ethics is not a heavily trending topic, particularly for teachers, – yet perhaps could be. However, it is important to highlight the impactful work being done by numerous scholars and educators around ethics that helps shape this work – particularly around visual inquiry – and that represents a variety of insightful scholarship that provides a deeper understanding of ethic's complexities (see Aldridge, 2012; Batsleer, 2011; Fairey, 2018; Joanou 2017/2009; McAra, 2016; McClure, 2009; Lykes, 2010; Sinner & Owen, 2011; and other scholars cited in Chapter 2 under Theme 4: Ethics). Based on my own lived experiences, my desire is notably for more overlap in the worlds of research, teaching, and practice so that the realm of theory is less separated from the realm of actual classrooms and field-based practice.

I became exposed to ethics as a new researcher in post-secondary education and less so as a teacher, although it was on my horizon. Therefore, part of my wondering in this study was how the two fields might speak to one another and perhaps learn together about this topic. In some ways, this study sought to do just that. As Sontag (1977) wrote, “The ethical content of photographs is fragile” (p. 21) and so a discussion on ethics in photography is fragile as well, with no single right way or ethical checklist to follow. Rooted in this study, contemporary ethics are considered within a living framework of what to talk and teach about for areas of photography education, photography teacher education, and photo-based research including a/r/tography. For example, could Sontag, Barthes, and Butler and the works of Jaar and Miyako be brought into today's classrooms as a way to open conversations on ethics? How is our exhibition an opening towards furthering these conversations? Additional questions are raised that help further an inquiry:

What counts as ethics?

What can we learn from ethics?

*As visual artists, educators, and researchers,
what is important to address about ethics right now and for the future? Who decides?*

How are ethics understood and negotiated in research versus art or teaching, and how are those understandings disseminated widely so that common language and practices can exist?

*How might conversations and practices on ethics change, grow, and adapt
as the modern digital, social, and educational landscapes continue to change, grow, and adapt?*

Thinking a/r/tographically, how might one ethical context inform and speak to another (art, research, teaching, learning, curation)?

How do we talk to youth and children about ethics? How do we talk to teachers and artists? To ourselves?

What/where are the overlaps or gaps in dialogue, method, theory, and context?

What does/what could ethics in photography curriculum look like?

What is missing or problematic?

Whose ethics?

In the hopes of fostering a heightened sense of visual awareness around the photographic image, photographic practice, and the contexts in which images are taught, made, shared, critiqued, and circulated (such as galleries, public spaces, online, on social media, books, and schools), these questions and many more emerge from a place of lived experience with photography as well as a place of not knowing and wanting to know more. This study is an opening for further exploration.

A range of connected yet unique ethical contexts in this research emerged as significant and could be explored for further study, including: ethics in memory work, ethics in photographic inquiry and the lifecycle of images (Edwards, 2007), ethics in a research group, and ethics in curation. Each issue presented its own challenges, addressed as they arose and in some cases, linger still. Ethics played a central role in the navigation and understanding of photo-based research within our group and my role as researcher, as we grappled not only with the ethics involved in our photographic practices (of taking, sharing, exhibiting, disseminating, etc.) but also with the ethics of being in a group collaborating insofar as how we exchanged ideas and attended to one another and the work we produced and exhibited. I have gathered some of those grapplings next, acknowledging that this is not an exhaustive list. Connected to the discomforts shared next in Offering No. 5, this sharing is part of our “pedagogy of discomfort” (Boler, 1999, p. 175), as I

acknowledge the important new learnings gained from each one, despite their potential difficulty. Within a context of visual awareness whereby one attends to and reflects on the ethics emerging from photographic inquiry, this list represents areas in which ethical considerations or challenges arose. Their presence across various aspects of this study suggests: 1) the permeation of ethical demands and considerations upon and within research, teaching, photography, gallery work, and group work; and 2) that ethics is potentially involved in more areas of a research project than could be known from the start and therefore may need to be revisited⁷⁵ more than once so that ethical commitments can stay in line with ethical concerns that arise, keeping an active dialogue on ethics.

Some Ethical Dilemmas Presented in This Work:

On the ethics of image consent, including children
On the ethics of representation: being pictured by others; picturing others; curating others
On the ethics of portraiture and memory work in an exhibition and dissertation
On the ethics of photowalks in “emotionally and aesthetically loaded places” (Kathleen Nash, artist statement)
On the ethics of addressing suicide and loss, photographically and with respect
On the ethics of vulnerability in sharing artwork with a public audience
On the ethics of vulnerability in visual lifewriting and memoir/memory work
On the ethics of visual lifewriting about beloveds, now and particularly after they are gone
On the ethics of bearing witness to challenging or discomforting work
On the ethics of the photos not taken
On the ethics of what stories to tell or not to tell
On the ethics of captions, didactics, and image attribution accuracy
On the ethics of collaborative photography and authorship
On the ethics of addressing disappearance in the Canadian context of stories of disappearance⁷⁶
On the ethics of evoking memory, potentially painful or triggering
On the ethics of not evoking memory or making space for lifewriting as life telling
On the ethics of participation while leading
On the ethics of self-curation
On the ethics of equitable voice, careful listening, and decision-making within a group

⁷⁵ I wish to acknowledge the personal influence of Dr. Cynthia Nicol from The University of British Columbia in teaching me about the importance of revisiting ethical consents during a research project, something I learned in our group’s work with the teachers from Dadaab, Kenya. I am grateful for this lesson and will carry it with me.

⁷⁶ My reference to disappearance here refers to the thousands of Indigenous women and girls that have gone missing or been murdered in Canada and The United States, referred to as the [Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women](#). Indigenous women endure a disproportionate level of violence, and this is a national tragedy for both countries, still in a process of being understood and investigated. For further Canadian context and information, see the [National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) and a relevant [article by the New York Times](#), referring to this great loss as genocide. In the American context, the House of Representatives Bill 1585 Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2019 was passed in 2019 by the House on April 4, 2019 and is stalled in the Senate. The Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives was authorized in November of 2019 to address communities’ concerns regarding missing and murdered women and girls. It is clear there is more work and research to be done on this important, tragic issue in Canada, The United States, and around the world.

On the ethics of building and maintaining trust in relationships
On the ethics of image circulation and the digital futures of this work

This collection of ethical demands and dilemmas represents some of the bigger concerns that had to be attended to in the doing of this work, some arising during the study and others in retrospect after. In sharing them, I share the image behind the image, revealing places where hesitancy, fear, uncertainty, surprise, anxiety, new understandings, assumptions, and questions came to bear on this process and researcher and thus, affected its outcomes. They raise possible implications for individuals or groups who may wish to take up work like mine by highlighting a wide range of issues and contexts where ethics is present, important, and potentially pervading.

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As a way to study ethics in the context of photo-based memory work, the exhibition *Against Disappearance* offered participants an educational environment and safe space to explore and confront our own ethical practices, considerations, challenges, and understandings within the context of a group and a group show. Being in a creative community of practice enabled the group members' working knowledge about and practice of ethics to become stretched, allowing us to face our discomforts together. The exhibition became a way to think about ethics, practice making ethical decisions, and to embody one's own photographic and learning experience while considering the ways new understandings about ethics could be applied to our individual lives as artists, teachers, curators, and/or researchers. Further, the show became an active space for debate and dialogue, as exhibition viewers were invited to encounter notions of disappearance from eight artists' viewpoints and experience their own ethical negotiations with the artwork and artist statements. Addressing topics that range from the challenges of photographing home and disappearing in image floods to the loss of a family member, the works are visual lifewritings that engage *with* and *against* disappearance – writings that speak photographically of our lives, losses, and loves. To be disquieted by some of this imagery was one potential provoked response as part of the invited 'pedagogy of witnessing' (Simon, 2014), as the discomfort of disappearance revealed that not all the artworks are light-hearted. Some are heavier than others.

Thinking with Boler's (1999) "pedagogy of discomfort" (p. 175) along with Zembylas's (2017) related "ethic of discomfort" (p. 2), we learned, through encountering these photographs (and as photographers, through making them), how to face and speak of difficult images (Green, 2004; Linfield, 2010; Reinhardt, et al., 2007). We learned how to welcome the kinds of learning and teachability that comes from them, even if it is difficult or discomfoting. As art teachers and artists, we take up the challenge of engaging with photography as/through critical pedagogy in the

discussion, curation, and teaching of difficult knowledge (Ellsworth, 2005; Gil-Glazer, 2015; Lehrer, Milton, & Patterson, 2011; Simon, 2011) by reflecting on the qualities of pedagogy that might safely yet provocatively surround the knowledge and knowledge-making process. In turn, we consider how that curation, content, and process might be educational (O'Neill & Wilson, 2010) and productively disruptive. As such, an exhibition of disappearance can be discomfiting pedagogically *and* a creative disruption, offering artistic practice as a poetic form and forum for intuitive seeing, deeper discussions, and a way to critically and creatively engage challenging subjects through photographic and perhaps other forms of inquiry. For an array of examples of photographic and visual inquiry relevant to this discussion, see: Bean, 2005; Decker, 2012; Eldon & Eldon, 1997; Goldberg, Andre, Brookman, Livingston, & Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1996; Goldin, Ritchey, Steidl, & Keller, 2007; Hanieh & Walker, 2007; Iwakura, & Kaneko, 1995; Jaar, 1998; Jaar, Jacob & Princenthal, 2005; Klett & Fox, 2011; Leggo, 2010; Mazadiego & Sterrett, 2011; Meiselas, 2012; Miyako, 2008/2005 a&b; Powell, 2015; Reinhardt, 2007; Riaño-Alcalá, 2004; Prosser, 2005; Sinner & Owen, 2011; and Smith, 2018/2015/2014. Thus, the exhibition site and process can be seen as a potentially safe space for tough and tender subject matter to be artfully addressed and explored in a mature manner – in the context of this study, within a trusted community of practice whereby the inquiry into difficult knowledge was a road not travelled alone. Thinking the exhibition as a “pedagogy of discomfort” (Boler, 1999, p. 175) positioned it as an artistic learning event with ethical demands, inviting discussion, exposure to new ideas, creative expression, and the potential for being affected or made different. In ‘making our curriculum public’ (Ibáñez-Carrasco & Meiners, 2004) via an exhibition, artwork, and dissertation, we created a unique opportunity that exposed a public audience to new conceptions and imagery of what it might mean to be with and against disappearance in ways that they may not have previously considered or seen, while outwardly expressing our own current understandings and stances as artists and educators.

As well, the artworks imbue and reflect the creative and possibly disruptive nature of memory work, potentially expanding and/or unsettling perceptions and expectations around disappearance (and concepts related to disappearance) as well as the reach of photographic inquiry. As such, the artworks invite further understandings towards the role, rigor, and potential failure of photo-based memory work to help us see and re-see the nuances and imagery of lived experience in new, different, and unexpected ways. Thought this way, the exhibition became a form of artistic, a/r/tographic activism whereby the act of ‘being against disappearance’ was a political, poetic, and pedagogical move that was *against* erasure and *for* hope of a better future where our dreams for an ethics of photography are not disappeared.

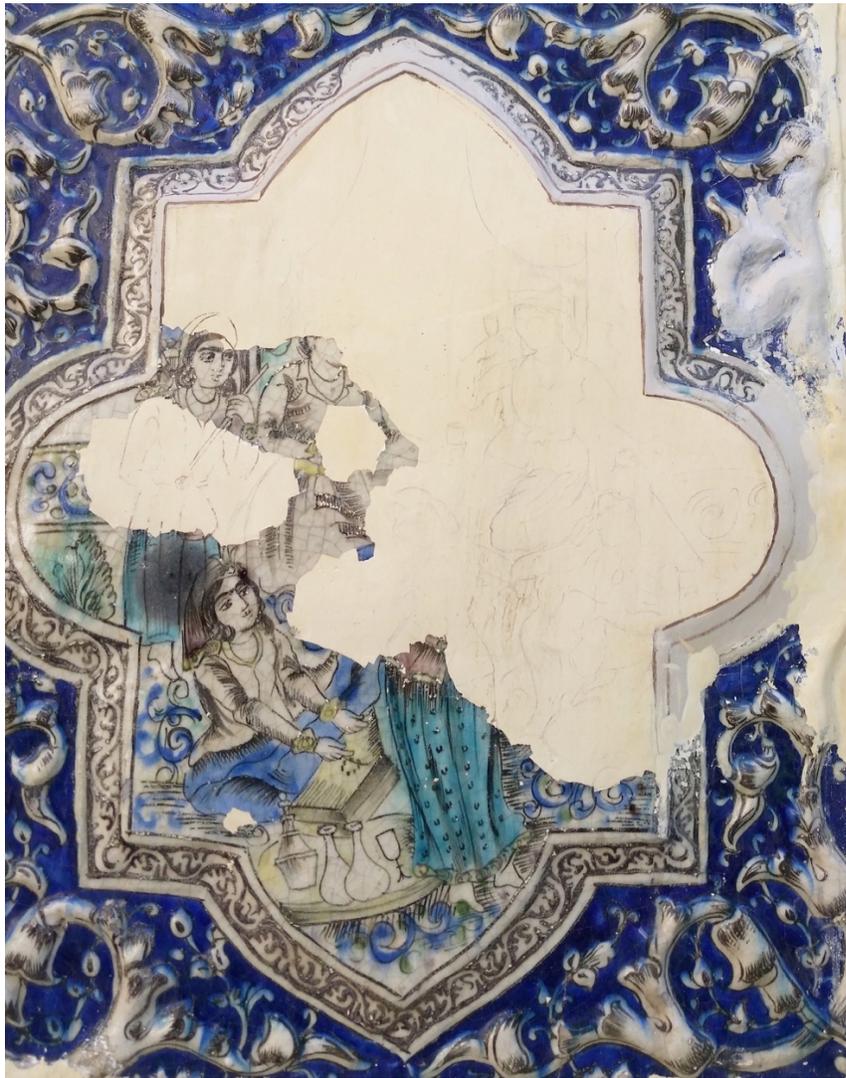


Fig. 89 | By Niloofer Miry, *Residue #1*

Offering No. 5

Tracing Duration & Necessary Discomfort: On Rendering an Extended Image

*In a photograph of an ancient tile from Tehran, Iran, parts of the original indigo and green pigments have broken off or faded away, revealing underneath on half the tile an under-layer of an artist's pencil markings. As a sketch of what once was, or what was to come, we can imagine what the finished piece may have looked like from this now-faded, once-complete image weathered by time and history. Part of a wider photographic series that anchors it, entitled *Residue*, the photographer, an Iranian-Canadian woman, artfully traces this delicate historical residue with her camera. She captures a moment of slow cultural disappearance by freezing the tile in time as it continues what is likely further decay. Here, both a passage of time and a moment in time are captured, marking a double duration. Certain photographs and*

photographers help to trace duration in their capacity to mark time across time (such as, in a series, in a memoir, or through chronology) by documenting changes, iterations, and collections that visualize transformations, be they subtle or bold. Photographic time becomes marked by clicks of the shutter (another duration) in scenes that will never reoccur, capturing things as they are only in that very moment. To render those moments is to render time standing still.

In photography, there is a term for a concept I love that speaks to the form of this dissertation as a method for rendering time: *the extended image*. As an open-ended self-portrait or portrait assignment I gave every year to advanced photography classes and was given to me as an assignment once, this project invites the photographer to study the self or a particular subject or place over a period of time – a duration, a continuance in or measure of time. The invitation is to render the portrait as an extended image: a suite of images that come together like a collage or film strip to form *another image* (and tell another story) of something, perhaps fragmented or multidimensional. Generally, one takes a single photographic image and adds to it over time, thereby extending it, so that, like a photobook, singular images become narratively hinged as they form a sequential yet not necessarily chronological collection or series. Sontag (1977) writes, “Because each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted” (p. 106). Each image depends on the other to complete the extended image, creating “pictures as bookends” (Wolfe, 2007, p. 8) to one another. A strong influence on this study as aforementioned is photographer Byron Wolfe’s series *Everyday: A Yearlong Visual Diary* (2007), one compelling example of an extended image and what I would consider a visual lifewriting project of memoir.

Like the ‘Lexicon for *Against Disappearance*’ which is an extended poetic data image, this concept is Sontag’s ‘cubist thinking’ in photographic form, as extended images show more than one view, thus, alternative yet connected views of one subject at the same time – like what you might see when looking at a photographer’s contact sheet and similar to how we approached disappearance in the exhibition. It invites juxtaposition and narrative reading. For a/r/tographic research, it is a productive visual and conceptual reference for thinking of how and why I have creatively initiated, documented, amalgamated, shared, and reflected on the many pieces of this research into one holistic view that intends to be both panoramic and sweeping yet intimately close up. As well, it can be considered a metaphor for ‘extending the image’ of what constitutes knowledge, knowing, seeing, and research. Methodologically, I suggest this reference asks and informs the following: how to render an accurate extended image of what has been studied and experienced, capturing its wingspan; how to behold, caption, and curate the extended duration of an inquiry as it spans across years, piles of material, and peoples’ lives, most of all my own; how to

express the magnitude, mystery, and missteps of that duration into the writing as a form of durational inquiry (here: written, living, and photographic) that signifies the time of its becoming and its becoming over time; and last, how to link together honestly both the soaring highs and the painful lows of this work, while finding stable middle ground as a safe place from which to share this research story and the ways it has extended my understandings.

In this study, *photographic time* is artistically explored and expressed through the work of eight artists in varying images and ways, revealing notions of duration evident in and tied to both the work and its creators. Life histories are bound up in these artworks through the lived experiences of the photographers who each bear durations of our own, such as learning, creating, teaching, researching, and living. Boulton-Funke (2015) writes, “Time as duration is then understood as a mixture, a relational experience wherein the past, present and future coexist” (p. 143). As a narrative form, the extended image in/as research tries to take into account these human fragilities and generate a portrait of experience that embodies the story it tells so that “past, present and future [*can*] coexist.” It is an image that lives and breathes, expanding and contracting like lungs, following the rhythm of events and experiences as they unfold.

Ellsworth writes, “To think experimentally about “important cultural transformations still very much ‘in the making’” (Ockman, 2000, p. 22), we need concepts and languages that will grasp, without freezing or collapsing, the fluid, continuous, dynamic, multiple, uncertain, nondecomposable qualities of *experience in the making*” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 3-4). In this study, our work renders an extended image of our “experience in the making” through shared acts against disappearance, reflecting the imagery of our linked photographic time: a shared duration, narrated here in a single shot of many images – not all of them photographs and not all of them picturesque.

To create narrative balance and speak truth to the things that were less than picturesque and in fact were challenging is to attend to the extended image as an honest summary, one that includes the fragments that perhaps were/are more difficult than the others to hold. Here, this includes the things that I rubbed up against, that pushed me, that were challenging, or that I was disappointed by. To do so is to attend to the task of researchers, teachers, and artists pursuing meaningful work, willing to bare vulnerabilities and locate areas of improvement as well as discomfort. In those rubbings, pushes, challenges, and disappointments are moments of valuable, humble learning from which we can become better, do better. Without them, the surface of our work is too shiny and the rust, dents, and scratches that reveal its character are missing. In visual lifewriting and lifewriting that attends to memory (Cixous, & Calle-Gruber, 1997), we may choose to go to the dark places, the tender places, in order to mend them and make our amends and tell

the full story – and we may not. These tellings help shape the research in a robust and important way. As Leggo reminds us, “Lifewriting is fraught with dangers, wrought with tensions, bought with tears and laughter, always caught up in mysteries beyond all telling. Lifewriting is much like living life. Of course, there are many dangers in lifewriting, but there are also many dangers in avoiding lifewriting” (Leggo, 2019b, p. 69).

To attend to lifewriting as ethical practice and share some of the challenges I experienced in doing this work, I share a list of ten significant aspects of this study that were difficult and had to be negotiated in a variety of ways; some were never fully resolved, becoming considerations for future research and thought. Through this reflection, I confront these challenges and discomforts, considering what good came of the moments of tension, disappointment, fatigue, uncertainty, desire, failure, messiness, and regret, which are all part of the duration of my and our learning process and give texture to this research story. As an opportunity to go deeper and think about the complexities of visual lifewriting as a method, I attend here to the places that were somewhat sticky yet were all teachable ethical moments. I take guidance here from Irwin et al., stating: “While much has been written in a/r/tography about the need for autobiographical inquiry (Irwin, 2003; 2004a; Irwin & deCosson, 2004) more needs to be written about the challenges and insights gained through collective artistic and educational praxis” (Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, Xiong, & Bickel, 2006, p. 85).

Ten Significant Things I Found Challenging or of Discomfort in This Work:

1. **Anxiety.** Pushing for and maintaining ethical photographic practice. Inadvertently, creating some anxiety around picturing. Concerned if our collective work would be seen as good art by legitimate artists or simply student work.
2. **Bridge.** Finding a way to bridge all of our artwork and individual artist statements under one meaningful umbrella around the theme of ‘against disappearance.’ Curating for visual and conceptual flow so the works could speak to each other and evoke conversation.
3. **Closure.** A personal nostalgic longing for closure: Due to timing and personal commitments, our whole group of eight never came to see the show *together*. This is an experience I wish would have occurred; however, we were able to see it in groups and in other ways.
4. **Collaborations.** In photographic collaborations: authorship, ownership, and co-decision making. How to write/speak openly and honestly of collaborations and their challenges. How to share space. Sharing a camera. Fair or equal sense of contribution and being seen. Finding time to collaborate. Doing collaborations with friends. Truly seeing another person.
5. **Emotional cost.** The emotional cost of doing visual lifewriting and memoir work while some of the things I love are slowly slipping away or died during the process. The decision to keep those painful photographs in the show anyways. As well, the emotional cost of *not*

sharing this work, crucial markers in my and our journey and evidence of a durational photography inquiry.

6. **Futures.** The digital and emotional future of our images and where they will travel, how they will (or will not) be attributed and potentially edited/reprinted in the future. The desire to have the work live on in other ways – *to have it (us) not disappear.*
7. **Logistics.** Getting all the artwork and didactics prepared for the show (i.e. edited, proofed, printed, matted, framed, paid for, and hung). The potential for more delegation balanced with a need for control. Communication and timing with certain people was a challenge.
8. **Memory work.** How to respectfully do memory work on disappearance on Musqueam land, an unresolved challenge.
9. **Tension.** The decision to center my work perhaps too heavily, potentially dominating the spotlight or taking away from the other participants' work. The tension and creative challenge of bringing together solo and group work. Exhibiting art as part of research creation and public dissemination. Sharing the private with the public.
10. **Vulnerability.** Being vulnerable to the commentary and critiques of others, including colleagues, mentors, students, family, other artists, and friends. Being vulnerable in sharing our work publicly. Being vulnerable as a writer.

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As evident in this list of discomforts, during the duration of this study, as a new researcher I learned so much about the challenging yet inspiring nature of a/r/tographic research, particularly within groups involving collaboration, about organizing a group exhibition, when producing and curating photographs, and in trying to carry too much of the weight of the work at once. At times, it was difficult to hold space well, as I felt the importance and strain of a large effort looming, and there were many important details and many moving parts to attend to. Although they understood the demands of an exhibition and research study, through some of the post-show interviews I learned I may have inadvertently created stress in sharing my worries with some of the participants. Most of all, and although its duration was one year, the felt time of this project flew by. By the time the show was finally up and the opening had happened, it felt like the summer had passed in the blink of an eye, and it was already time to take it down. I had barely breathed and did not spend as much time lingering with the works all together in that luminous space as I had wished for.

Speaking of challenges and resolving tension, throughout this process and project, I was confronted by unexpected yet necessary moments of uncertainty, vulnerability, anxiety, discomfort, and perfectionism – all moments I had to negotiate and find my way through. Personally, I struggled with certain issues, such as: decision-making and time management; wondering if I was asking the right questions in interviews, overpopulating the space, and losing one interview; battling insecurity; financial costs of the exhibition; data oversaturation and over-

collection; how to do research with friends and former students; and being fully present as I was doing all of this while teaching. While none of these struggles may be unique, my experience reveals some of the challenges of learning how to do qualitative, a/r/tographic research, highlighting potential areas for deeper inquiry as to their effect on methodology and new researchers. In wrestling these confrontations, in part through writing about them, I have learned that we in some ways wrestle ourselves, becoming reminded that we learn as much from our struggles as from our successes and in many ways become reshaped by them.

In what might have been a need for control and/or part of academic busyness, I took on many roles at the same time. This desire to be at the wheel not only shaped much of the project but stretched me in multiple directions at once, which in some regards was an exciting challenge I was used to, yet at other times was overwhelming, energy depleting, and in some ways not collaborative. Yet, being an a/r/tographer and inquiring through a/r/tographic ways lends itself to the dynamics and demands of engaging multiple, simultaneous professional roles which are not separate but rather interlinked, informing one another. In those dynamics and demands, a/r/tographers actively and reflectively seek the in-between spaces of our work for teachable moments from which to strengthen our practice and grow our palette of lived experiences with and through art. Of note, much of this stretching was not uncommon and in fact created interesting, important layers of experience and insight from which to draw upon: a teacher's eye on an exhibition and its pedagogical lingerings, a curator's eye on images and their capacity for juxtaposition, a photographer's eye on research and its visual narrative, and a researcher's eye on memory work and disappearance. Thus, a compelling yet complicated space was revealed between being teacher, being curator, being artist, and being researcher, challenging the roles and responsibilities of each and considering where they touch, overlap, coalesce, sing, come alongside, and sometimes collide.

However, the complications and power dynamics of overlapping roles was something I had failed to consider as a possible area of discomfort for the participants and was brought up in our final focus group (post-exhibition), taking me by surprise. The decisions to not only facilitate the study and exhibition but also to: 1) participate, as a featured artist, in the exhibition I curated in conversation with the participants; and 2) show our group's work in the gallery I, at the time, was a curator of both became important points of discussion. Something I learned from my mentor, Dr. Karen Meyer, is about the importance of writing about and addressing the 'messiness' of our research, how doing so adds breadth, meaning, reflexivity, and truthfulness to our writing and life stories (Leggo, 2004; Roorbach & Keckler, 2008) based on living inquiry. Leggo (2010) writes, "Life is abundant, and lifewriting is a way of focusing on some particulars of that abundance in order to

recognize some of the possibilities of meaning that lie always in the seemingly tangled messiness of lived experiences” (p. 67). At our last focus group in October of 2016, for our final question to close out the study, I thought of Dr. Meyer’s teaching and asked everyone about messiness by inviting them to share what was messy about the study, our process, my leadership, and/or the exhibition in terms of anything that was difficult or challenging. One person spoke up. Having read a book earlier that year called *I like your work: art and etiquette* (2009) by Paper Monument, Matthew shared an impression it left on him in relation to our show and my role in it:

On one of the first pages it says if you’re a curator, you’re not allowed to include your work in the show...It was one of those serendipitous moments where I had bought the book and the next day I was at the gallery helping you hang it...If I was in your position, I would have done the exact same thing, and why should I feel bad about this?...It’s a privileged situation that you are in to be a curator at The Liu Institute but in this instance, in most other instances, I thought it was like so what...It did put a messy spin on things the day that I was hanging the work. It was ruminating in my head ‘I wonder how I really feel about this?’... It’s complicated, but I would hope that nobody who came to view the show ever had a problem with that either. (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

Matthew could be right, and it is possible that they did. Continuing this line of thinking, Joanne replied, reflecting on my roles of being both participant and project facilitator/researcher:

It’s interesting, I like the duality of it. They’re all signifiers and how we separate ourselves that way. There’s this expectation of objectivity... And so there’s a praxis around this. I’m asking you to go with me on this journey and I’m also in this journey. If we had done it without you in the show, it would have been fine, but it would have created a different dynamic, a different power relationship. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

Someone in the group replied, “We would have had a huge piece missing from it.” Another person said, “It would feel like there was the launch pad missing in what brings all these people together.” Matthew responded:

If the whole purpose of it was supposed to be that we’re a collective, whatever you want to call us. If we were a collective, then you had to be shown because you were part of it, you’re a piece of it and whether or not you wanted it to be throughout the visual display, you wanted to show that you were the leader of the collective or not, you needed to be in there. (Matthew Sinclair, interview)

Hearing these reflections from some group members was informative as well as humbling in some ways. They invited me to rethink our process and the intentionality behind it. This research conversation revealed some of the tensions and opportunities of taking on multiple roles and raises interesting questions regarding how to define collaborative work, welcoming critique from participants, and how or if curators-as-researchers-as-artists might curate and participate in their own shows – and if so, in what ways.

Reflecting on Matthew's, Joanne's, and other's comments became a valuable learning moment in this work and allowed for a new understanding and perspective that I had not fully considered. Our discussion that followed suggested to me the impact and trust of open, honest discussions in focus groups and the ways participants become teachers to researchers when we listen. Matthew's disclosure also came as a light shock being shared at the very end of our group's time together and after the show had come down. Had I not asked about messiness, I may not have learned about this concern, and I was glad he felt comfortable enough to express his thoughts. Looking back, he raised an important point upon which the study pivots, had it been designed or curated another way. It not only calls my decisions into question but also calls me to question:

*Do collectives or groups of artists need leaders for big projects,
and what might that leadership look like?
To create greater equity, could we all have shown the same amount of work?
Why did it matter to be seen as worthy, capable artists?
What are the considerations for exhibitions being used in dissertations as data sources?
How different would the outcome and optics be if someone else had curated the show,
such as a guest curator?
On the other hand, what was the value, importance, and necessity of curating our group's show?
What are the benefits of self-curation and group art exhibitions, and
how is that part of contemporary art practice for some artists or artist-curators?*

These are some of the questions I have considered in the afterglow of the study, reflexively considering some of the methodological, curatorial, and personal decisions that shape both the study and my learning as a researcher. And yet, I take to heart what author Natalie Goldberg (2000) writes, that "Mistakes made the endeavor human" (p. 197).

My reflections here suggest the tricky nature of collaborative work, question the role of the curator-artist, expose power dynamics, reveal certain desires and disappointments, and highlight the range of challenges one can face in a single project – including the challenge of facing yourself. They also highlight the importance and catharsis of writing about them to create a sense of balance in the story and to honor the messiness as necessary discomfort that likely exists in all projects. As educators, we know that impactful learning occurs in many places, one of them being discomfort. It is another place to linger. By creating a dialogue with discomfort (including asking participants about their discomforts) and rendering an extended image of one's research that includes this as part of its narrative duration, we can open new spaces of possibility, self-improvement, growth, honesty, openness, risk, courage, relationality, and confidence. By carefully and reflectively attending to the uniqueness and challenges of each step of the research process, including and centering ethics, while remaining open to listening, perhaps next time...we can do better.



Fig. 90 | By Joanne Ursino, *Reading Embodied 1 and 2*. Photographs by Blake Smith.

Offering No. 6

Tracing Desire: On the Importance of Being in & Alongside a Creative Community of Practice

In this diptych, we see the delicate hands of artist-participant Joanne photographed in her home studio as she holds and beholds the signature quilt-back, Women United Against Poverty. The photographs are research artifacts and artworks that bear witness to the autobiographical life of this artist and this quilt, as the images document a becoming in a marking of time, love, devotion, craftsmanship, history, and living inquiry. They also document time spent in the company of another, as one artist (Blake) photographed the other (Joanne) in one of two shared experiences of collaboration in this study (the other being with Kathleen).

In this study, being alongside another artist meant being not alone and offered the opportunity to co-exist, co-create, and co-learn as creatives, as intellectuals, as educators, as students. We learned that we were stronger together than we were apart, and this knowing dictated our movements as a group, committed to learning and growing as a creative community of practice (Irwin, 2018b) whose work involved an exhibition (Triggs, Irwin, Beer, Springgay, Grauer, & Xiong, 2011). Leggo and Irwin (2013) write “A/r/tographers often collaborate in communities of practice where they encourage and interrogate one another, where they bring

distinct expertise to braiding a more complex research agenda with diverse perspectives and practices. In turn, they nurture more and more complex research questions, and mobilize and disseminate knowledge in creative and engaging ways that honor the ways that the arts characteristically evoke and provoke insightful understandings” (p. 152).

Our exhibition hoped to evoke and provoke such understandings and, as a public offering, was a critical gesture towards our group being appreciated as artists and as teachers with something to say. In our art educations, it was a platform for our voices to be heard in a space we are often not. In this way, all of us were finally seen.

The exhibition is one way of tracing this desire to be acknowledged not only as an artist but also by each other, for our community built a sense of trust and relationships that lasted far beyond a course. In seeing each other, we saw a colleague, a fellow teacher and/or artist, and most of all a human being. To look into the eyes of another person and to be recognized as worthy is a majestic humanizing act made possible here through a/r/tographic research experienced *alongside*: being alongside, seeing alongside, walking alongside, photographing alongside, studying alongside, and learning alongside. Speaking of her collaborations with Dr. Carl Leggo, Dr. Rita L. Irwin writes:

...a/r/tography is at once a material and conceptual practice always in a state of movement that exceeds any perceived products, protocols, or practices, in order to embrace emergence, always in movement, always becoming. As such a/r/tography is also committed to reciprocity. To work alongside others opens ourselves up to the unknown and to becoming co-creators of knowledge, co-designers of pedagogy, and co-participants in communities of practice. It is through this reciprocity with others that we become attuned to the potential for inquiry. After all, becoming requires the presence of the others: it is through our dialogue that encounters, invitations, and conversations inspire opportunities to learn anew. (Leggo & Irwin, 2018, p. 51-52)

In a profound experience of coming together for photographic inquiry, our group learned the value of knowing that “becoming requires the presence of the others” (Leggo & Irwin, 2018, p. 51-52) and that we could not do this shared work alone. Appreciating our community of practice and increased capacity for “expansive learning” (Roth, 2012, p. 272) as a result of our co-learning and collaboration, Hari said, “I like having conversations like this. Where else would I have it?” In addition, Kathleen shared the value of participating in this (as she described it) “collaborative research group with artists and educators:”

It gave me a way to have some conversations with people in a similar position one way or another...it brings up common questions, even though our lives and our jobs aren't the same, that are important to some artists and educators. It also gave momentum to prioritizing a dialogue around the same things that are really important. It's good to be able to have those conversations and be able to participate in something creative. I don't make space for that or know how to make space for that or have space for that so of course it's really valuable. (Kathleen Nash, interview)

We *saw* each other in those summers and during that year as we attended with humility to the process of being in community, bearing witness over a meaningful duration of time to the journeys of eight pedagogues and creators (who were also university students) in a state of growth and transformation. Pedagogue means ‘to be beside’ *to guide* ...yet they were guiding me, or rather, we were guiding each other as we walked in unison, this group of photographers, towards an unknown we were comfortable not knowing yet walked forward with spirited enthusiasm anyway. Our pedagogy became our *paragogy*, as we learned as peers from one another. Leggo and Irwin (2018) offer a proposition that is helpful here as a guide for potential collaborators: “Learn together how to attend. By engaging in collaboration and conversation, we teach one another, and we learn from one another, what it means to attend as artists and researchers and teachers” (p. 75).

By tracing our lives beyond the classroom walls and into other in-between learning spaces over time, we attended to the shaping of one another’s journeys – a/r/tographic mirrors to experiences, growth, struggle, change, celebration, endurance, education, transformation, and creativity. This is a rare gift, given the solitary nature of graduate education and teaching alone, plus the kinds of daily pressures everyone seems to be under to perform where *time* becomes the single most treasured, desired item to have, yet we never seem to have enough. Without saying yes and making time for art and research in everyone’s busy lives, there would be no group show, no meetings by the fire over hot tea and Panettone bread, no compelling conversations, and no new understandings emerging because of these art-curricular events. As I reflect, what an incredible honor to be part of that journey-story, made possible by the creation and actions of a creative community of practice who all took a chance and said *yes*.

Described in the next and final offering, Offering No. 7, the in-between spaces of this work are many, with perhaps the richest being our dynamics that emerged and grew, over time, between one another through many memorable conversations and focus groups, while photowalking alongside, in sharing a meal, over email or coffee, and standing in The Lobby Gallery with a sense of accomplishment. This in-between space, between human beings, is perhaps the most precious of spaces and where a different kind of learning occurs: the learning of the other, whereby in their presence we become remade. We also learn how to share space, learn to truly listen, and learn how to care for that delicate ephemeral space between two (or between members of a group) so that it matters and lasts. When artists and educators activate and preserve this space, likely as they do with their own students, relationships are born, and we help one another become who we are not yet but are in the process of becoming. As Sinner and Owen (2011) write, “Becoming represents an experimental and expressive ambient state, a liminal space of transition...” (p. 71).

The rare and special opportunity to stay together after a course ends and continue learning as a free-form photo-based research cohort is to extend the usual pedagogical moment beyond its expected closure and has generated new meanings for those involved. It becomes an afterimage of an experience and itself creates another afterimage which occurred but is now gone: the exhibition *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*. A such, the intentional threading of a protracted art educational moment over a period of time, from a course to a study to a show to a dissertation, offers insights into the ways a group of teachers and artists might collaborate, form communities of belonging, and teach, learn, and make art together in the name of research.

Working directly with class members turned participants offered a special opportunity to gain an understanding of their approaches to art teaching/making, to photography, and to the themes we explored. Together, we experienced how to facilitate group research in focus groups and how to curate, organize, hang, and open a large, professional art show. For some, this was their first research and curation experience, which adds two tools to their respective 'tool belts.' It also gave real-time insight from a grounded perspective into what participants needed and wanted at that time, into their desires and dreams. As a community of inquiry and practice, this collection of individuals can be seen as creative pedagogues whose experiences are valuable towards reimagining visual arts curriculum in a contemporary moment, in Canada and elsewhere, including considering the pedagogical possibilities of photography, memory work, and visual lifewriting.

In this study, being part of a research group on photography immediately following a course on photography offered not only a sense of community and belonging but also extended the momentum, relationality, and creative and dialogic activity from the course in a way that was rhizomatic, reaching beyond and touching something in-the-making but not yet fully formed. The teacher could relearn and come to know her students in a new light, and her students could pursue new learning outside a course yet remain in contact with one another. Pedagogical possibilities, artistic explorations, and teaching and learning in one setting could be explored again in the next – two side by side experiences: another diptych. In a research setting, the group was offered the chance to participate in a creative learning community, to create artwork for an interdisciplinary on-campus summer exhibition, and to *belong* somewhere (Brown, 2017), if only for a brief while.

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My research interviews and observations revealed *desire* (in fact, a range of desires, including photographic ones) as a significant theme among group members, and this writing

attempts to trace that desire. Debriefing our first focus group with me (a recorded practice we did after each meeting), Joanne shared this observation on desire and love:

There is an energy in the room...and I think what you're really seeing is the desire. The desire for connection, the desire for the work, a desire to be better, to offer, to be in community...there's longing in people. There's definitely a devotion, a desire, a love. I think it would be really interesting to speak to the love of this work. I don't think we use the word love enough...what was around this room and what was happening today was about love. Love of the other, love of people, love of young people, love and hope, desire, love of this craft and wanting to be better at it, love of the image, of the visual and what can happen. There was love spoken in this room. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

Joanne's insightful comment sheds light on some of the desires I learned about in this study and helps to elaborate on some of what may have inspired members to continue our conversation into this in-between space where research creation, art making, and new conversation became possible, all sparked by some sense of desire. Referring to the philosophical work on the concept of desire by Deleuze and Guattari, Berard (2017) writes "Desire exists and circulates in assemblages, which is why they often use the term desiring-machine or desiring-assemblage. Desire is not a thing and it cannot be located as pre-existing in a subject, it becomes possible in relationality, desire is all about connectivity and the and...and...and" (p. 45). Thinking of desire as manifesting in an "assemblage" helps to center the importance, in this context, of gathering (assembling) together in community, of embracing collectivity, of being in relation, and of the need for the other.

Through research conversations, I learned more about the participants' desires, including the following: 1) The desire for belonging and to feel connected to something bigger than oneself: being part of a photography community or collective, engaging in shared activity and thinking after a course; 2) The desire for lifelong learning: to learn more about this medium and to strengthen their photography and teaching practices ('to be better'). The desire to gain *new* knowledge, share knowledge *with* others, and illicit knowledge *from* others in similar art teaching positions; 3) The desire for personal and professional development opportunities like this one, specifically opportunities for art making, exhibition, and collaboration in community and outside of school and work; 4) The desire to be seen as relevant, practicing artists and opportunities to showcase this side of themselves; and last, although I am sure there are more, 5) The desire for *time*: time to collaborate with other teachers and artists; time to slow down and reflect on their own lives and learning; time to learn; and, as photographers, time to engage, immerse, and expand in their own photographic practice. These desires highlight certain wantings that help to understand why and how participation in the research group and exhibition was of interest and meaningful to participants and suggests further inquiry into desire in art education and what it might mean. In

his second interview, Paul spoke to the desire and time for making art, for often our careers or lives take precedence and the time for art often falls short:

The upshot of being part of this art class and group is that I've been mindful about creating art and teaching that. I've been very mindful of being an artist; of getting back to creating art again...I'm mindful that for fifteen years, I was so busy trying to be a teacher...But I forgot about the very thing that was important, which was creating the artwork...Now I'm getting back into it. (Paul Best, interview)

That this study offered participants an opportunity to make and exhibit art is a significant benefit to their practice. Furthermore, the group expressed sincere pride in having taken part in the study (as described in the lexicon for the letter P). That we did it as a *group* of art educators and artists, not individual artists showing alone, is also significant for it helps link our efforts to the practice and pedagogy of photography education. In that same interview with Paul, I asked him, "What kinds of art educational experiences and art making are made possible when we are engaging with photographic practice and pedagogy?" He replied, making some key points:

Most importantly, it's actually making it, actually doing it. So getting out and doing it. The second part about it is doing it as a group. It's not an isolating experience that you're just doing something on your own for your own satisfaction or thrill. You do have the power of a group and support from the different members of the group. You get this sort of encouragement so all that's important. So what we were doing was no different from what's been proven in time memorial of groups of artists, such as the Cubists, getting together talking, sharing, and doing their art making. So that was what's good about it...Too often, it's all about me, it's all about the individual artist and putting up a piece of work on the wall. So often we get away from the journey of making art and we concentrate on the art but the journey is the one that's so important. Of course that's what Rita Irwin is talking about when she's talking about being an a/r/tographer. (Paul Best, interview)

In pointing out the importance of the "journey of making art" and "doing it as a group" (Paul Best, interview), both critical aspects of a/r/tography, Paul reminds us how a/r/tographers seek the togetherness of creative companions and experience art making as a journey of self and group exploration to places undiscovered and yet unknown. As such, this tracing illuminates the nature and potency of participating in the a/r/tographic collective and the importance of being alongside in art educational endeavors by creating opportunities and carving out time for alonsidness to occur, specifically through personal and professional development initiatives, including research. We can do this by: 1) looking at and seeking out in-between spaces for/as possibilities, including summer (discussed next); and 2) tracing and acknowledging the driving desires within a group as to what compels their interests and commitments moving forward, in order to attend to the group's needs, narratives, capabilities, directional leans, struggles, passions, expectations, and hopes.



Fig. 91 | By Kathleen Nash, *Conversations (Image 1 of 2)*. Photograph by Blake Smith.

Offering No. 7

Tracing the In-between: *On In-between Spaces as Informal Learning & Making Opportunities*

This image, one of two, is the result of a conversation between myself and Kathleen as we photowalked in contemplation in the lush moss-covered woods of Squamish, B.C. Haunted by a body once found hanging in these woods by Kathleen, in a death by suicide, this image renders an eerie scene of presence and absence, an ethereal in-between of delicate life, marked by our presence here – and early death, marked by the memories these trees hold.⁷⁷ Aesthetically and metaphorically, the empty spaces between the vivid green trees gesture towards the knowledge of this loss as they hold space for the nothingness of something.

In a walking interview turned living artwork, ours was an extension of a conversation about difficult knowledge that began in a course and was further drawn out in those woods through dialogue, walking, and shared photographic inquiry. These woods were also our in-between, a

⁷⁷ After taking this photograph on our photowalk in the woods where the topic of suicide was raised, I later recognized an eerie connection to artist [Ken Gonzalez-Day](#)'s photography series *Hang Trees* and *Erased Lynchings*, introduced to me by Dr. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá of The University of British Columbia in her powerful course on historical memory and social reconstruction. Gonzalez-Day's work and Kathleen's address the loss and the absence of bodies through the presence of photographs in differing ways, both centering trees as sites of memory and haunted subject matter.

place where we met to make images that was between the EDCP 405 course and the exhibition in which this image was later shown, printed large to express “the corporeal body” (Kathleen Nash, artist statement). Both the image and the context of our experience speak to the power of unexpected, in-between spaces being pedagogical and highlight what becomes possible when artists and educators walk alongside, literally and figuratively, in ways and places that are beyond classroom walls, yet still traceable through poignant photographs and evocative narratives. Between us, we created the space for listening, learning, looking, and lingering in a landscape of many stories; without the other, there could be no image and no beautiful yet ghostly in-between.

This experience with Kathleen was a visceral expression and embodiment of Aoki’s (2004a) “curriculum-as-lived” (p. 160), for our photowalk emerged as an unexpected emotional event and learning opportunity shaped by walking, camera in hand. Aoki (2004a) writes of a teacher (Miss O) who “indwells between two horizons” (p. 161) in the “Zone of Between” (p. 163) as she navigates a teaching and learning life that is between “the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experiences,” (p. 159). Aoki writes of Miss O:

In Miss O’s indwelling in the Zone of Between we see the teacher’s dwelling place as a sanctified clearing where the teacher and students gather – somewhat like the place before the hearth at home – an extraordinarily unique and precious place, a hopeful place, a trustful place, a careful place – essentially a human place dedicated to ventures devoted to a leading out, an authentic ‘e(out)/ducere(lead),’ from the ‘is’ to new possibilities yet unknown. (2004a, p. 164)

He highlights the inherent ‘tensionality’ between the *curriculum-as-plan* and *curriculum-as-lived*, saying “to be alive is to be in tension” and that “tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung” (2004a, p. 162). In cases where learning opportunities present themselves beyond the bounds of a course (a curriculum-as-plan) and evolve into a curriculum-as-lived-experience (or here, research-as-lived-experience), another between emerges, engaging the presence of tension. With Kathleen, that tension was between beauty and loss. In art education, Irwin and Chalmers (2007) write, “Curriculum-as-plan is often concerned with a subject-based approach and attends to *experiencing the visual*. Curriculum-as-lived is often concerned with a student- or society-based perspective, and attends to *visualizing experiences*” (p. 179). The tension of photowalking and interviewing in a highly sensitive place renders an in-between space of possibility and hope that attends to both the visual experience and the visualization simultaneously, suggesting the *possibility* of what may come of this moment and the *hope* that one may become shifted in the process. Indeed, we were. In this unique and promising in-between space, a “living site of pedagogy” (Aoki, 2004b, p. 426/432) emerges as fertile ground for further learning and authentic engagement through photographic inquiry.

Of the seven offerings in this chapter, No. 7 is perhaps the most important for it speaks directly to the pedagogical aspect of this study. In a way, the other six fall underneath it or emerge from this context of the in-between that highlights learning possibilities beyond coursework and in community. In this research, I learned the value of tracing the in-between spaces that exist for art teachers and artists and the importance of creating and caring for them. As an opportunity to pursue personal and professional development, this study reveals summer as a potential vibrant in-between space “devoted to a leading out” (Aoki, 2004a, p. 164) for art teachers, artists, and students to engage and be engaged in educational, art, and research practice.

Through this research, I have discovered that summer is a learning place and an annual pocket of time that can be meaningfully capitalized for new opportunities towards beyond-classroom learning, particularly towards the development of teacher learning groups in communities of practice. These opportunities can include workshops, self-study, professional development offerings, studio time, making and exhibiting art, art travel, gallery and museum visits, curriculum reimagination, and participation in arts-based research including a/r/tography. It is a promising time for teachers (those in training and those experienced) to come together when they no longer have to work alone and can be in/build community in a time where they might otherwise not be. Through these kinds of opportunities which can be offered by others as well as self-made (or designed by groups, school districts, communities, universities, and organizations), the power of learning beyond coursework presents itself as generative and promising. Exciting projects can be imagined and carried out in this space and time, as groups of art educators come together to share inquiry practices, and as teachers, teach and learn from each other in an offering of professional reciprocity and expanded dialogue related to yet beyond their jobs.

Further, summer can be an in-between space for university students (including teachers, teacher educators, and artists) taking summer courses where there can be time between courses and the start of their fall teaching jobs or terms, or between the end of one school year and the start of the next. What exists in these in-betweens are opportunities for formal (such as EDCP 405) and informal learning and making (our research group) when small or large groups of artists and teachers gather for a shared purpose or intention, to participate in individual or group projects, and to pursue projects together, such as form small research groups with other art educators to investigate their own practices and pedagogies. Leggo and Irwin (2018) write:

...a/r/tography is an ontological positioning that embraces both questioning and questing (Irwin & Ricketts, 2013) through artistic and pedagogical encounters, those in-between spaces where we can linger in the unexpected, embracing the liminality of what may unfold...(p. 51)

In this study, by offering the exhibition as reciprocity for taking part in the study, another powerful in-between space was dreamed and manifested, one that embraced “the liminality of what may unfold” (Leggo & Irwin, 2018, p. 51). It unfolded outside the curriculum that was neither coursework nor teaching work, and it was not graded nor required. Rather, taking part in this research was chosen personal work that provided the participants several opportunities, including: immersive self-learning and self-reflection, artistic creation and co-creation, professional dialogic engagement with one another and the wider UBC community, collaboration, the pursuit of ethically-engaged photo-based memory work within a trusted community of like-minded others, learning how to put on and curate an exhibition, and pedagogical and artistic strengthening. Birthed in an active in-between space, this research endeavor became an extended learning moment wherein we are now changed from having participated in it, made different (aesthetically, pedagogically, and emotionally altered) by the teachings of the group, the course, ourselves, other artists and teachers, the research, and the artwork produced. Most of all, we art educators shared a space of learning, book-ended by summers, that we lived inside of for one year, immersed in a slow, generous dance where sometimes we faltered yet whose cadence was magnificently magnetic and alive with the ache of deep learning and, for some, the breath of wanting more.

We lived our inquiry by immersing ourselves in the vibrant process of doing this work in an in-between space created outside yet related to a course. By producing artwork and writing that reflects, for each of us, a part of our own history, journey, and beingness (of who we *were* and who we were *becoming*), eight autobiographies were on the wall, as I wrote in the lexicon for the letter G. LeBlanc writes “Irwin (2003, 2006, 2008, 2013) suggests that when artists, researchers, and educators engage in living inquiry, they remain open during their practice and become attuned to the ideas, feelings, and meanings as they emerge during the process” (Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, & Belliveau, 2018, p. 46). Through our conversations in interviews and focus groups, and while preparing for, being at, and taking down the show, there were profound moments of reflecting on our process as a significant learning experience in a way that was transformational and echoed its duration. Similar to an a/r/tography research project described by Leggo (in Leggo & Irwin, 2013) ours was “...a living inquiry that was always transforming our pedagogical and research practices in the creative pursuit of teaching and learning experiences that were critical, transformative, holistic, and collaborative” (p. 154). On transformation and experience, participant Joanne shared:

The piece for me around transformation is around all that's practical around the method of your [Blake's] work, like attending to the group, the individual coming together, being apart, coming together, over time what that meant... The long and short is that this experience has been generative for other experiences, and it's not that an experience begets an experience, it's that the next experience is actually enriched. It's

very much about doing, and I'm actually better in the next experience because of all that we did in this one. There is so much to draw upon. (Joanne Ursino, interview)

Following that, Hari said this:

Like Joanne talked about, the experience, generating a new experience. I think for me because the theme was around memory, which my work evolves around that and will continue to evolve around that...Where do I go from here now? I don't know what I'm going to transform into, but the photo that I took from Korea, it was like a period mark for me. It's like starting a new chapter... I just don't know what kind of transformation that I will go through at this point. It definitely is an experience that I will carry with me and it will inform the experiences that I will experience later. I'm excited for that, but it's an unknown phase. (Hari Im, interview)

In this research, the living inquiry and learning stayed alive through our photography, creative activity, research conversations, collaborations, pursuit of questions, and deep care for the work and one another. It also thrived in the way that we carried it with us over the course of many months and in the way that learning and art practices impressed new considerations towards participants' later teaching and art making, something I learned in interviews after the show. Leggo and Irwin (2013) write, "A/r/tographers are always asking questions as they inquire and engage in art-making and consider how pedagogy is connected to ways of knowing and becoming" (p. 151). The pedagogy of this project was alive (is still alive) and is connected to our collective "knowing and becoming" through our purpose and process of engaging photographic practice in a relevant, relational, personal, ethical, and educational way. Via the photo exhibition as a meaningful tool for evocative and provocative encounters for both pedagogy and practice, this artful research engagement turned out to be a significant learning event pursued, practiced, and sustained through living inquiry, experienced and cultivated in a generative in-between space bounded by our creative community of practice.

As artists, teachers, and participants in research who celebrate and seek to better understand our "hybrid identity" and "the interconnections between the artist *and* researcher *and* teacher" (Leggo & Irwin, 2013, p. 151), this inquiry threaded itself a/r/tographically through our personal lives, our passion projects, and our professional vocations as we together traced pedagogy beyond (class)rooms into new rooms – spaces unknown until we had built them or arrived. Although it was not planned at the time, such tracing emerged as our collective enactment of *currere*. Irwin (2017) writes:

A/r/tography also encourages networks of artist scholars to be engaged in *currere*, to create living inquiries set alongside one another, implicating one another personally, professionally and politically. It is perhaps here when *excurrere* and *incurrere* reverberate, in complicated conversations. In and through time, this becomes a

recursive space when currere is revisited again and again from different perspectives.
(p. 100)

Through this iterative, reflective, and relational process, we came to understand that, we too, were “always in process” (Leggo & Irwin, 2013, p. 150). Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, and Belliveau (2018) remind us “how art practice contributes to our understanding as becoming-educators over time and in particular situations because they render living inquiry as a form of self-study that creates the conditions for the unknown (Irwin, 2013)” (p. 50). Through art practice as “self- study” within a group, in this threading and tracing of our living inquiry in an in-between space, we marked a series of meaningful through-lines that evoke and provoke photo-based memory work as a fecund pedagogical and ethical place for ‘indwelling’ (Aoki, 2004a) and its own significant artistic ‘place of learning’ (Ellsworth, 2005).

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Having completed a reading of the seven offerings, we move now into the final chapter of this body of work. Chapter 8 is intended to dovetail Chapter 7 by continuing to consider what this research offers towards implications and invitations for theory, research, and practice. To do so, I take up some of the pedagogical and artistic possibilities, cautions, considerations, and resonances emerging in this study, including new a/r/tographic renderings and emerging concepts for visual lifewriting. Further, I gesture beyond this work through propositional and lexical thinking by placing an artful and diffractive lens on the notion of creative potential. As well, I present some of the ways that *the art of trace* might be valuable in extending this work in new directions.

Chapter 8

Notes on a Photographic Education: Invitations for Theory, Research, & Practice



Fig. 92 | By Blake Smith, Untitled
Found under the overpass: Pink suede heel.

A Closing Reflection

In this final chapter of my dissertation, I gather what I have learned thus far and take on the task of dreaming about some of the potential directions this research might take on or be taken artistically, pedagogically, and theoretically. In addition to classroom and research relevance, I offer a series of a/r/tographic propositions inspired by the seven offerings in the previous chapter. As well, I lay forth a cautious note of consideration around the ethics of memory work, inspired by conversations had with mentors, colleagues, group members, and other artists.

In an effort to gain closure to this study as a whole, I also reflect back, holistically, on the direction and pulse of my own journey of traveling through and embodying this work over a sustained period of time. This reflection is presented as a Postscript following this chapter, including reflections on what I learned, what's next, and where the group and I are now. Finally, after the Postscript, to recognize the efforts and insights of the seven participants without whom this work would not be possible, I close this dissertation with an Epilogue in an open letter to our group. This letter is a heartfelt thank you that acknowledges their contributions to this project.

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This research study sought to offer, explore, and understand meaningful experiences of teaching, learning, and making as well as ethical practice through creative engagement with photo-based memory work within a community of practice. It reveals the contextual, relational, emotional, poetic, political, collaborative, and sometimes challenging nature of such engagement, as well as significant degrees of nuance and subjectivity surrounding artistic approaches to memory work as they surfaced in this study. These nuances and subjectivities are highlighted in Chapter 5's exhibition images and artist statements, Chapter 6's lexicon, and Chapter 7's offerings. The photographic search for memory ended up becoming a search for *meaning* and for a way to *make memory mean* – meaning in our lives and work as teachers, as artists, as students, as members of this group, and meaning in this research. This equally important 'secondary or parallel search'⁷⁸, drawn out and informed by the creative process itself, is evident in our intimate research conversations, our artwork, our shared devotion to this work, our process, and our individual as well as collective experiences of being against (and in some cases with) disappearance.

Through photo-based memory work in collaboration, we engaged the tangled, beautiful, and dynamic practices of teaching, learning, and making by living these practices out loud. We did

⁷⁸ The importance of the concept and process of *the search* is also addressed in the lexicon under the letter S, "The Photographic Search."

so by exploring the ways in which these practices lean on, embrace, sometimes complicate, and come to bear *meaningfully* upon one another. For example, how teaching can be artistic, how making art can be pedagogical, and how learning can be experiential, durational, and highly creative. As well, we considered some overlaps: teaching in order to learn, learning to make art, the making of a teacher. The intentional a/r/tographic entanglement of teaching, learning, and making is what, in many ways, brought this study to life, as we explored the many ways these practices become hybridized and are vital to a/r/tography. In addition, in this entanglement, I became aware of the complexities, subjectivities, intimacies, assumptions, and unknowns around ethics in relation to this study, prompting further reflection. Such complexities are notable in our photography, in the research project and group dynamics, in gallery curation, and in the ethical task of writing about ethics as a way of deepening and reflecting on one's own practice and purpose. These understandings underline the need for more work to be done in this area of study (ethics), particularly in photo education, photo-based and visual research, and a/r/tography.

Because we are teachers, we are committed to the process of learning and the hope of being transformed by that learning. Because we are artists, we are committed to the process of creating and the desire to be inspired by (and inspire others by) that creativity. From my observations, each of our practices became strengthened as well as stretched by the lived experience of doing this work as teachers, learners, and makers involved in a shared research endeavor. In making and exhibiting photographs, we learned about the challenges and potential of teaching photography and creating and sharing photographs. In community, we taught one another new ways of seeing and created belonging. And through arts-based research, we made ourselves anew alongside the making of new artwork and the rise of new experiences – every image and experience another reflection and iteration of a “learning self” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 2) in motion, arching towards a future that is promising yet unknown.

Pedagogical Dreaming: Potential Applications for This Work in Photography Education & Research

In order to consider potential implications and applications for this study, I first want to center the uniqueness of this project and acknowledge its singular qualities over its potential for replicability. The study is unique in terms of the eight individuals who make up this group and how we each placed a personal lens on the study, including artwork, writing, and conversations. It is unique in the ways that we approached photography in light of disappearance, offering thirty-six unique perspectives on memory, informed by our own subjectivities, desires, knowledge, skills, and

pasts. It is unique in terms of opportunities and connections, including teaching the course and my affiliation with The Liu Institute and Lobby Gallery as well as my strong commitment to a/r/tography. It is unique in the conditions of our coming together and how we met in the course then stayed together, a beginning that now has an ending. It is unique in the way I brought together the group as well as the experiences of teaching photography and creating, curating, and exhibiting photographs. Finally, it is a unique experience to be in a photography community as research in order to study these experiences with curiosity and care through an a/r/tographic lens. Like an artwork, this research endeavor is reflective of all that makes it original and one-of-a-kind, contextualized by time, place, lived experience, certain drives, and the timbre of our own becomings as a result of participating. It was made, collectively, by the touch of artists who teach and, in that making, new understandings were born. These understandings are now being negotiated and reframed in a different time, place, and context in 2020, a year of note for us all.

Therefore, as I share on the coming pages some of the ways I imagine this research may find linkages or spark inspiration elsewhere, it is important to honor the distinctiveness of what we accomplished. As highlighted in the previous chapters, I wish to place emphasis on the insights gained. I do so in the hopes of emphasizing potential novel contributions, exciting connections, and fresh possibilities for teaching, research, and art making, rather than emphasize best practices for photo-based memory work, as this is not possible or necessary. Memory work is so highly personal and intimate, informed by layers of time and history, remembering and forgetting, the importance of storytelling, sometimes an encounter with loss, and, in this case, highly informed by *artistic process*, which carries its own monikers of meaning and memory. Photographic encounters with memory are unique to the person behind the lens, whose images, perspectives, and experiences are shaped by the inner viewfinder the photographer possesses. As such, these insights and images are very specific to our group and this research and this moment in time. Other groups may approach this kind of work through different modes of inquiry, new lenses, alternative methods, or theoretical underpinnings, yielding distinctively different insights. This sense of multivariance in approaches and artistry is what keeps art education, for me, alive and thriving with potential and purpose, much like the way photography encourages seeing and composition through a multivariant, kaleidoscopic lens.

On Complexity, Transformation, & Extending the Image

Leggo and Irwin (2013) write:

The disposition of the a/r/tographer is fired by a commitment to curiosity, and embracing questions as necessary for any living quest, and never assuming that we know all there is to know...A/r/tographers are committed to embracing complexity and transformation. (p. 153)

As I seek to embrace the complexity and transformations we experienced in carrying out this study, I reflect on how this dissertation research has affected my thinking about doing photo-based memory work and collaborative research with others, including students, teachers, and teacher candidates. I am excited at the possibilities we uncovered in this work and am enlightened by the challenges we faced and, in many cases, overcame. Most of all, my writing on the potential of this work is informed by my own wishes and wayfinding as a teacher, an artist, a curator, and a researcher. Necessarily, this reflects a desire to extend the work and have it continue and metamorphosize in new forms and projects yet to come, of my own and perhaps others. In a way, this desire refutes closure; however, in my commitment to the extended image, the idea of extension is another way of continuing a conversation. These imaginings and hopes are potential new 'images' of where this work could go.

After years of teaching photography and pursuing it, the study has illuminated how much more there is to learn and revealed the many unique ways and captivating forms in which we might come to understand, complicate, creatively explore, and see the things which occupy our inner and outer attention. As a seer, I learned more about what it might mean to see as well as where there might be blindness. Since the inquiry is shared amongst a keen group of colleagues open to collaborative learning and being affected by the process, this experience has taught us to see photographic inquiry in a whole new light, appreciating it as our teacher as much as our method of understanding and creative exploration.

As I look backwards and forward, this process has greatly expanded and complicated how I understand photography. At this point in time, I see it as a form of visual inquiry, self-expression, documentation, and way of seeing, inspiring me to think of new and innovative ways for photography to be explored in relation to memory and perhaps other subjects, such as *time*, *trauma*, and *healing*. As well, I consider the ways photography within the frame of memory might be engaged with teachers, artists, and others, such as a generative learning tool, a reflective and autobiographical practice, a rephotographic gesture, a thematic exploration, a photographer's *curre*, and a form of intuitive visual engagement through methods like visual lifewriting, a promising art form as well as a research method.

The teacher in me seeks real-time connections to classroom practice that can be shared with others. It seems reasonable that since this work and my commitments to photography began in the classroom that they might end there, or at least return. I begin to imagine how a course like EDCP 405 or a course like it might be taught differently, perhaps engaging some of the new insights gained and challenges taken on in this project. I now imagine how new research groups of teachers and artists might form, engaging with photography as a means of inquiry, collaboration, and self-study.

On Durational Inquiry

The themes driving this work – including memory, loss, ethics, autobiography, and disappearance – emerged as the underpinnings and iterations of my own existing photographic work and self-study as an artist, writer, and teacher (as shared in Chapter I). I carried them forward once in a course then again into the shaping of this research study. Threaded through the EDCP 405 course then into the exhibition, the movement of themes and the resonance of artists including Jaar, Miyako, and Wolfe from one learning landscape to another becomes one way to trace the artfulness of pedagogy beyond rooms. Such tracing is one way of studying their directional pulls, alternative forms, echoes, and manifestations elsewhere.

As significant through-lines in this study, they raise questions for how to approach these themes theoretically, methodologically, intellectually, pedagogically, and artistically. They reflect a continuance of inquiry over a prolonged duration in the way that some inquiries can't seem to be let go, becoming a constant echo or ghost that is present at every turn. As sometimes difficult subjects, I drink these themes as the "bitter milk" (Grumet, 1988, p. xi) of my own desires to know and to teach and to make the photograph in a way that might be meaningful and make a difference in the lives of others. These are themes that have continued to haunt, provoke, and inspire me for years and are the emotional soil of my photographic gardens. The perseverance of these themes speaks my desire to attend to them, and in staying with them over time, they have come to influence a journey of inquiry that became a durational learning endeavor, marked by photographs, teaching, this research, and so much more.

Through photography, duration and durational inquiry were artfully approached in this dissertation in a deliberate myriad of forms: *the diptych, the rephotograph, the group exhibition, the extended image, the visual memoir, and the lexicon (six forms, intentionally based on Sontag's cubist thinking)*. The creative exploration of the research question and the various aforementioned themes through these six forms became a way of asking questions of art and answering them *through* art and in community. Duration, then, is offered in this work as a critical and creative rendering of self

and art over time. It is a felt metamorphosis and record of moving through from one place to another like a slow walk of coming to understand and a process that was artfully documented along the way.

Duration and *durational inquiry* in art and education, practice, and research suggest the importance of staying with that which begs one's attention. They underscore the significance of tracing one's learning as it evolves, appears, manifests, and intersects with the learning, practices, and art making of others. Highlighting the promise of 'artist's rendering their own currere' (Irwin, 2017), Irwin writes "*Currere* is an autobiographical form of research that is evident in what a/r/tography attempts to perform," (Irwin, 2017, p. 100). Like a long-form visual journal marking and mappings one's currere, durational inquiry points to the artistic, reflexive possibilities of taking measure of one's educational and personal learning journey over time (in any form, i.e. writing, music, theatre⁷⁹) as embodied research, centering the teachability of lived experience. It takes into account the relevance, history, and nomenclature of events and experiences of impact, such as (in this case) courses, conversations, exhibitions, relationships, and collaborations, contemplating what key through-lines persist across them and what they might mean. As such, duration itself becomes a noteworthy trace of a becoming self moving purposefully through space, place, and time.

This research suggests the importance and artistry around tracing the lingering residue of one's work, one's teaching, one's research, one's art, and one's curations. In attending to and artfully tracing the pedagogical residue, emotional residue, psychological residue, creative residue, and experiential residue of lived experiences, including research and learning experiences, we can become more attuned to them and gain deeper insights. This approach embraces *trace* as an a/r/tographic method for deepening understandings by embodying and writing about them, photographically and otherwise. As artistic ways of engaging and collecting such residue, I put forward the value for researchers of tracing their own lived practices through a/r/tography. Inspired by my own experiences with *The Visual Memoir Project*, I suggest the potential usefulness and creativity of writing visual memoirs as a way to compose research stories and archive an evolving self or project as it manifests across a duration of time. As well, researchers might consider the potential and vibrancy of memoirs as a research and writing method, lexicons as method, data,

⁷⁹ I note here an impressive, inspiring example of a personal scholarly journey enacted through theatre and a compelling example of memory work in another genre: the doctoral dissertation and accompanying play, [Empire of the Son: using research-based theatre to explore family relationships](#) (2018) by a colleague and talented friend of mine, Tetsuro Shigematsu from The University of British Columbia. See also the [theatrical trailer](#) for his original and compelling one-man play, *Empire of the Son*, which has received many awards and accolades.

and form, and exhibitions as artful expositions. Finally, there is the possibility for this kind of visual work to be archived in the form of a book, dissertation, exhibition catalogue, exhibition, on social media, or on a website as a way to expand its duration. In doing so, as further form, organization, and public engagement, it has the potential to impact and inspire others as well as gain longevity in its conversational reach.

On Potentiality

As a new contribution to the fields of photo education, photo-based research, and specifically for a/r/tography, this study addresses a noted gap in the existing literature around photo-based memory work in art and photo education including schools and other educative spaces. It does so by taking up that gap through a photography project involving an exhibition with artists and educators in a professional research group setting. As such, this work points to some of the challenges and considerations necessary when envisioning creative memory work with adults – here, specifically around the concept of disappearance – and helps to imagine them for other groups and contexts, including younger students. It also shows the promise of artists and educators engaging meaningfully in studio art practice as an offering through a/r/tography. As such, this work generates fresh experiences and artwork that compel new thinking and learning through acts of embodied doing, sharing, and reflecting.

In terms of reach, I suggest that this research might find further resonance with creative research and lifewriting communities, a/r/tography research groups, art collectives and artists, memory museums, teaching initiatives, researchers, curators and galleries, educators in memory studies, photographers, and community groups that wish to explore memory, disappearance, photography, loss, ethics, and/or visual lifewriting. Because the topics and insights in this work touch various disciplines with the potential to cross-pollinate, my study suggests the importance and role of interdisciplinarity in photography education and research. Therefore, the artistic, pedagogical, and research possibilities laid forth in this work offer new insights and contributions into the fields of art and photo education, a/r/tography, lifewriting, interdisciplinary studies, ethics, the humanities (including the digital humanities), memory studies, curatorial studies, photo-based and visual research, and visual literacy.

This research reveals the exciting potential of doing photo-based memory work within post-secondary higher education, particularly in art and photo education and teacher education – most notably with teachers and artists as well as researchers who may work with them. Specifically, via collaborations, exhibitions, lexical thinking and doing, small research groups, and group

photographic inquiry, these kinds of activities are ways of exploring contemporary topics (here, around memory work) by engaging in a/r/tographic scholarship with adult learners. In this case, these learners include new and experienced teachers and graduate students who are in the midst of considering and refining their own pedagogical stances and artistic philosophies.

As a unique opportunity for reflection, I have learned through this work that teachers, artists, and graduate students appreciate having the opportunity to: a) participate in an art project involving an exhibition of their work; and b) creatively document their lived experiences by creating a visual memory of their own history and learning – in a way, extending their own learning moment and/by tracing it. Photo-based memory work, including visual lifewriting as memoir, presents a compelling way to register, narrate, and visualize such experiences through photographic inquiry and the documentation of an emerging self and/or project over time. In addition, opportunities to take part in exhibitions of such work (or exhibitions of one’s artistic research creations) offer not only public engagement but also the chance to self-reflect, to be seen by one’s local and university community, to contribute to bodies of knowledge artistically, and to critically and creatively express oneself either solo and/or in a community of like-minded others.

On Sensitivity: A Cautionary Move

Through our group’s considerations towards photography and its educative potential in the exhibition *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory*, I am now able to (re)imagine, appreciate, and critique what other forms of teaching, curating, researching, and art making might become possible in projects, exhibitions, and learning spaces that invite photo-based memory work around disappearance and other concepts related to memory. Within projects and living inquiries designed and/or emerging as pedagogical learning events that may invoke memory work and the autobiographical life, my hope is that the “learning self” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 8) is compelled to come forward and shine. However, my other hope is that educators, artists, curators, and researchers remain somewhat cautious towards the ethics of certain photo-based or other kinds of creative memory work, aware of both the potential insights and dangers of autobiographical writing (Leggo, 2019a/2019b/2019e) and visual lifewriting (Sinner & Owen, 2011; Smith 2018/2015/2014).

While I have celebrated the benefits and artistic offerings emerging from this research from my point of view and the participant interviews, I have a responsibility to acknowledge the presence of risk in this work. Such risk can be considered productive and necessary for art, research, and learning in terms of taking chances in order to grow and learn, as well as risk that can be understood as potentially concerning. Therefore, I embrace the significance of both possibilities.

Given the potential weight and sensitivity of the subject matter discussed in this dissertation (such as memory, loss, disappearance, pain, and violence, for example), there is potential for difficulty in some contexts, particularly involving youth, vulnerable individuals, and those who have experienced trauma. Certain kinds of creative engagement with photo-based memory work could be triggering or uncomfortable for some, thus this cautionary move⁸⁰. Some of the ethical dilemmas shared earlier in Chapter 7 in Offering No. 4 (Tracing an “Ethics of Seeing”) apply here as possible implications to consider when engaging memory and disappearance through photography as part of artistic, educational, curatorial, and/or research endeavors.

Returning to the photographs, sculpture, and artist statements from the exhibition reveals real-life examples of how some of the artists framed and negotiated ethics and emotional sensitivities in the production and sharing of their work, including certain dilemmas specific to photography and others specific to research, curation, exhibition, collaboration, and other areas. To learn more about this subject, medium, and its potential for engaging artists, educators, and perhaps youth, I suggest that more practice-based research (Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sullivan, 2010/2006) and grounded theory (Andrews, 2015; Glasser & Strauss, 1965) are needed to better understand this important yet understudied area in art and photo education and teacher education. I argue these areas deserve more attention; in particular, further study on ethics in photography education and ethics and/in photo-based and other forms of memory work.

On Risk-taking, Ethics, & Doing This Work

I am biased towards the intrigue of this work as a teacher who worked with memory and autobiography as subject matter in my high school and university photography classes and as a photographer whose work is often based around memory. Yet, I must continue to challenge my own experiences and assumptions. This study was one way of doing so. What has been revealed

⁸⁰ Contextually, let us remember that this study was conducted with adults and educators over age nineteen who chose to participate, engaging with memory and disappearance on their own terms. In addition, this study did not include categorically vulnerable, young, or traumatized persons, although that is not to say that members of this group may carry certain vulnerabilities or may have experienced trauma. Thus, it is unclear from this study what the possibilities or problems might be of doing photo-based memory work with delicate populations, yet, from my experience, reading, and research I have some equally hopeful and concerning ideas. Regarding youth specifically, I suggest there are potential concerns to attend to such as maturity, parental consent, life experience, vulnerability, subject matter, and the chance for personal artwork/stories to be circulated online through social media* and other channels, which could be productive for some yet distressing for others. [* I wish to acknowledge the guidance of Dr. Michael Parsons, Research Professor at The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who once raised this concern to me regarding youth and the potential effects of image sharing and distribution on social media of projects related to certain kinds or interpretations of photo-based memory work.]

here is an ethics to *doing* this work as well as an ethics of *not doing*⁸¹ this work, considering the potential concerns it raises alongside the potential benefits. Because what was learned in this study is highly specific to this experience and is not generalizable, it is somewhat challenging to imagine the work or outcomes differently. For those interested in this area, I think it matters greatly how the invitations to engage creatively in photo-based memory work are framed, to whom, and what kinds of guiding questions and methods are being addressed. Thus, the approach could adapt to the context, audience, and intention. From my experience, I feel photo-based and other kinds of creative memory work, including “visual autobiography” (Niloofar Miry, interview), can be generative when done with mature populations who are given a choice to engage in this work. It can be artistically productive, highly reflective and intuitive in nature, inspiring, evocative, and even cathartic or healing (Chandler, 1990; Goldberg, Andre, Brookman, Livingston & Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1996). Those were the experiences of some participants in this study, including me.

Thinking of photo-based memory work this way renders it a form of “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1994, p. 13). Such pedagogy makes space for this kind of work to be a valuable form of personal expression, a way to reflect on and come to understand one’s past, and a creative way-finding tool for artists and educators (and perhaps for their students) to map out, narrate, document, and understand their lives and experiences through photography. Further, having the opportunity to publicly exhibit such work offers a secondary level of potentially meaningful engagement whereby conversations about the art can be extended into other spaces. As in this study, groups of photographers and teachers can have the opportunity to create and showcase new work together around important themes, both individually and as a collective.

At the same time, I acknowledge that certain kinds of invitations have the potential to be disruptive, painful, emotionally jarring, too private, or poorly timed for some. Thus, projects which might echo or be inspired by my study could be grounds for further consideration⁸². In certain

⁸¹ I wish to acknowledge the integral influence of my mentor, Dr. Karen Meyer, from The University of British Columbia on this work when she introduced me to this idea: the ethics of *not doing* this kind of work (specifically with youth), i.e. memory work, visual lifewriting, and personal storytelling through photography, asking me once “Why would we *not* engage and invite youth into their being in the world?” (personal communication, 2014). Her teaching marked a turn in my thinking in this research.

⁸² As people conceptualize projects in art and photo education or other fields, I suggest that they may want to consider who they are working with and what their capacities, interests, and vulnerabilities are or might be. In some projects or research endeavors invoking particular kinds of memory work, perhaps the help and guidance of art therapists, social workers, and/or counselors could be useful as conversational partners, project designers, or co-researchers. Additionally, I believe art and photo educators and researchers could benefit from receiving professional development training in these areas to better equip them in addressing memory work and potentially difficult or disruptive knowledge and imagery that may arise. Educators, researchers, and artists could also consider the creative benefits and generative nature of memory work through photography and continue to imagine new ways to conceptualize and explore it creatively through both art and writing.

contexts, the writing (or visual lifewriting) of autobiography or the return to certain memory may be challenging or risky. However, inherent in the processes of art making and learning is risk-taking, something I experienced in extending the invitation for this study. Had I not taken that risk, there would be no research, photographs, or group. Thus, the presence and necessity of risk can be productive as well as enlivening under carefully thought-out conditions.

It is valuable to consider that both actions – *doing* this work/*not* doing this work – challenge the role of the photo educator⁸³ and the aims of a photographic education in ways that can be considered promising and engaging as well as potentially problematic. Engaging the work of memory is an invitation to pull from one's past, observe the everyday, and/or document one's present, all ways of archiving the self. Teaching about seeing – one of the photo teacher's greatest tasks – cannot escape fully a teaching about the self. They are intertwined. *Not* doing this work raises questions about censorship, erasure, readiness, and the silencing of vision. *Doing* this work highlights opportunities for self-reflection, writing one's life, poeticizing lived experience, and photographically rendering the autobiographical self. Making space for photo-based memory work including autobiographical self-learning endeavors and artistic explorations of memory through concepts like disappearance could be of interest to some art educators and potentially their students, including those who may find it valuable to engage in a photographic "curriculum of loss" (Leggo, 2017, p. 64-65) as a way of writing (or photographing) through it.

How to ethically, respectfully, and pedagogically navigate this line while accepting the necessity and potentiality of risk-taking in creative work, including research, is an underlying question of my study and may be the pursuit of future projects. In this study, before taking up memory work with youth, we took it up for ourselves, doing the pedagogical work first, considering the ethics of art and of pedagogy. From my experience doing this work and as a teacher, memory projects can benefit from being approached with great attentiveness, intention, and care. Offerings to creatively engage in photo-based memory work might include the ways the offerings can be negotiated, personalized, and understood and how the ethics are attended to. Finally, it can be helpful to consider the possible benefits and implications and discuss them with one's

⁸³ My M.A. thesis research is titled [Art for Social Action and Awareness](#) (Arizona State University, 2008). In it, I looked at the feasibility of incorporating social action and awareness into high school visual art content area courses. Part of this research explored the roles and social responsibilities of the art teacher as artist, pedagogue, and citizen educator, inspired by Paulo Freire's call for teachers to be 'cultural workers' (1998). The study revealed a range of generative possibilities, expectations, and opportunities regarding teachers' curriculum and roles. It also revealed some contextual and instructional conflicts teachers face around implementing art for social action and awareness and highlighted some potential problems and benefits of incorporating social action. [It is possible the blog link above may not be available post-graduation. My thesis is available in the Arizona State University library catalog.]

students/participants/group up front, while at the same time embracing the potential of artistic engagement with memory to be transformative, generative, educational, and worthwhile.

My desire, moving forward, is for more venues of conversation to open up so that the pedagogical, theoretical, and artistic possibilities, alongside the ethical responsibilities, of this kind of work can be further explored and better understood. At the same time, I wish to acknowledge there is no right way to do memory work. I suggest more theory, research, artwork, and writing could be developed around photo-based memory work to help better understand its pedagogical and artistic potential as well as its potential problematics, some aforementioned in earlier chapters.

I suggest a/r/tography, specifically, is a valuable methodological entry point for the further study, practice, curation, creation, and teaching of such work, including work on the subjects of loss and disappearance. Such study could occur across various art educative and art spaces, including schools as well as exhibition spaces, museums, universities, and in communities through individual as well as group projects. As well, through a/r/tography and perhaps other forms of inquiry, I hope to garner a greater sense of how photography, both in method and in form, might help us to *see* even beyond sight – to see possibility, to see hope, to see what we are missing, to see justice, to see a light in dark times, and to see one another.

Emerging Concepts for Visual Lifewriting

As I consider the value of methods such as visual lifewriting and photographic inquiry alongside the artistic potential of exhibitions around memory work, I suggest that this study invites creativity, new scholarship, and curricular innovation in a space that is less talked about in the literature. In Irwin, LeBlanc, Ryu, and Belliveau (2018), Ryu writes that we should “trust the living process of committing to artistic forms of engagement that celebrate the uncertainties, complexities, and beauties of artful, fragmentary ways of knowing” (p. 45). I observed through my research the potential of photo-based memory work as ways of knowing, such as:

an agent of self-knowledge and knowledge of others, place, and history;
as a powerful tool for visual lifewriting;
as an artistic gesture for storytelling and documentation, including autobiography and memoir;
as a vehicle for the art of returning, including rephotography;
as an artistic as well as ethical practice; and
as living and dying inquiry (Smith, 2018).

For further exploration, art and photo educators, researchers, and curators interested in engaging with this kind of work could be thinking about and designing age/grade/group-appropriate projects that evoke, provoke, and thematize some of the concepts discussed in this dissertation or other

concepts of interest to them and their constituents. They could explore the concepts through a selection of artistic methods including those presented in this dissertation, such as inner- and out-looking photographic inquiry, visual lifewriting, rephotography, visual journaling, and photowalks, as well as consider the ways a/r/tographic inquiry, including collaborations, self-study, and group exhibitions might assist in the process of coming to know, see, and understand.

Further, one contribution this study offers towards the literature is the potential for visual lifewriting to be a way of writing memoir, a reflective process that could be useful in practice-based settings, schools, research, and other places that memoir might be written. For those interested in composing their own memoir (individually or as a group), a variety of visual and perhaps other media could be creatively investigated for their capacity to render, catalogue, and visually narrate a certain duration's of one's vocation, research, life⁸⁴, or perhaps the duration in which those overlap or parallel. Gude's "principles of possibility" (2010/2007), such as "empowered making and experiencing" (2007, p. 11-13), "forming of self" (2007, p. 8), "attentive living" (2007, p. 10), and "not knowing (2007, p. 14)," could become useful means of engagement towards this process. In addition, visual lifewriting is a generative method for the artistic and authentic documentation, reflection, and sharing of personal stories, lived experience, and iterations of one's developing self and projects. In a way, this method could be considered a living visual journal.

As one way to frame the method of visual lifewriting (VLW) as an inspirational and promising pedagogical project of memory work, I put forward six new concepts emerging from my research that offer ways visual lifewriting might be put to use in teaching, art, and/or research:

***Journey as Documenta:* Visual lifewriting as a pedagogy/form of "address"**

(Ellsworth, 2005, p. 99)

For example: Using VLW to document one's journey and visually "address" significant moments, events, encounters, places, and observations of note along the way. The notion of "address" also suggests a speaking to/about, a potential way to confront something, and a way of attending to that which calls one's attention.

***Slow Curriculum:* Visual lifewriting as a pedagogy of contemplation**

For example: Using VLW as an artistic practice of deliberate slowness, such as photowalking in slow contemplation, visually mapping an area or project, or writing to/about photographs. Other ways to contemplate as a visual lifewriter might be

⁸⁴ It could be argued that the use of social media and the ways people already document their lived experiences in photographs and video are forms of visual memoir and/or utilize visual lifewriting. As such, highly visual platforms such as Instagram could be studied or made useful as a learning project around the capacity for visual content to narrate and speak to lived experience as well as be curated in a way that tells a story, albeit selective and fragmented.

thinking photography as a way of writing poetry and centering a certain concept, subject, place, or person for creative contemplation through image and text.

“Strange Glitter”⁸⁵: Visual lifewriting as a **pedagogy/process of creative wayfinding**

For example: Using VLW to collect memorable artifacts (“glitter”) in a visual journal or curate a series of images for a photo book or exhibition. The process of creative wayfinding can be a way to document one’s understandings over time and a way to navigate the artistic process, gathering materials, archival objects, and perhaps the self along the way.

Residue: Visual lifewriting as a **pedagogy of ‘lifting’⁸⁶**

For example: Using VLW to artistically ‘lift’ the residue of something (i.e. place, memory, learning, object) as a way of coming to understand it, see it differently, and bring it closer. ‘Lifting’ can be material, emotional, and durational in nature. VLW as a pedagogy of ‘lifting’ offers a profound conceptual vehicle for attending to the visualization of residue emerging from lived experiences, including teaching.

Archiving the Self: Visual lifewriting as a **pedagogy/practice of memoir &/as currere**

For example: Using VLW to write one’s life, in pictures and to write alongside them. For series of photographs taken over a duration of time, both image and text can evoke the evolving ‘art of personal narrative’ (Gornick, 2001) that is *memoir* and provoke the educational autobiography that is *currere*. VLW as memoir and *currere* is a highly reflective, transformative practice of self-understanding and durational learning.

A Project for the Next Generation: Visual lifewriting as a **pedagogy of critical hope**

For example: Using VLW to critically and creatively document and discover narratives of hope (or the absence of hope), both in one’s personal life, community, and in society at large. VLW can be useful as a method to inspire, invoke, investigate, critique, and better understand hope through visual explorations and to ignite conversations on the importance of hope for the next generation, something we know is *so vital* at this time.

~

These six concepts draw on the important work of Sinner and Owen (2011) and aim to expand their contributions around photography and lifewriting through this research into new directions for teachers, researchers, artists, students, and lifewriters. I suggest the concepts are possible entry points into conversation, creative activity, and curriculum around the potentiality of

⁸⁵ Inspired by Ted Hughes, *Birthday Letters* (1998, Farrar, Straus, & Giroux):

“Nobody wanted your dance,
Nobody wanted your strange glitter, your floundering
Drowning life and your effort to save yourself,
Treading water, dancing the dark turmoil,
Looking for something to give.”

⁸⁶ As mentioned earlier in the dissertation, ‘lifting’ comes from the photography exhibition *Walker Evans: Depth of Field*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2016).

visual lifewriting as a productive art practice, art form, writing method, and a/r/tographic research method tied to poetic living inquiry. As we learned from participant Paul Best who investigated visual memoir through sculpture, these visual lifewriting concepts are not necessarily intended to be photographic and can be explored through a variety of visual and poetic media. *Writing* can be interpreted in a number of ways and come to form in a plethora of languages, including art. Therefore, deeper exploration into the potential of visual lifewriting will benefit from further study, both in practice and in theory. This is an area I plan to return to for future research, art, and writing.

Taken up together or one by one, these six new concepts offer fresh ways of visualizing and/or documenting memory, practice, lived experience, and story through the lenses of a journey⁸⁷, slowness, “glitter,” residue, archive, and hope for the next generation. I offer them here as places to begin, not to end, with visual lifewriting, knowing there is far more to be discovered for those committed to a life of art and writing and their beautiful entanglements. These six concepts emerge as significant creative opportunities inspired by this research and are one way of conceptualizing visual lifewriting around a set of open-ended possibilities that I put forward as pedagogies of address, contemplation, creative way-finding, ‘lifting,’ memoir and/as currere, and critical hope. As a collection, they work to situate the art, form, and method of visual lifewriting as a fecund place to explore and discover in/as a visual landscape of learning, listening, and lingering.

Artists as Exemplars

In addition to these concepts, teachers themselves (or teachers working with their students) could engage in memory work through the angle of autobiography or memoir, rephotography, photowalking, an everyday visual diary/photobook like Byron Wolfe (2007), and still life memento photography like Ishiuchi Miyako (2008). Similar to how this work was influenced by the work of contemporary artists, I suggest the value and fruitfulness of showing their works as productive visual references towards *the art of memory*. Artists such as Ishiuchi Miyako, Alfredo Jaar, Byron Wolfe, and others address memory work photographically in a profound aesthetic, narrative, and educative way that posits photographic inquiry as a way of knowing. Their collective offerings towards the work of memory through the work of photography reveal the capacity for images to evoke and inspire stories, meaning, history, memoir, and a poetics of attunement.

⁸⁷ The notion of journey is, in part, inspired by an assignment in an art education course I took with Dr. Dónal O’Donoghue at The University of British Columbia during my graduate studies. As students, we were invited to take a journey to somewhere we had never been and to document the experience. That opportunity was generative for me as a visual documentarian and lifewriter and helped to shape my thinking around the journey as a potential avenue for a visual lifewriting practice.

Discussing and studying the work of contemporary artists (O'Donoghue, 2015) as entry points into memory work has great potential, for this provides visual exemplars, conceptual framings, cultural perspectives, and a variety of lenses from which researchers, teachers, artists, students, curators, or others could gain insight and reference (historically, politically, socially, artistically, etc.). The lexical list I provided in Chapter 6 in letter A is one generative starting point as a gathering of artists who engage memory work in a powerful, resonant way, most through photography, some of whom invite discussions around ethics in their work.

As well, some of these artists as well as writers cited in this dissertation such as Bal (2007), Butler (2009), Edwards (2007), Jaar (1998), Levi Strauss (2012), Miyako (2008), Meiselas (2012), Reinhardt, Edwards, and Dugganne (2007), and Sontag (2004/2003/1977) could help to explore the politics and pedagogy of encountering, learning about, circulating, and producing difficult imagery while engaging in, for example, debates or Socratic seminars⁸⁸ on ethics. Additionally, teachers may want to consider the places in their existing curriculum (or future curriculum designs) that ethics might compliment or become a part of. As well, they might open dialogues with their students and colleagues about ethical photographic practice and the varying contexts in which ethics may apply. For example, they could look at examples of codes of ethics (i.e. photojournalism, research ethics, ethical practices in different countries) as well as art exhibitions that address ethics as ways in to these conversations, such as the Tate Modern's [*Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance, and The Camera*](#).

Finally, Ellsworth (2005) invites us to dream of “emergent pedagogical elements and qualities – that we do not yet understand and that provoke us to think or imagine in new ways” (p. 5). I feel we can take this invitation as an opening towards other ways of imagining, conceptualizing, researching, curating, creating, teaching, and engaging in photo-based memory work (and perhaps other kinds of memory work) that attend to ethics, ideally leading to meaningful learning, teaching, and making experiences. That is my hope, moving forward.

⁸⁸ In the EDCP 405 course, we held a productive [Socratic seminar](#) to discuss photo ethics. The seminar is a model I suggest may be useful for others in approaching this topic (and more). We used questions submitted by the students as departure points for discussion around two course readings: Susan Sontag's chapter “The Heroism of Vision” in *On Photography* (1977, p. 85-112) and Holly Edwards's essay about the highly circulated photograph *Afghan Girl* by photojournalist Steve McCurry, entitled “Cover to cover: The life cycle of an image in contemporary visual culture” in M. Reinhardt, H. Edwards, & E. Dugganne (Eds.), *Beautiful suffering: photography and the traffic in pain*, (2007, p. 75-92).

On the Resonance of Disappearance



Fig. 93 | By Blake Smith in collaboration with Frank and Dance (pictured), *Untitled Image of Dance's jacket, now stolen, signed by his friends in the community. I was signature # 1, 447. That day, we looked at The VMP series on my laptop, sitting on the sidewalk together. What an honor.*

Thinking beyond the exhibition, this work points to an array of possible directions to pursue on the topic of disappearance, a new rendering offered in this dissertation, giving way to opportunities for exploring it further and extending its reach. Our work addresses disappearance by invoking its opposite. We appear, in photographs and one sculpture, in artist statements, in our coming together as a group with something to say, in this writing, and through our collective embrace of its potential as a provocative teaching and learning tool. New questions, then, are raised:

What/who/where is it we wish not to disappear?

In what ways can one be both with and against disappearance?

What are other potential artistic responses to and interpretations of disappearance?

How is our participation in this study/show in some ways a refusal to be disappeared or stay silent?

What would it be like if _____ dis/appeared? and

How is disappearance relevant to our lives as teachers, artists, and human beings?

In this work, what we learned from disappearance is its fragility and, in some cases, its inevitability. We learned that many photographs in some way are against the disappearance of something. Yet this work intends to speak back to that, one artwork at a time, in an effort to address the challenge of how to “give form to the act of memory?” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 99, quoting Dannatt, 1995, p. 6).

As a concept to artistically grapple with as artists and educators, disappearance invited us to engage in a plethora of possibilities for being both *against* and *with*. It also allowed for each of us to approach the topic in a way that felt personal yet could relate to the group and the greater public as well. While our work focused on photographic inquiry into disappearance as it resonated in the context of 2016, it has opened the door for other renderings of disappearance that still linger, or linger differently, now. On a more global scale, this work is also a calling out – an artistic act and in some ways a poetic rage (Lorde, 2007) against so much more:

*against the disappearance of compassion and empathy,
against the disappearance of slow and heartfelt learning,
against the disappearance of ethical practice,
against the disappearance of justice and democracy,
against the disappearance of a memory of our lives as we have lived them,
against the disappearance of vulnerability and courage,
against the disappearance of truly seeing another person,
against the disappearance of hope and belonging,
and like in the work of artist-participant Kathleen,
against the disappearance of individuals, especially young people,
to suicide, where the only seeming way out is leaving forever.*

In addition to these considerations, we might also reflect on the resonance of disappearance at a time when hate, racism, and violence are at the forefront of our collective attention as Black and Indigenous lives continue to tragically disappear *as I write this*. As well, we can take into account how images play a fundamental role in our collective seeing, witnessing, and learning in relation to these incredible violent losses. This is a connection that links back to my writing in Chapter 3 on Judith Butler’s work around whose life is deemed “grievable” (Butler, 2009, p. xxii) and Susan Sontag’s writing on seeing and the ethics of picturing others (2004/2003/2002/1977).

As such, I posit disappearance to be a highly relevant and extremely vivid, visceral, contemporary concept that has lingering potential beyond this single exhibition. I suggest that disappearance – and its related concepts – have meaningful connections elsewhere, both inside and outside of classrooms, and is an invitation to engage with the politics and poetics of seeing. Disappearance could be useful in art, photography, and general education at various levels as well as other fields as a generative starting point for critical dialogue, social critique, and artistic creation

and response, particularly in the offering to pivot: being *with* or being *against* disappearance and perhaps being both.

Tracing the Traces: On A/r/tography & Propositional Thinking

Now that I have considered some of the potential applications, pedagogical possibilities, ethical considerations, and resonance for this work, I invite us to return to the seven offerings⁸⁹ presented in Chapter 7 as a way of extending them – to trace the traces, per se, in a move to connect theory to practice once again. Threaded across all seven offerings is a significant underpinning of a/r/tography, a methodology and way of embodying research that invites emergence, transformations, collaborations, provocations, ruptures, openings, and creative intertwinement across disciplines, identities, communities, beings, places, and practices. As such, a/r/tographic understandings emerge from this study as artistic, pedagogical, and methodological. In many cases, all three occur at once, reflecting the nature of this hybrid inquiry as multi-modal as well as interdisciplinary and aesthetically meshed.

The offerings as a collection embrace, reflect, and perform an a/r/tographer's *art of tracing pedagogy beyond classrooms*. Like the lexicon, they highlight key global insights from this research experience as a living inquiry, reveal the creative pursuit and palpability of knowledge in multiple forms, and center the promise and pedagogy of photography education and educators. The offerings draw attention to some of the significant new understandings gained in the doing of this work, each one presented as a rendered tracing of meaning, method, and possibility. These doings invoke other doings. As such, the titles of the offerings implore the use of verbs to help activate their intentions: *lingering* (No. 1), *understanding* (No. 2), *pursuing* (No. 3), *seeing & cultivating* (No. 4), *rendering* (No. 5), *being* (No. 6), and *learning & making* (No. 7). These verbs express the active and lively states of embodying each offering, in what it *is* and what it *could be*. As well, these seven offerings not only trace pedagogy but are also themselves lingering *rhizomatic traces*: they trace the noteworthy residue of this work's learning, teaching, making, and becoming and, in doing so, leave their own trace. Thus, every tracing is yet another a trace, suggesting the iterative and narrative potential of the "pedagogical trace" (Prendergast, Lymburner, Grauer, Irwin, Leggo, &

⁸⁹ As a collection, the offerings described in Chapter 7 include: 1) **Tracing the Lexicon:** On Lingering with Language, Love, and Liminal Spaces; 2) **Tracing the Exhibition:** On Understanding *Against Disappearance* as a Provocative Learning Event; 3) **Tracing Disappearance:** On Pursuing Artists' Echoes and Photographic Inquiry; 4) **Tracing an "Ethics of Seeing:"** On Cultivating Visual Awareness; 5) **Tracing Duration and Necessary Discomfort:** On Rendering an Extended Image; 6) **Tracing Desire:** On the Importance of Being in and Alongside a Creative Community of Practice; and 7) **Tracing the In-between:** On In-between Spaces as Informal Learning and Making Opportunities.

Gouzouasis's, 2008, p. 59) both for a/r/tography and for other methodologies, endeavors, and disciplines.

Inspired by *propositional thinking* within a/r/tography (Lee, Morimoto, Mosavarzadeh, & Irwin, 2019; Leggo & Irwin, 2018; Rousell, Lasczik Cutcher, Cook, & Irwin, 2018; Truman & Springgay, 2016; Rousell, Lasczik Cutcher, & Irwin, 2018), I engage the offerings presented in Chapter 7 as colorful places of potential that invite meaning-making and evoke new propositions. Rousell, Lasczik Cutcher, Cook and Irwin (2018) suggest “a proposition is a theoretical lure or provocation that combines virtual potentials of the speculative imagination with the empirical dimensions of embodied experience in the actual world...and also as the source of enabling constraints,” being “catalysts for learning activities and experiences that exceed our capacities to foresee” (p. 25). Since “propositions draw our attention to potentials” (Leggo & Irwin, 2018, p. 52), one goal of actualizing them is to “draw from actuality as well as propose what *could* be” (Truman & Springgay, 2016, p. 259). That is my goal here, as I consider the forward-reaching gestures of this work, imagining how those gestures might act, holistically and a/r/tographically, as propositions towards the future of photographic inquiry, education, and creative memory work in/as research.

Upon Reflection: The Lexicon and Exhibition as Kinds of Propositions

Looking back, I now recognize I was using propositional thinking as part of this dissertation research before I named it: the lexicon and the exhibition upon which it is based are both a kind of proposition, inviting artistic commitment to a process of unfolding and emergence. The exhibition was self and group-directed as well as propositionally driven. Participants were presented with a theme of disappearance and invited to produce artwork towards that theme in an open-ended manner and collective environment. Yet, at the time of initial invitation, what each artist and what the group would produce was initially unknown and yet to be made. Inviting the teacher-artists to create their own artwork brought together a wide variety of viewpoints and imagery that could be intentionally juxtaposed, each juxtaposition another visual proposition in itself. As such, both group inquiry and the exhibition are put forth as generative, highly complex methods of artful engagement involving pedagogical implications as well as invitations towards research, theory, and practice. While the notion of an exhibition is certainly not new in art education, I am suggesting here its potential as an opportunity to publicly showcase arts-based research, to generate and exhibit art data, to invite collaboration, to engage a/r/tography, and to explore complex themes through creative forms and expressions – here, through photographic inquiry, although other forms of inquiry would also be beneficial and exciting.

As an *artistic* event, the exhibition is a moment for art educators (and, for example, their students) to embody their artist selves, to collaborate, to explore relevant topics through visual media, and to expand their writing practice *about* and photographic language *around* their own art and practice. As a *learning* event, it acts as a possible potential space for difficult pedagogy to be artfully engaged, for self-reflection and self-education, and for connections to teaching to be made. In this case, this involves exploring some of the shifting dynamics behind memory work which include remembrance as well as the right to forget. In this way, the exhibition can be seen as an *art of learning* and a way to demonstrate or display that learning while also inviting rigorous attention to art making and the creative process as experienced in community. Last, it is also a moment that brings together art and writing, a tenant of a/r/tography, whereby participants' artist statements became statements of longing alongside their art as places to linger, listen, and learn.

The invitation to creatively engage with photo-based memory work in an ethical manner evoked new artwork and meaningful experiences. This was sparked by the initial proposition to participate in the study and encouraged by earlier propositions made in the course, such as engaging in photographic learning, making alongside, photowalking, and building community. Those propositions led to *further* propositions, such as new opportunities for self-directed inquiries, personal growth, the inception of a research group, collaborations amongst group members, engaging research conversations, new art making, and the events of the exhibition, opening reception, and focus group meetings. As well, our hope was that the exhibition and its teachings would resonate beyond themselves, creating the possibility for further propositions to be envisioned or to manifest, highlighting a key potentiality for propositional work. The a/r/tographic research methodology I used provoked propositional thinking not only for myself but also for participants as a way to inspire openness, imagination, and hopeful embarkations into the future of the unknown. As well, the propositional thinking, in turn, provoked the a/r/tographic research and researcher to move in new and alternative directions while remaining open to what may come.

One of those alternative directions was the possibility of understanding and composing the data through a lexicon, a proposition made towards the potential of poeticizing observations and understandings emerging from the study. This became a way of thinking and writing photographically by composing language in a manner that spoke to the data as tiny pictures of research that, once gathered, rendered an extended image. In composing a lexicon as a creative method of data analysis and data presentation, this offered an alphabetical abecedarian 'structure' or template that, itself, is a proposition within a proposition. Each letter of the alphabet (here, American English) became a wide-open expanse of potential for wayfinding with words as I sought

to align observations, personal reflections, artwork, and interview excerpts with resonant phrasings and concepts for each letter. Further, I sought to align each letter to the other letters so that the whole lexicon would read as an original composition and an artistic gesture against the loss of its own language and form, *both photographic and a/r/tographic*. By tracing significant through-lines in the data and in some cases interlacing, overlapping, and juxtaposing them, the lexicon became an artistic way of re/presenting data through the creativity of visual lifewriting in both image *and* text. Together, the exhibition and lexicon create an intentional diptych: art and writing, photography and poetry, visual and verbal expression. In this way, propositions can work alongside one another to generate new images that reflect and diffract their potentiality, marking significant aesthetic offerings within, and reaching beyond, the research study in which they were first born.

On Lexical Thinking & Doing

As a new a/r/tographic rendering (alongside *disappearance* and *duration*), the *lexicon* offers a sense of poetic organization and evocative expression for the nuanced renderings and readings of data, stories, artwork, artists, and events as well as a variety of ways in which we might come to see them, share them, produce them, and write about them. The composition of a lexicon encourages subjectivity and the use a personal lens as a way of staying intimately close with one's work and allowing the data to speak in a way and in forms that they may be heard. As such, the creation of a lexicon invites the notion and productive practice of *lexical thinking and doing*. That is, a way to conceptualize, build, embody, and artfully present emerging vocabularies of meaning around one's work and experiences (be they teaching, art making, research, curation, writing, etc.) and as a way to develop a grammar of awareness around the notion of seeing. This includes how we see data, how we see ourselves in relation, how we see events and their unfoldings, how we see art, and how we see the very essence of qualitative and in particular arts-based research. To do so, I suggest, involves a reinvigoration around methods for seeing and ways of looking; here, the camera can be used as a metaphor for noticing, composing, framing, perceiving, cropping, and paying attention.

Lexical thinking involves intention and an intentional playfulness with language as a way of thinking like an artist. It highlights the importance of imagination, possibility, and openness towards generating an understanding, image, or vision of something in the making. This type of thinking is invested in the power of creativity and the usefulness of emotivity in relation to research and appreciates the delicacies and sensuousness of language as a way of knowing, including, and, in this study, *prioritizing* visual language. Lexical thinking is a/r/tographic as it is artistic in nature and can be seen as a form of creative art making – in a way, painting alphabetically with words.

As a way of writing about art and our art experiences, lexical thinking engages all the senses and invites a deeper study of phenomena through an engaged attunement to emergent qualities, important concepts, beautiful descriptions, and poetic methods. All of these deepen our discoveries, understandings, practices, and lived experiences in part through the act and art of writing⁹⁰. Further, creating lexicons for one's research, artwork, or events (here, an exhibition) involves lexical thinking through a generative and inspiring creative writing process whereby a novel, linguistic architecture can be built from the alphabets of one's own work, art, and observations. *The language emerges from the form, and the new form emerges as a language to behold it.*

Looking ahead, lexical thinking and doing might inspire pedagogical possibilities for photo-based memory work (and other kinds of work) inside classrooms, galleries, and other educative spaces as ways of inviting complexity, creativity, and poetic renderings. I suggest that the exhibition and the lexicon are promising forms for photography education and research, emerging from and connected to a/r/tography. They represent innovative structures for presenting and composing artwork and writing as research as well as an effective, artistic way to build a body of understanding and possibility *around* that work and those who created it and may engage with it.

Eight Diffractive Propositions for the Future

In this study, the act of tracing evokes the photographer's eye towards seeing the "vibrant matter" (Bennett, 2010, p. viii) and compositional possibilities for the assemblage of data, depths, and darlings. To trace is to carefully caress the edges of some *thing* over a period of time, sketching its contours and studying its topography in order to know more about its formation, form, and finesse. Once traced, new and different edges emerge, inviting a rephotographic gesture of second looking that reveals silhouettes of new potential and yet another trace.

Returning to the theorists and artists presented in Chapter 3, I have come to understand that they each perform their own kind of trace: for Sontag, the trace of photographic thinking and the voyeuristic and compassionate eye; for Barthes, the trace of his mother and the love and loss of her; for Butler, the trace of pain and being seen; for Miyako, the trace of time and broken history; and for Jaar, the trace of violence and the landscape of memory. Through their work of tracing as well as the photographic trace of my own that is this research, I come back to Barthes's 'only beginnings' (Allen, 2003) presented in Chapter 3 as a frame for looking at and writing about these photographs. Over time and in this study, I became better able to understand them in the following ways: I developed a more nuanced understanding of the capacity for *Photographability/Grievability*,

⁹⁰ See also "a lexicon for a lexicon" at the end of Offering No. 1 in Chapter 7.

specifically around disappearance. I learned how to consider *The Privilege of Seeing/Disrupting Seeing* through photographic creation, juxtaposition, and an exhibition. I pondered ways of exploring *Framing Desire* through art making and being in community. I performed a study of photography made *Post-Death: [to understand] Visual Narratives in the After-moment*. Finally, I cultivated a stronger sensitivity *Toward an Ethics of Picturing Others*. Through writing and art making, these writers and artists explore the capacities for photography and photographer to both trace and become traceable. Inspired by them and their offerings, I, too, enacted a trace, exploring the capacity for a/r/tography to evoke and provoke a tracing of research. Through artwork and written texts, research narratives, memory work, the lexicon, and the offerings each as traces and acts of tracing, new a/r/tographic understandings emerge as significant in this study.

Further, the traces of their influence have left a mark on my thinking and the ways in which I have come to appreciate this work, itself ‘only [a] beginning.’ Reflectively, I have come to understand the capacity for such ‘beginnings’ (Allen, 2003) to perform as a/r/tographical “openings” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx) that hope to open up new space for considering the photograph as knowledge agent and/or archive, a question I raised from the start. Staying with the notion of trace, the linger of their efforts (Sontag, Barthes, Butler, Miyako, Jaar) is echoed here, only in another form – this time as propositions, also positioned as ‘only beginnings’ (Allen, 2003).

Therefore, I put forward the following artful propositions as *offerings from offerings*, as-yet-unwritten cartographies of possibility, rendering, and encounter that seek to open doors to undiscovered worlds within theory, research, and practice and to become “catalysts for learning activities and experiences that exceed our capacities to foresee” (Rousell, Lasczik Cutcher, Cook & Irwin, 2018, p. 25). Namely, they are a way to think of these practices differently, as the propositions are a creative way of engaging all three. They emerge *from* and correspond *to* the offerings presented earlier in Chapter 7 which represent some of the key and resonant understandings emerging from this study, including artistic, pedagogical, and methodological discernments.

With the offerings as historical *reflections of/about* this research which have already occurred (important in narrative reflexivity), the propositions work to propel new thinking forward as *diffractions* (LeBlanc & Irwin, 2019; LeBlanc, Triggs, & Irwin, 2019) for the future. They invite artistic, pedagogical, and/or theoretical engagement with each of the seven offerings as a way of extending this work a/r/tographically into places of potentiality and directions not yet known. Further, I situate the act and art of tracing offerings as both useful and urgent with regards to the importance of teachers, artists, students, researchers, and others documenting and reflecting on their life narratives and their learning, tracing the residues of both. Such tracings enable the

creation of substantial markers of and memoirs about their self-evolution, transformations, and growth over time as a significant duration in which they persist, exist, and seek to thrive.

As such, the propositions are a/r/tographic evocations and provocations to engage, extend, expand, elaborate, embody, explore, and excavate the potential of these new understandings and discernments singularly *and* as a compilation. While ‘trace’ may evoke sentiments of something that has already occurred and is therefore traceable or has left its trace, it is intended here to be useful in tracing past, present, and/or future work and selves, while noting that for some, going back is a way of going forward.

The eight diffractive propositions I propose are as follows:

Poetically trace your own lexicon.

A/r/tographically trace a learning event.

Photographically trace the echoes of disappearance.

Visually trace an “ethics of seeing.”

Reflectively trace duration and/or/of discomfort.

Narratively trace desire(s).

Artfully trace an in-between space.

And the eighth, to encompass them all:

Lovingly trace pedagogy beyond rooms.

The eight adverbs for trace (*poetically, a/r/tographically, photographically, visually, reflectively, narratively, artfully, and lovingly*) are intended to be playful and artistic ‘ways in’ to each proposition and can be interchanged, combined, or reimagined. They are meant to inspire different kinds of creative action, traction, and artistry regarding the notions of trace, tracing, and what it means to proposition or engage with one. These eight diffractive propositions are calls to attend to theory, research, and practice as artistic engagements towards the unbounded, the script not written, and the not-yet-known, invoking *trace* as a verb with wings. They emerge as I trace my research, one impactful moment, big idea, and tiny fragment to another, in an attempt to behold its wholeness and magnitude while still cradling its mystery and fragility. As a collection, they represent *an art of theory*, highlighting the potential of artful thinking and doing to inspire new ways of expressing knowledge, cultivating research, and tracing methodology, practice, and the poetics of praxis.

Collectively, the propositions invite attentive awareness towards the importance and relevance of creativity, the potential of trace and acts of tracing as pedagogical, and the role of

variants and variation in education and research. They draw attention to the artistry and perception of visual literacy, notions of seeing/seers/seen, and traceability in places we may not yet know or anticipate but might now begin to imagine. They suggest the promise and excitement of tracing, teaching, designing, researching, innovating, participating in, and reflecting upon educational endeavors in artful ways as well as engaging in artistic endeavors in educative ways. Through creative forms that encourage novelty and invention, the propositional tracings make space for new possibilities, pedagogies, poignancy, and personalities to emerge, hinging on the ecstatic *potential* of potential. Truman and Springgay (2016) write, “Propositions do not give information as to how they function in concrete instances but gesture to how they could potentialize; allow us to feel what may be; in that regard, propositions are ‘lures for feeling’ (p. 25)” (p. 259, citing Whitehead, 1978).

As ways to artistically and philosophically document, narrate, linger with, return to, embrace, emote, notice, archive, map, trace, and collect the beautiful and complicated residues of our teaching, learning, making, and evolving selves, the *tracings as propositions* are invitations towards the poeticization of research and an *a/r/tography* of hope. As seemingly separate “lures” to trace certain qualities, concepts, emotional states, and methods in relation to events, the eight diffractive propositions come together in a way that speaks to their relationships *amongst* and *between* as well as gesture towards new places and directions that each proposition might be taken. They also suggest and intend to make space for the potential of further tracings, propositions, offerings, and new renderings to occur. This interrelatedness and suggestive harmony assert how one trace might come to bear on another and reveal how propositions that materialize from offerings are often deeply connected, conceptually rooted in the place where those offerings were first conceived while flowering towards new potentials. Finally, the number eight is significant in that the eight propositions in some ways echo the makeup and members of this group, of which there are eight: We are uniquely different yet come to bear upon one another. We made a series of artistic offerings now traceable. We *became* a proposition – our potential was magnified by our coming together, and from this creative activity and collaboration, new renderings are now possible.

Linked together in poetic prose, the eight propositions I have laid forth read and connect as the significant traces of this work and those who manifested it. As one, they compose a narrative research poem that is against the disappearance of its memory, highlighting the potency and vibrancy of *a/r/tography* as a creative research methodology of potential – potential offerings, potential collaborations, potential transformations, potential relationships, potential propositions, potential renderings, and potential gestures towards hope, creativity, and imagination.

Portrait

*Emerging from an in-between space,
the artistic echoes of
a photographic inquiry
against disappearance
linger still...*

*A group exhibition
exploring photo-based memory work
by eight artists, also teachers,
marks a significant learning event
with ethical demands,
evoking desires, discomforts,
and pedagogical dreams...*

*Evolving across a
profound duration,
photographic and otherwise,
I creatively render the fragments
of this experience
into a lexicon,
a poetic container and
alphabet of deepenings,
juxtaposing observations, images,
interviews, and new understandings
towards what it means to be
with and against disappearance.
A gesture of poetic offerings,
The Lexicon for Against Disappearance
is a compelling form
for the gatherings,
landscapes, languages,
and lingerings
of this highly visual experience...*

*Extending the image
once more,
this a/r/tographic living inquiry
of emotion, evocation, and education
is a durational portrait and
visual research memoir
of a journey once made,
meaningful evidence
of tracing pedagogy beyond rooms
and into the worlds
it began to inhabit.*

In this work, propositions and propositional thinking and doing resonate for they gesture beyond a course and an exhibition, existing outside of formal curriculum while still teaching. For theory, research, and practice, they help address the questions of: *How do we conceptualize, offer, and trace evocative, provocative learning experiences and come to understand them? What is a portrait of learning, and how can we mark this kind of duration?* Creative, generative, and reflectively diffractive, the poetics of propositional thinking open up gateways to possibility without establishing boundaries, norms, or expectations, embodying an open curriculum of emergence. Like provocative course assignments, similar to my experiences with a/r/tography, propositions are open-ended, interpretive, and creative places whose key provocation is to consider taking them up. As invitations towards the “art of seeing” (Kimmelman, 2005, p.5), the eight propositions offered here are future-looking renderings of opportunity, possibility, and potential for creations and learnings yet to come.

Reflectively, what I offered in the course EDCP 405 as a teacher was uniquely different than what I offered in the exhibition as a researcher/curator. Yet, they have their shared qualities. The course had a pre-choreographed structure in the form of a syllabus and daily outline, and while I always encourage creative interpretation of my assignments and projects, the presence of a roadmap in some ways dictated the drive. In comparison, the exhibition and research group were opportunities to create, learn, and make collaboratively in a somewhat less-prescribed manner. Both events were offered and embodied in a way that embraced the potentiality of open-ended contexts, where, in both cases, we knew not the path ahead, and discovered it as we walked. As well, both offered notes on a photographic education yet one (the course) had learning outcomes already established. The learning outcomes of the exhibition and research group, alternatively, emerged over time through moments of deep conversation, art making, creativity, frustration, curiosity, being alongside, messiness, excitement, observation, attending, passion, laughter, walking, and listening. As such, what and how the participants learned was dictated by the steps we took together, drawing the roadmap in real-time as we lived and as we learned. As such, our time together reflected the desiring *internal* proposition for a longing to learn and *to belong*, extending conversations begun in a course and narratively arced across the duration of one year.

All of this became possible in a space and time beyond the traditional school context and invites exciting possibilities and further propositional thinking for learning, teaching, researching, curating, writing, and art making in other places and in other ways than we may be accustomed to, expect, or have yet to imagine or create. The power of artful, heartfelt learning beyond coursework or outside the classroom *and* being in intentional community with likeminded others speaks to the

importance of the dynamic pedagogical adventure. They reveal the intriguing ways and myriad of forms in which different kinds of *beautiful learning*, *learners*, and *learning events* can occur if we can envision and see them, cultivate and encourage them, and make space for them to emerge, shine, and *be seen*. As such, this work is a poetic offering and willful proposition towards the transformative power of that space and what might happen there.



Figure 94 | By Paul Best, *Cartoon pencil drawing*.
On his photographic journey from EDCP 405 to the exhibition.
Collected as part of a focus group 'journey mapping' exercise.

Postscript



Fig. 95 | By Blake Smith, Untitled (locket)

...We are all in the process of becoming.

Piero Ferrucci (1990, p. 6)

I close this dissertation with the same quotation by Ferrucci (1990) that opened it as a way of bringing forward, once again, the image of a path and a “process of becoming” (p. 6). It speaks to the nature and curvature of this work as an evolving journey. As research projects and writing endeavors come to a conclusion, there is an opportunity to reflect back on the synergistic process as a gestalt (a whole) in terms of what was gained, learned, grappled with, opened up, made different, and reimagined along the way. There is also a moment to situate where things are now and where they might be going, in a forward-looking glance that carries with it the strength and new wisdom of having pursued important work.

Returning to the beginning of this dissertation and the story of my *why*, this particular moment of reflection is a necessary pause to take notice of and celebrate the work itself as a significant becoming and my own “process of becoming” alongside it. In a compelling invitation by my committee member Dr. Kedrick James, I was invited to bring closure and a final personal

reflection to this work in a way that that centers me in this process and brings us to the present moment. The writing of this Postscript, then, performs like a ninth proposition, in the ask of: *Where might this story and I be headed next? How does it end, and how might it begin again, informed by the experiences and richness of this research and what was learned? What resonated, what was wrestled with, and where is our group now? Having done this work and lived this process, what now is my credo?*

~

I began this research inspired to explore photo-based memory work in the company of like-minded others. At that time and like anyone at the start of a new journey, I knew not what would come of it in terms of who would participate, what would happen, how or in what ways we might engage photography, and what might be learned from this engagement. As I look back on it, an abundance of valuable experiences, new understandings, and relationships have unfolded in the in-between space of then and now, a space of once not knowing and now knowing differently.

I pause to reflect on this unfolding by taking up, alongside the provocation by James, the second of the eight propositions offered in Chapter 8: **A/r/tographically trace a learning event**. I do so by considering, through a narrative frame, some of the ways I have integrated this key experience as an artist, researcher, and teacher. Most of all, I appreciate the nature of this unique learning experience – and the event of a dissertation as a key part of it – as an incredible *journey*. Because gaining an education is a long road we travel, not a set destination to reach, in a way, the proposition could also read as an invitation to: **A/r/tographically trace a learning journey**. This journey has been transformative to my life as an arts educator and lifelong learner, and it will continue to reveal its gifts and likely change course over time. Like a proposition, I imagine where might this journey lead, seeking its fullest potential while acknowledging its unknowability as the future to come, particularly given the current 2020 context of COVID-19.

As I consider the beginning of this learning journey, I return to one of my first courses at UBC in an event that marked a turn, mentioned earlier in Chapter 1: *A/r/t/ography* with Dr. Rita Irwin. My relationship with *a/r/t/ography* is most significant, for this methodology was impactful and impressed upon me the hybridity and livelihood of being an artist, researcher, *and* teacher, encouraging artistic practice as research practice. Further, the main themes addressed in this dissertation – memory, loss, and disappearance – are themes that have been with me from that initial course and perhaps even earlier, part of an ongoing conversation between the camera and I. In this way, *a/r/t/ography* provoked and evoked this journey.

As part of an *a/r/t/ography* assignment, the journey began with a self-portrait of sorts – an image of my grandmother Marjorie’s golden locket held in a plaster cast of my hand (pictured, Fig.

95), one of a series of digital photographs as mementos about displacement, loss, and a search for home. Those early photographs were *against* the disappearance of something I had yet to articulate at that time and *with* the disappearance of certain beloveds as well as the loss of my identity as a high school photography teacher, a necessary trade-off made in order to pursue graduate school in another country, Canada. Those images – of her locket, my mother’s childhood Brownie Bullet camera, Bunny, the Yoruba mask from South Africa, and more – were my first official foray into photo-based memory work as a/r/tographic research and represent an ongoing search for memory, still active to this day.

Fast forward to this present moment and the journey ends, or at least this part of it does, at home in Atlanta, Georgia alongside my mother and father in the home where I grew up. On this sunny day in October as the leaves outside begin to turn, I sit at my mother’s mahogany desk writing and editing this Postscript. Reflecting on the accomplishment of completing a dissertation, I acknowledge and am proud of the work and perseverance it took to get here.

On the wall in front of me is a framed print by American artist Norman Rockwell that I have looked at many times when my eyes needed a break from the screen, called *Surprise* (1956). It is an image of a female teacher smiling, facing her classroom of young students who wrote “Happy Birthday Miss Jones, Surprise!” on her green chalk board. This image is important because it has been a constant visual reminder, literally right in front of me, as I write and think and dream, of a devotion to teaching. This is a role I so much look forward to returning to, being my greatest passion and reason for pursuing graduate school. In this way, the journey is coming full circle – leaving one classroom in order to soon and hopefully enter another, including, possibly, the virtual classroom.

A/r/tography has taught me that I do not have to abandon any role in order to be another one. I can be an artist who teaches, a teacher that makes and teaches art, and a researcher interested in both the art of teaching and the artfulness of research. This study and writing process engaged all three of these roles simultaneously, as well as the role of curator, by inviting seven artists and teachers to participate alongside. Together, as this dissertation describes, we explored memory work in the context of disappearance from numerous photographic perspectives, namely our own, in the pursuit of pedagogical and artistic discoveries. In this way, the journey was lovingly shared.

Through my engagement with the participants in this study, a/r/tography also taught me the immense value of creating and being in a creative community of practice, as discussed earlier in the dissertation. I learned of the vitality that comes from a sense of belonging and the commitments of/to a group, no matter how small. Working with this group as well as working with the photograph have revealed the benefits of appreciating and bringing together diverse

perspectives and possibilities – *visually, aesthetically, socially, culturally, conceptually, curatorially, and experientially* – as a way of coming to understand, learn, collaborate, and *see*. That sense of diversity, intentional fragmentation, and gathering together *thrives* as part of an art practice and interdisciplinary research agenda that centers *a/r/tography*, for it celebrates multiplicity, relationality, creativity, and the importance of building an inclusive artistic community. This is something I learned and something I will carry forward into future endeavors.

~

As I write of our creative community of practice in this reflective manner, I am cognizant of a longing to be back in our time of togetherness. As mentioned, this research ended nearly four years ago, and in the time that has passed from then to now, much resonates still. As the writing of this dissertation was completed in a place of necessary solitude, dictated by a writing process as well as COVID-19, I am aware of my own nostalgia for the group context as well as the sincere desire for a sense of community once again. The isolation and loneliness of writing during a global pandemic meant two things: one, that my ongoing photowalking practice has surfaced as a productive artistic act against quarantine, and two, that the yearning for a connection to a group surfaced on the page, as I attempted to stay in community by writing about it.

Both practices, photowalking and writing, encourage creativity and thoughtfulness while giving form to a process of journeying through. This desire to be in community is strong, and I relived and remembered our group's time together fondly as I walked and as I wrote. Yet, because collaborative work also has its difficulties, some of which I wrote about, I am careful not to over-romanticize, as there were challenging moments that had to be negotiated and worked through. These moments contributed to my understandings of relational work in community, of ethics in collaborative projects, and taught me how to be a better researcher, leader, listener, and person.

Upon reflection, I now understand the power and need for coming together as a collective with other educators and artists, particularly in graduate education. I also see the importance of leadership in terms of creating these opportunities and groups both inside and outside of school. To me, this connectivity is vital to human experience, something we know now more than ever.

While I hold dear the memories of our time together, it is also time to move on and prepare to let things go in order to create space for new prospects to appear. This is both the challenge and opportunity of memory work: the past offers both a gesture of *return to* and a gesture of *moving away from* – in order to go forward. In this way, memory work is *a photographer's journey of currere* (Irwin, 2018a/2017; Pinar, 2010/1975), evident in this dissertation and the exhibition anchoring it.

~

In my longing for togetherness, I like to think that, in some ways, our community still exists. We have not done another project together since this one, but that is not to say that we never will. In fact, it was once mentioned by someone in the group that we might want to come together for another exhibition – *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory II*, with new artwork, perhaps five (2021) or ten (2026) years later. In essence, a second view of disappearance and a chance to consider the ‘timelessness’ of our images, as Niloofar once said. With everyone’s permission, I have also considered sharing the entire exhibition on Instagram or posting our show on a website, both for an expanded public audience and the furthering of dialogue around memory. These possibilities are quite special and exciting to imagine and could be a powerful example of durational a/r/tographic inquiry, rendering a new lexicon or rephotographic image of the first.

When the exhibition was taken down in late August of 2016, everyone picked up their work from The Lobby Gallery, and we went on our way, all in different directions. My twenty-one prints, still framed, are now in a cardboard box in a storage unit in Vancouver. I look forward to hanging them once again on a wall in a gallery or my next home. Since October of 2016, our group has mostly scattered, with everyone moving along in our own busy, devoted lives as artists, parents, partners, teachers, students, writers, and friends. As the connecting figure of this group, I am in touch with some more often and more closely than others. My closest ongoing relationship remains with Joanne, as it was from the beginning. Our alonsideness continues to this day in a beautiful, intentional way that appreciates the richness, complexities, and maturation of one another’s journeys – journeys of learning, teaching, writing, making, and living. Though we are separated by over 2,700 miles and current U.S./Canadian border restrictions, there is a nearness still.

Through the sharing of images and messages, Instagram keeps our group connected in a dynamic way through photography. Matthew, Andrew, Niloofar, Hari, and I follow snapshots of one another’s daily lives, and Paul and Kathleen stay in touch in other ways. Paul recently shared with me that his white chair sculpture from the exhibition has spent most of the past few years in his garden, being weathered by the seasons. On Instagram, I see children grow up, babies born, moments captured, art made, skate parks ridden, meals shared, flowers blooming, landscapes traversed, experiences had, life happening, and time passing by. Collectively, I get the real sense that everyone is in pursuit of a purposeful life, actively engaged in the meaningful endeavors of work, parenting, graduate school, art making, teaching, personal growth, family life, and more. I admire everyone’s evident drive to succeed, and it is a privilege to stay bonded this way.

~

In addition to my reflections on the group and our process, this entire experience has driven me to recognize and imagine new directions for this work, many illustrated in Chapter 8, and, most of all, challenges what I thought I understood about photography and the purpose of an education. I have been strengthened and stretched in ways I knew not possible, better for having gained this experience and grateful for having shared it with others. Part of that challenge and education comes from what I wrestled with to get here, some of which is described in Chapter 7 in Offering No. 5 ‘Tracing Duration and Necessary Discomfort: On Rendering an Extended Image.’ In addition to what I wrote there and since the time of this study, I have grappled with and had to make sense of new challenges. Some were about the writing process and research, while others were more personal, although the three are of course intertwined.

As a narrator, I wrestled with how to tell this story in a way that honors everyone who took part. As a writer, it was difficult at times to find a balance of breadth and depth in the writing. As a scholar, I fight for relevance and resonance in this work. As a graduate student, I was challenged by a lack of community once the study ended and not being allowed to return to Canada due to COVID-19. As a researcher and photographer, I worked to continually define my own sense of ethics and found myself unsure, after all the images taken, what or who or how to photograph next. As a teacher, I had to learn to let go. As a family member, I struggled with the death of my grandfather, Pop, in 2018. And finally, as a human being, I have had challenging experiences with depression, anxiety, loneliness, and trauma that came to bear on my life and this work, as I struggled most of all with knowing what is good enough. In the end, I believe in my heart that it is.

The contention with myself was paramount and has been dizzying at times but over time, found its cadence, strength, and poise. This was all part of the iterative learning process as a writer and new researcher finding her way. The wrestling and what was learned from it is part of what, from the event of this learning journey, I will carry along my way. The failures, missteps, and bruises to the soul make us that much stronger in the end. *It was never supposed to be easy anyway.*

~

Looking forward to the journey to come, I envision many things along the road ahead and am excited by the potential that awaits. My plans include possibly working in art and photo teacher education, creating and being involved in new communities of practice, finding opportunities to curate and participate in shows, continuing existing relationships with our group, further exploring a/r/tography, and potentially studying art therapy. Artistically, there is a longing to return to a practice and teaching of visual journaling. I also yearn to return to film and the darkroom, making silver gelatin prints by hand under the glowing red lights; although, given the present coronavirus

context, I realize this may not be possible. Thematically, loss is still a recurrent subject in my work, while the exploration of hope continues to grow and expand. As well, I have an interest in conceiving and producing new work, including: 1) fresh collaborations and local and international projects; 2) potentially working with marginalized groups similar to [Hope in Shadows](#), a Vancouver-based community photography project celebrating local photographers and the places they love, live, and call home; and 3) possibly penning a text for graduate students on writing, resilience, and courage. Mainly, my intentions are to continue engaging in photographic inquiry, as well as creative writing, photowalking, and teaching. The rest, I imagine, will unfold in due time.

Reflecting on the impact of this process on my art, as an artist, I am more committed to my artistic practice as a result of doing this research and being involved in and inspired by the community of a/r/tographers at UBC. My practice has strengthened, and my relationship to photography has deepened, not only in how I was challenged but also in how I was so deeply moved. Therefore, I am excited to continue my photographic practice both as arts-based research and as a personal creative endeavor outside the academy, something I have not done for a while.

Currently, I am in the process of imagining a new photography series, informed by yet different from this work. For now, *The Visual Memoir Project* continues and will one day become a photo book or series of them. Diptychs and extended images are still of ongoing interest, although due to being home or near home much of this year, my most recent photographs are singular portraits of my parents and our home, Riley our sweet senior dog, or images from the places where I walk: Briarcliff Heights, the Atlanta Beltline, and Timothy Drive. These images are still, in their own way, against and with disappearance and are my way of continuing the memoir.

~

After many years in graduate school, this story now comes to a close as one journey ends and another begins. My life as an artist, researcher, and teacher takes on new wings, and the future is bright yet unknown. I anticipate, with great excitement and some understandable trepidation, a return to teaching at a time when what I know teaching to be is no longer – or, no longer right now – with the opportunity to be something altogether novel and new. The possibilities emerging at this time for art, education, and research are rousing while challenging at once, for this is new territory we are all in that encourages new ideas and flexible, innovative approaches towards pedagogy and practice. As I envision teaching online, it is promising that photography as a teachable subject is one that in many ways thrives on the screen, inviting discussions on and creative explorations of the language, linguistics, and limits of seeing, sharing, and being seen. Therefore, despite any concerns about the next unfolding, a kind friend recently reminded me that I bear the capacity,

skills, and confidence to evolve with this process. Like other teachers I know and admire, I will find ways to engage, inspire, evoke, adapt, and shine. This conviction comes, in part, from what I gained through *this experience*, giving me the strength to meet this moment.

In closing, the study ended in 2016, and the writing found completion in 2020, a significant year for us all. At the time of composing this piece, we are nine months deep into COVID-19 which is redefining understandings of community, art, teaching and learning, research, mental health, communication, employment, relationships, and more. Disappearance takes on new meaning right now, inviting me to consider it in new ways: With the disappearance of in-person learning, what appears in its place? How do we cope with a disappearance of normalcy, certainty, and human touch? During this critical time, what and who have appeared alongside to guide us, inspire us, sooth us, teach us, and lead us forward? How can we wayfind this new space for ourselves, our families, our colleagues, and our students? Finally, what is the role of art and photography during a pandemic, and what does photo-based memory work look like at/of this time? What will those memories and photographs be, and how will I engage in this significant storytelling opportunity?

In a time of great separation, I put forward this work, a passion project, in the hope it kindles connection, conversation, and creative action. I desire for it to inspire people to come together, learn together, and make art together, including doing so virtually on screens as we explore all that is possible across distance through technology. I also look forward to when we can all be together once again. Most of all, it is my sincere aspiration that this work finds resonance, contributes something exciting and new, and sparks inspiration, offering value to photographers and photo researchers, fellow a/r/tographers, graduate students, and “those who dare teach” (Freire, 1998, p.3).

Therefore, while there is a certain uncertainty *and* promise in the air with a palpable sense of not knowing what the future holds, I feel hopeful towards navigating the uncharted waters ahead. I am confident that what I have learned during my education and through this challenging yet rewarding process will carry me through, safely and spiritedly to the other side – because, after all, this journey with photography and education is my *credo*⁹¹: what I have given my heart to.

⁹¹ ‘Credo’ was a significant writing assignment from Dr. Carl Leggo as a statement about what you most deeply believe in. It was one of my favorite writing prompts given in the final course he taught at The University of British Columbia that I took with Joanne. Akin to lifewriting, writing your credo is an invitation to poetically linger with *that which you have given your heart to*, regarding your greatest commitments, vocation, time, love, and passions. It is a heartfelt, revealing, and cathartic exercise for writers, students, and anyone who has given their heart to something or someone.

Credo

A Tenth Proposition: Write your credo

I believe in the power of encouragement and being alongside.
I believe in our potential for greatness and magical thinking.
I believe in creating opportunities and manifesting dreams.
I believe in the capacity of photographs to stir the soul.
I believe in the transformative power of art education.
I believe in the restorative capability of lifewriting.
I believe in the resilience of the human spirit.
I believe in the importance of community.
I believe in the love and labor of teaching.
I believe in a future that we make as ours.
I believe in writing with poetry and grit.
I believe in the mystery of not knowing.
I believe in the power of vulnerability.
I believe in the vibrancy of creativity.
I believe in hope as a verb.

And I believe in learning as an *incredible* journey
of dreaming, daring, and deepening.

Credo.

Epilogue

An Open Letter to Our Group

Dear Paul, Kathleen, Hari, Niloofar, Matthew, Andrew, and Joanne,

As I write these final words, bringing this dissertation – and our story – to a meaningful close, I hope, in some ways, this is not the end of our conversation. Many of you I have not seen since we last parted ways as a group on October 1st, 2016, in East Vancouver at Joanne's home. During the time it took me to write and make sense of all of this (our exhibition, our process, our interviews), I often reminisced and wondered where your lives have led each of you since our research group parted ways on the day of our final focus group. As a lingering memento of our time together, this joyful moment of goodbye was captured with Matthew's fisheye lens in a memorable photograph, an image I hold dear because it will always remind me of our time together, taken in the place where most of our generative conversations occurred.

As I reflect on this experience, I am reminded again and again of my sincere gratitude towards all of you for saying yes and for sharing all that you did. Your participation meant possibility and hope, and it also meant that I did not have to do this work and walk this road alone. As such, the time our group spent together from 2015-2016 was the most meaningful sense of community and belonging I felt in all of my graduate education where so much of it was dedicated to solo learning – ironic, given the lived experience of being a teacher surrounded by excited students and the magical chaos of a classroom in motion, my previous life and the context of how we first met in the UBC course EDCP 405. In a way, our group, made up mostly of my former students, became its own circle of learning and formed its own self-taught class, just in a different 'room.' I am ever grateful for this opportunity to have lived, learned, and been alongside this journey with each of you.

Collectively and one by one, you should know that your unique contributions, thoughtful insights, artwork, and personal narratives have enriched the field of art and photo education scholarship in a way that I believe is full of potential and meaning for artists, educators, researchers, and curators, particularly around memory work, the concept of disappearance, and the power of exhibitions. Together, we have made an original offering of ideas and imagery towards photography education through a/r/tographic research. Our work has helped to deepen understandings about what it might mean to be *with* and *against* disappearance, as we explored the possibilities of photographic inquiry within the frame of memory in eight unique directions visually, conceptually, pedagogically, and personally. Further, in our coming together (staying together) after a course, we have shown what is possible when artists and educators build an intentional creative community of practice around making, learning, and collaboration and engage in collective artistic endeavors such as a group exhibition as part of our professional and personal development. I am so very proud of us and what we did. You should be, too.

Looking backward and forward, my great hope is that you found this experience worthwhile and have taken the pieces of it that resonated with you along your way into your lives, teaching, art making, other collectives and communities, graduate educations, research, collaborations, self-learning, and your ongoing photography practice. For me, I have tried to share what was most significant by composing a dissertation that reflects and speaks to the nuance and narrative of our endeavors by illuminating them through the writing itself, by centering our images and artist statements, and by creating the lexicon, the offerings, and the propositions as new contributions to the literature. Perhaps, from these forms, there will be other resonations and maybe other new forms. It would be wonderful if what we created and presented is useful to others who are perhaps dreaming up similar projects or tackling similar questions or themes. Either way, we will always have the shared memory of knowing it was meaningful and, to us, *what mattered*.

This study started out being about photography and became so much more, which I now understand to be the nature of research – you never end up where you thought you would and, often, where you end up is far richer and more compelling than you once or could have imagined. Part of that journey is who we meet along the way; *you* were my noteworthy encounters and community, giving shape, texture, and meaning to the story we wrote as we lived it together. There would be no *Against Disappearance: A Photographic Search for Memory* without you.

To the members of this research group who will stay forever bonded through this experience and through this document that attempts to capture some of its essence, **thank you for everything** – for all that you taught us about photography and your ways of seeing, for all that you offered, for all that you gave, for all that you are. Your students, colleagues, families, co-workers, loved ones, and mentors are lucky to know you, as am I.

Most of all, know that your voice matters and has been publicly archived here. Know that the time and hours we spent over coffee and snacks and walking has made a difference and left its mark upon the learning landscape. Personally, it has left an indelible imprint on my life as an educator, artist, and researcher, showing me that qualitative research is more about relationships than anything else. I will carry this experience with me as I embark back into a life of teaching, this time with a renewed sense of understanding and an even greater respect for the complexity, reach, demands, and potential of photography education as well as the power of being and learning in community.

Until our paths cross again in Canada or elsewhere, may you find success, great joy, and a lifetime of beautiful, compelling photographs along your way. It had indeed been quite the journey.

Against ever forgetting how much I appreciate you,

Blake E. Smith



Fig. 96 | By Matthew Sinclair, Group photograph 2016
*A final image of our research group, with Kathleen joining us on the phone I am holding.
Back row left to right: Hari, Niloofar, Joanne. Front row left to right: Blake, Andrew, Paul, & Matthew.*

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Appendix B: The B-Side Lexicon

A collection of words, phrases, and concepts that were significant and noted, in relation to 'Against Disappearance.'

Absence	Language of forms, A
Aesthetic experience	Learning event
Afterimage	Lenses, Multiple
Anxiety	Lifewriting, On the Art of
Archive	Lingerings, Significant
Artists, Practicing	Living curriculum
Bearing witness	Longing
'Beautiful suffering'	Loneliness, Against
Being heard, On	'Long-term autobiographical project, A'
'Being seen as a teacher with value'	Loss, On
Bittersweet	'Making alongside piece, The'
Boundaries	Meaning making
Captions, On the importance of	Melancholy objects
'Change blindness'	'Memory of our labor, The'
Collaboration	Natality
Collective	Obsolescence
'Commitment to a process'	Opportunity
Community-building	Pedagogical possibilities
Consent	'Perpetual flicker'
Contact sheet	Photowalking as a method, On
Contemplative acts	Place
'Corporeal body, The'	Positionality
Courage	Potential
Creative thinking	Presence
(Sontag's) 'Cubist thinking'	Privilege
Curate ('to care')	Profound
Didactics	Psychoa/r/tography (Smith, 2018)
Digital landscape	Reflexivity
Diptychs, On	Relationships
Disruption	Renderings
'Documentary artwork, A'	'Re-seeing'
Duration	Resonance
Echo-methodology	Signatures against glass walls
Emergence, Creative	'Storytelling from our lives'
Encounters	'Teachers, Because we are'
Erasure	Temporality
Ethics & art	Thematic adjacency
Excess	'The tracing of time'
Exegetical thinking & doing	Time capsule
'Experiences as art'	Transformations
Experiential learning	Transience
'Gift upon gift'	'Unexpected things, The'
Heavy	Vancouver's light
Illumination, The art of	Vulnerability
Image as metaphor	Vision
In relation, On Being	Visual imagination
Intersections	Visual journals
Invitations	Visual thinking
Iterations	Writing wounded
Journey	Yesterday, A delicate awareness of
Land, Doing Memory Work on This	Zero,' Howard Gardner's 'Project