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Lost-and-found Photos: Practices and Perceptions

Todd J. Wemmer
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Lost-and-found Photos: Practices and Perceptions

A Dissertation Presented

by

TODD J WEMMER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
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Lost-and-Found Photos: Practices and Perceptions

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DEDICATION

For my father, Jerry J Wemmer, who taught me how to use a camera
and to be a collector.

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ABSTRACT

LOST-AND-FOUND PHOTOS: PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS

FEBRUARY 2016

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Personal photographs become separated from their original owners in a number of ways, due to time or tragedy, sometimes ending up in strangers' hands. Dealers, collectors, curators, bloggers, scholars, and families actively seek what are frequently called "orphaned," "abandoned," or "found" photos and present them to the public in multiple formats. This dissertation offers an analysis of the practices and perceptions that surround these presentations, and it argues for use of a more inclusive term ("lost-and-found") to describe personal photos that are connected to both finders and losers.

Data were collected in three primary ways: (1) examination of the current contexts in which "lost" photos appear (e.g. books, websites, newspapers), (2) interviews with collectors of "lost" photos, and (3) the project's website, designed to collect anecdotes from those affected by "lost" photos.

Dominating this field of study are the perspectives of those who find personal photographs. The choices photo-finders make regarding the presentation and interpretation of photographs differ in clear ways, enabling me to group their practices within five categories which are evident across all formats examined in this study:

Museum Curator, Archivist/Preservationist, Essayist/Editor, Reuniter, and Dealer. What unites practitioners across these discrete categories is the act of compiling and displaying "lost" photos within public archives, where new presentations of old photos invite myriad interpretations, conversations, and possibilities.

Since the perspectives of those who have lost personal photographs have been largely missing from this field of study, I created tools to capture the viewpoints of photo "losers." The project's website, Lostandfoundphotos.org, provided a space in which contributors shared stories of personal photos they had lost, challenging notions of finder-collectors who often see themselves as the sole appreciators of "lost" photos' true value.

Most importantly, this project gave a literal voice to photo-losers through an audio component—a voicemail system which recorded contributors' stories of lost personal photographs. This aural element offers a new medium for the examination of the visual, and it provides an emotional depth which, it is hoped, may inspire an enlargement of lost-and-found photography practices to accommodate the perspectives of both finders and losers.

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LOST AND FOUND AND LOST AND FOUND

Introduction

Many have felt the panic of not being able to find their personal photos, whether

they are paper snapshots from long ago or digital images that have suddenly disappeared

from phones or computers. It need not be as devastating as a fire that consumes all the

family albums or an image-laden computer hard drive that crashes; it can be a single

missing tattered paper photograph that causes angst, or that one digital image lost in the

disorganized electronic folder.   For it is not just quality or quantity of photographs, but

what they contain—which is often autobiographical, connected to friends, lovers, and

personal experiences—that made them important. Ulrich Baer writes in *Spectral

Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*, "There remains one simple fact the viewer

always knows about a photograph, regardless of her or his training: 'Here it is.' The

single, indisputable truth about any photograph is not its meaning or veracity but its

testimony about time" (7). For Baer, this "testimony about time" is connected to the role

photographs play in remembrance and recovery surrounding traumatic events, but I

would argue this claim touches upon something very basic that permeates everyday

photography. For personal photographs, whether a single image or a pile of photos,

whether vacation photos or a blurry snapshot, the "here it is" moment will be the

stimulation for all sorts of feelings, memories, and ultimately practices. In losing these

photographs, therefore—when "Here it is" becomes "Where is it?"—we lose much more

than paper objects; we also lose the trove of personal associations bound up with these images.

Preserving our personal photographs thus becomes critically important, yet it isn't easy to do. As D.J. Waldie writes in an introductory essay to *Close to Home: An American Album,* a published collection of anonymous family snapshots, "All of us are arsonists, and the ordinary is on fire every day. These snapshots—those you've just found and your own that you're about to lose—insist that we're destined to be among the disappeared" (15). To reduce that likelihood, Barbara Gould advises readers in "Dealing with Grief, Guilt and Gratuity," a short article for the website *Canadian Senior Years,* that "Photos and snapshots should be labeled, otherwise it is highly likely that no one will even know who [the people in the photos] are." This kind of documentation, Gould argues, "should be addressed well ahead of time and put on paper, but so often this is neglected or just an unbearable task that no one cares to undertake." Indeed, one needs only to consider where photographs will go upon death to consider the work involved in keeping, maintaining, and passing on a personal photograph collection.

Inability to identify people in the photos left behind by those who die may be the primary culprit in the abandonment of old photographs. While old photographs often contain writing with names and dates, this does not guarantee future identification. Websites like *Heritagephoto.com* and *Ancestry.com* offer advice for protecting family photographs such as using archival boxes, making multiple copies, and backing up computers. The National Archives offers detailed advice on protecting personal photographs, such as how to choose storage containers and the types of photo albums one should use. After reading long tracts posted to these sites concerning the care of personal

photographs, it is clear that preserving photographs and the subjects within them from getting lost isn't easy.

In fact, all personal photographs are trying to get lost. Whether they are tucked away in a photo album or existing as ones and zeroes in a computer hard drive, it takes work by their caretakers to protect personal images *and* their accompanying and desired meanings and stories from becoming "lost." Personal photographs (digital and paper) exist in an ephemeral state, always in danger of losing their visual presence and their memory-inducing vitality, literally and figuratively. Just as photos are ever trying to get lost, they are also ever trying to get found. Everyday cultural practices, such as photographing, scrapbooking, creating family albums, photo organizing, and sharing online via email or social networks build miniature and massive archives that, in turn, preserve photographs and the memories and stories they hold. This is important not only for the owners and subjects of the photographs but also for future generations and future viewers, as Evan Carroll and John Romano's note in *Your Digital Afterlife:* "the things you own today may one day be exponentially more valuable to someone else, be they family, friends, or even historians" (45).

Photos have value and are worth the effort it takes to preserve them because they have meaning. For example, photographer Graham Smith writes in "Albert Smith" for *Granta* of the need he felt to foil his mother's attempt to get rid of a departing father's family photos in this way:

> But whatever hope that box full of better days gave me it was empty on
> that awful and final day we were a family. One of the rare times I knew
> without a doubt I had done something right was on bin men [i.e., trash
> collection] day when, before leaving for school, I salvaged the box of

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negatives and hid them in a dark corner on the top shelf of our pantry, well
away from the nerves of my mother. (130)

Smith writes, "many years later I got to know a little of who my dad was, and I think the

love and belonging he left behind in that shoebox full of negatives were all he ever

wanted from life" (156). Here, Smith's mother wants the photographs gone, but they are

salvaged by a son. These photos are both lost and found: photographs destined to be lost,

but recovered and written about in a personal essay, where they will continue to exist for

both Smith and his readers. Smith's essay is an attempt to recover not only the story of

retrieving the photographs from the trash, but the personal meanings the photographs

hold after the passing of years.

We have all seen moments of meaning arising from photographs: people looking

at images, lingering over certain ones longer than others. There are unattainable interior

dialogues occurring during conscious and unconscious examinations of photographs.

One needs only to think about the personal photographs that she or he has carried through

life to understand how photographs change meanings as the people who own the

photographs change, go through different life experiences, grow older and mature, and

the people and places in the photographs appear to remain the same. In this sense, a

photograph becomes meaningful for us because it, as Andre Bazin writes, "embalms

time": "Those grey or sepia shadows, phantomlike and almost undecipherable, are no

longer traditional family portraits but rather the disturbing presence of life halted at a set

moment in their duration, freed from their destiny. . . " (198). Bazin's observation

suggests the photographs of places and people we know are frozen in time, forever

paused at the moment the shutter has been pushed, whether the push of the button is a

carefree act during an unguarded moment or a carefully planned action undertaken by a relative. This concept of "frozen time" is repeated over and over in expressions of photography. As Michelle Citron writes in *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions*, "The camera freezes the child's life, which can then be stored for safekeeping in an album or a box or a tape. . .Deterioration and death are stopped, but so is the process of development and independence. At a deep-down level, these images may betray a parental panic of losing one's children" (11). The fact of this halted moment is of constant fascination to many who encounter photographs of the living and the dead, strangers or family.

The idea that a photograph can sustain a split second of a person's life in perpetuity is especially poignant when considering photos of those who have passed away. The novelist Jeffrey Eugenides writes in "Passing into Life," "in the case of the dead, nothing physical remains. And so the photograph itself becomes the living thing. The dead, in passing away, give a measure of their vitality to the images of themselves they leave behind" (n.pag.). In facing the untimely death of his father and aunt, and the framed photographs of them in plain site after their death, Eugenides is moved to consider not the halting of time which a still image may produce, but the vibrancy which photographs of the deceased may assume and may project back to the living who look upon them. This would suggest not an embalming of time, but rather a continuation of the life of the dead and an activation of memory within those who remain to look upon photographs of the deceased.

Yet, not *all* photographs of the deceased necessarily contain the same sense of vibrancy, as in the oft-cited story of Roland Barthes' "Winter Garden Photograph,"

described in *Camera Lucida*. After the death of his mother, Barthes pores over photographs of his mother looking for her essence in the images, but cannot "find" her until he discovers a photograph of his mother when she was five years old, standing in a winter garden in 1898. Barthes writes, "I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother" (69). In the portrait of his mother at five, Barthes writes, "I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever. . ." (69).

These kinds of interactions with personal photographs lend themselves to a narrative of personal loss and discovery, productive personal reflections, and cultural perceptions and practices. In this manner, the life of the photograph exists apart from the physical (or digital) object. Barthes writes, "photographs are signs which don't take, which turn, as milk does. Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see" (6). And even when viewers believe the photo is showing what it is that they believe they see, it can come to mean something different, whether as a result of the passage of time between viewings, the altering dynamics of everyday life, or new contextual sites and relationships where the photograph may find residence. As personal photographs travel from site to site (digital or analog) and as they pass through time, as they get lost, as they are discovered, they leave multiple meanings and memories in their wakes.

Lost-and-Found Photographs

"Lost-and-found photographs" is a term I prefer to use for what are commonly called "found," "snapshot," "accidental," "orphaned," "anonymous" photographs or just "family photography."

These images are also sometimes referred to as "vernacular photographs."

"Vernacular photography" is a broad term to describe a host of different types of personal photographic objects. In a series of short essays in a 2000 issue of *History of Photography,* several scholars defined "vernacular photography" according to their understandings of the term. Geoffrey Batchen writes that vernacular photographs are "Ordinary photographs, the ones made or bought (or sometimes bought and then made over) by everyday fold from 1839 until now, the photographs that preoccupy the home and heart but rarely the museum or academy" ("Vernacular Photographies" 262). Daile Kaplan, director of photographs and photobooks for Swann Galleries, defines vernacular photographs as those made by an "untrained maker" or an "amateur photographer," while scholar Elizabeth Edwards posits that vernacular photography also includes "commercially produced images" such as cartes-de-visites purchased by travelers (qtd. in Batchen, "Vernacular Photographies: Responses"). Scholar Douglas Nickels advocates defining vernacular photographs by their usage instead of what they look like. This would, as Nickel explains, "locate vernaculars within the complex belief systems of the communities that interpret them and avoid the trap of lumping all 'ordinary' consumers of pictures together and require scholars to be attentive to discreet photographic practices" ("Roland Barthes" 230).

A.D. Coleman refers to snapshots as "vernacular" as well as "quotidian" in his 1992 essay that explores the functions and contexts of amateur photographs. Like many essays about amateur-made photographs, he works to separate the vernacular photo from art photography, and points to its neglect in the history of photography. He writes, "For if there is indeed one truth that must underlie any future unified field theory of the

histories of photography, it is that those histories include *all the photographs ever made*, as well as all the people who produced them, who are represented in them, and who laid eyes on them" (325, emphasis added).

While "vernacular photographs" is a term used often, the most commonly used phrase to describe personal snapshots is "found photos." "Found" refers to photographs of unknown origins collected for various reasons and purposes. While "found" photographs can have institutional or professional origins, they are usually amateur in their creation and are produced as part of the everyday practice of photography. It is a descriptor which shows up over and over again in books devoted to vernacular photographs. It is a popular hashtag on social networks. It is a term that privileges the finder, as opposed to the equally useful though less used term "lost" photo, which calls attention to the loser.

Another popular term used to describe these kinds of photographs is "anonymous." "Anonymous," as Nancy Martha West points out in one of the most astute critical assessments of lost-and-found photographs, is as "charged" as the word "found" for similar reasons. "Anonymous" and "found" erase the original authors and make way for new authors, creating an "unidentified object" and an "unidentified story" (82).

Ultimately, though, all photographs labeled "found," "anonymous," "vernacular," or "lost-and-found" are *personal* photographs. "Personal photographs" is a better phrase than "family photos" or "family albums," since these latter terms tie personal photographs to discourses that specifically surround family life. I do not wish to separate personal photographs from these discourses, but I want to acknowledge that personal photographs are not always connected to familial relations. Associates of the owners of

personal photographs are not always family; associates may be close friends who were in front or behind the camera at the time the photographs were made. They do not have to be close, but may be casual acquaintances who were present or who shared in a particular period of life or an event.

Despite the limitations inherent in all terms used to label photographs which were taken at one point in time and discovered in another, I choose "lost and found" because it is a pedestrian term used to describe loss and recovery of a material (and even digital) object. It serves as a practical term that alerts potential losers and finders that something has indeed been lost and/or found. When "lost and found" refers to personal media, especially photographs, it functions as a critique of the use of other terms like "found" or "anonymous" to refer to the photograph. It also alludes to the meanings and perceptions that endlessly loop as time passes and the photographs move between different sites and owners. A photograph is not simply *lost and found*. It is *lost and found* and *lost and found* and *lost and found*, and on and on.

Critical assessments singling out personal photographs that have been collected for artistic enjoyment, sociological study or for historical archives have done much to explicate aspects of lost-and-found photographs; this study seeks to conflate the separate uses and sites of visual cultural reception, so that any hierarchical dominance might be diluted in making "lost-and-found," instead of simply "found," the broad, inclusive term to describe personal photographs that have become lost *and* found.

This dissertation looks at personal images that are literally *lost* and the perceptions and practices resulting from the photographs being *found*. The term "lost-and-found" assists in illuminating cultural practices and perceptions that surround

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personal photographs as they move from possession to possession. It is a phrase that brings into focus the distance between the original owners (and the photographic practices that prompted their production of the image) and the resulting contexts in which the images are placed.

Where Do Lost Photos Go?

Rebecca Solnit writes in a *Field Guide for Getting Lost* that there are "two disparate meanings" of "lost." Solnit makes this distinction: "Losing things is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing" (22). It is the photo object or even the digital file that is the familiar to the person who snapped the shutter. That is, if printed snapshots or digital files go missing, they are missed with the naked eye. I suggest that "the unfamiliar appearing" is the discovery brought on by distinct practices surrounding lost-and-found occurrences that jettison snapshots into new contexts. These photographs have been lost and are being sought by a variety of individuals, all for different reasons. John Berger posits that photographs have "two messages: a message concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity" (47). The second of these messages is usually undiscovered except in instances of death or loss, which causes direct reaction to the photograph (48). "Lost," "loss," or "losing" when referring to personal photographs point toward the finding of new discoveries. New relationships, interpretations, presentations, evocations, and practices are formed with personal photographs that are lost and found.

Photos in the Hands of the Finders

Lost personal photographs sometimes end up in a stranger's hands. Dealers, collectors, photobloggers, greeting card companies, scholars, and disaster relief organizations actively seek what are frequently called "orphaned," "abandoned," "found," "anonymous," or "vernacular" photographs. These images become books, novelty cards, quirky photoblogs, one-of-a-kind photo gallery art, museum archives, ephemera shows, digital lost and found boxes, or subjects of journal articles on the visibility of culture.

Some finders of lost photos attempt to locate their owners. *Pictureproject.org,* an online recovery project started by a group of volunteers, has tried to return lost personal photos to Hurricane Katrina victims. They offer an online database of found photographs that gives people who have lost photos an opportunity to search for them. Such photo-reunion efforts are not unique to print photographs. After the 2005 Tsunami in Thailand, a man assisting with relief efforts found a broken digital camera with a memory card that contained photographs of a man and woman who lost their lives. He was able to return the memory card featuring the last photographs of the couple (smiling on vacation) to their children in the U.S. (Turnbull).

While those involved in reconnecting disaster victims with their lost photos consider the meanings and memories attached to the images to belong to the original owners or associates of the photographs, others believe the images and attendant meanings belong to strangers who find other people's photographs. Accordingly, family snapshots are found by or sold to strangers in a variety of places. The term "found" images suggests someone actually found them, maybe in a park or on the street, and

while some photos can be found this way, most are purchased. Photo albums, for instance, are often offered at estate sales. Antique or photo dealers purchase the albums, sometimes selling complete albums or separate pages from the album, or sometimes breaking them up to sell individual images. Prices for "found" photos are relatively inexpensive. Jane Farrow writes that certain subjects—such as early photographs featuring homemade pornography, family photos from poor minorities, open affection between gay and lesbian couples—can be more expensive to purchase (par. 7), but most photos cost no more than a few dollars per photo.

Embedded in the events by which lost-and-found photos are orphaned and acquired are stories. Lost-and-found photographs become the material for human interest stories that accompany natural disasters, they prompt desperate pleas for recovery appearing in newspapers and classifieds, and they inspire speculative queries (*Who were these people? Why did they let their photos go?)* in the discourses accompanying snapshot collections in books and museums. These stories appear in newspaper articles, books, and websites that feature lost-and-found photos. Often these presentations are authored to fit specific genres and to appeal to particular audiences, as when they appear in novelty greeting cards or museum exhibitions at well-known art galleries. What I call "lost-and-found events" prompt new meanings and relationships between people and photographs, as well as between the various people who experience, assist, and share in the lost-and-found photographs and events. Lost-and-found events scatter photographs across many sites and serve as a catalyst for new meanings and new uses for personal images.

Photos Out of the Hands of the Losers

Celebrated in various fashions when found, photos are often mourned when lost. Stories of lost photos appear frequently in newspapers or the local news. Stories of people digging through trash to find photo albums thrown out by angry lovers, hoping for the return of their stolen photographs lost in a move or a divorce. People post ads on websites like *Lostandfound.com* or *Craigslist* alerting the public to the loss of photographs. Whether they are forgotten, misplaced, left behind in a move, stolen, or swept away in a hurricane (and these are only a few of the ways that photographs get away), objects *and* meanings disappear.

Sometimes what is lost isn't so clear. "Lost" may refer not to the loss of the photo object itself, but to a loss of meaning some may experience with photographs that have not left their possession. This form of loss is more difficult to detect, because as stated earlier, people experience loss in different forms as they leave and return to photographs. "Lost" may also refer to the desire to possess photos that probably exist, but have never been seen. When there are no photographs, the loss is of something that never was. Judith Butler refers to this type of loss as "the loss of loss itself" (478). Butler writes, "somewhere, sometime, something was lost, but no story can be told about it . . ." (48). This may produce a longing for something that was never seen. For example, Minnie Lee, a participant in a pilot test for the call-in component of this project (and also my grandmother) describes her wish to see a photograph of her parents and deceased brother: "How happy I would be to see a picture of my parents who died when I was very young and of my little brother who was killed by a drunk driver. We've tried to locate some pictures, but have been unable to." Lee goes on to note the contrast between

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the overabundance of photographs people have in their possession today, and the fact that she has no photographs of her father or brother. The loss here is both of the actual people (parents and brother) and of the images that may very well exist or once existed that she never will see.

For Lee there is a story. The story is about the desire for photos and the loss of not having them. This is repeated in her description of the only photograph she has of her mother, which was cropped from a larger photo: "The only picture I have of my mother was from a group picture. I do not know the others in the picture. We had a photographer who restores pictures take her picture off. I cherish it." This photograph and the story of it being "the only photograph" has become the story of Lee's mother. Consider this short narrative that was posted in the comment section of this project's website, *Lostandfoundphotos.org*:

> I cannot even remember what is on my camera...except my son. He is the star, curly blonde locks and my house has green walls. I have brown hair and my [sic] I think I might have my dad on it as well...black and gray hair, always smiling. I live in Jacksonville, Florida and would love to have them back. It is our only source of memories. It is a sony cybershot, little guy, that I can't remember or find the instructions to camera...a something 370, or a 350 or something like that.....

This posted plea for the recovery of a lost camera is mix of stark imagery, emotion, and details that recall not only the photographs, but the people and memories, highlighting the importance of personal photographs.

It is not difficult to understand the feelings expressed for lost photographs. Richard Chalfen writes that the trauma over lost personal photographs is so strong because "family pictures are compelling pieces of our material culture. They are

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intimately connected to issues of identity and belonging, to evidence of existence and perhaps most important, and as a common thread, to memory" (par. 1). Personal photographs, Mihaley Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton write in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, leave a "tenuous immorality to beloved persons and [provide] an identity, a context of belongingness, to one's descendants" (69). Yet Geoffrey Batchen questions the ability of photography to "prompt you to remember people the way you might otherwise remember them. . ." in *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance* (15). Batchen asks the questions, "Has photography quietly replaced your memories with its own?" (15). To illustrate the stark absence of photographs where they should be, Alexander Honory's *The Last Pictures*, the last book featured in *Volume Two* of the 2006 encyclopedic *The Photobook*, features no photographs—only words. Martin Parr and Gerry Badger write, "Honory provides mnemonics in the form of words for each lost picture, opposite where the photograph itself might have been reproduced. Each takes the form of what might be termed a functional haiku…"(326). Loss of the visual takes on many forms through the expressed grief of the losers which serves to increase the potency of personal photographs.

Scholars Find Photos

Collectors *and* scholars like to believe they are the first to discover something unique, unknown, one of a kind. Both the collector and scholar might find the thousands of personal photographs available on *eBay* interesting. I, for a short time, believed I was the only one to uncover this undercover life of "found" photographs. Surely, the small collection of lost-and-found photos I had amassed could reveal, with the right methods

and the right questions, cultural relevance beyond simple visual records of the people and places within the photographs. Of course, I was *not* the first to ponder what could be done with personal photographs that no longer belonged to their owners. That these contemplations are not unique to me is evident in a diverse collection of practices and perceptions surrounding "found" photographs. Art dealers and photography collectors, for instance, find that some anonymous snapshots contain aesthetics worthy of museum exhibitions and the publication of coffee table books (monographs).

Consider an album for sale on a recent *eBay* auction. For about $150, a complete African American family album from the 1950s was closing for auction. The dealer had put together some of the "highlights" from the album for bidders to view. Kids in their Halloween costumes and at birthday parties. Mother sitting on Father's lap. The family pet. Dinner time. Vacation photographs. Surprisingly, there were multiple bids on this item. But how did this album end up on *eBay*? Who were the people bidding on it? What would they do with the album once it was received? The album could become part of a museum's African Americana collection, available to the public for inspection under glass. The album could be dismantled and the images sold individually to collectors. One or two of these images could fall into the hands of a college student who might use the photograph to write a personal essay about feelings of race. The album could end up as part of a collection of African American vernacular snapshots published as a fancy coffee table book. Or the album could become an object of study, providing visual ethnographic indigenous data, offering cultural clues for analytic inspection.

The one who finally came into possession of this album now wields power over this small, but important archive. By repossessing this album, the buyer has resituated

the album's value. While I have seen many other items like this album for sale, I think

the African American album works well as an example because it seems so obvious, so

rich in its potential to provide important. . . important *what*? That is the very question

that inspires the bulk of scholarship within the field of lost-and-found photography.

Unlike mass-produced materials, pre-digital, personal photos that have been hidden away

in homes, albums, shoeboxes, are not unlike undiscovered people and objects that await

scholarly inspection. Scholars from a variety of disciplines, utilizing a diverse selection

of methodologies, use anonymous photographs to investigate cultural attributes. In

"'Doing the Rest': The Uses of Photographs in *American Studies*," Marsha Peters and

Bernard Mergen suggest that lost-and-found photographs "as historical documents have

suffered the same neglect as other material aspects of culture[, a]lthough they are

acknowledged to 'provide data in regard to dress, artifacts, and everyday living' . . ."

(281). Beyond a simple extraction of historical details from historical images, Jay

Mechling has explored a number of different aspects of American culture in great depth

through "found" photographs. For instance, in an unpublished 2004 conference paper,

Mechling argues that "found" photographs of children offer unique "glimpses" into their

lives ("History of American"). He has also used found images to present a history of the

Boy Scouts. Perhaps most intriguingly, Mechling used vernacular hunting photographs

to examine the emotional world of hunters. Mechling posits that "found snapshots" are

"valuable pieces of evidence of the everyday lives of people otherwise lost in the writing

of history" ("Picture Hunting" n.pag.).

     While some scholars focus their work on particular subject areas, compiling

collections related to that subject from a variety of sources, others narrow their focus to a

particular community or family. Marilyn F. Motz's study of family albums discovered in

a museum archive, belonging to seven women from Ohio and Michigan, asserts that a

photo album is a kind visual autobiography and that clues to lives lived can be found in

the captions, composition, and ordering of the photographs (67). Looking over a range of

albums by women living in roughly the same time period and region could offer

ethnographic data to help us understand how women perceived themselves and their

place within that particular culture and time frame. Yet Motz acknowledges the

difficulties in researching family albums. Most albums stay with their owners. Other

albums are taken apart by museums and photographs and filed by content. Trying to

ascertain who compiled and arranged the photographs of the albums can be difficult (67).

Motz writes, "even assuming that the major portion of an album was compiled by its

principal subject, we are left with the problem of interpreting the images themselves. The

meaning of an album can be understood fully only if the viewer is familiar with the

circumstances depicted in the album" (67). Jon Prosser and Dona Schwartz likewise

posit in "Photographs within the Sociological Research Process," "found" photos aid in

"looking backwards," yet warn that "lacking contextual information" could misinform

scholars without a proper guiding research structure (122).

For Jennifer Katanic, this disconnect between personal photographs' original

circumstances and the circumstances in which they are "found" yields great meaning.

Katanic, an art history graduate student, writes of her purchase of a double studio portrait

of an African American couple. Katanic describes how she was "drawn" to and "taken"

by this particular portrait out of the "piles" of photographs available. Yet, despite the

powerful pull of the images, Katanic has difficulties understanding how to approach and

contextualize this photograph. She writes, "What did it mean for a young white woman living in New York City to own an image of a black solider and his wife from the early twentieth century? Just the fact that this object was in my possession shifted the photograph's meaning…My only relationship to this photograph now was through the present" (3-4).

The photograph evokes contradictory feelings in Katanic. She sees the photograph as representative of American diversity while it also makes her "uncomfortable" as she contemplates issues of racial prejudice during the historical period in which the photograph was taken. In the end, Katanic presents the photograph as a source of pride within African American culture, realizing as she stares at the photograph in wonder, and "turn[s] it over in [her] hands. . . admir[ing] the stylish script" (4) that the "abyss of ethnographic otherness has been momentarily bridged" (4). Katanic claims that "time has not silenced this object; it speaks, but now it speaks to me" (4). She is lured by this object depicting another culture's past. While she finds out some significant details about the subjects of the photograph, she does not indicate that she will attempt to return the photograph. Ultimately, however, Katanic's essay offers little by way of explaining how one can approach a photograph such as this other than to simply talk about how it makes one feel to not only look at a photograph, but own it.

Similarly, Catherine Whalen, a cultural historian, feels compelled to speak to and for found photo objects in examining a photo album purchased in a Delaware thrift store. Whalen travels back to Detroit, Michigan to research the owner of the album, Mary von Rosen. Whalen sees her task as an attempt to create a "voiceover for a new audience, a public audience never meant to know her" (2). Somewhat unique in her approach,

Whalen is not interested in talking to people, only in seeing the physical locations depicted in the album. Like Katanic, Whalen "grapples" with how to approach this album. She finally settles on using the narrative structure composed through the album to inform the historical and psychological context. The album offered von Rosen agency, Whalen posits, as she weaved her life story, editing the people around her in and out. Yet, von Rosen's story really exists as a mystery, much like the African American double portrait. Accordingly, Whalen ends her essay with a textual whisper: "between us, we have many stories to tell."

Other scholars focus less on the content of the images and more on the practices surrounding the images, as so much of what happens between people and their images extends beyond the solo act of simply looking at a photograph and immediately discerning its meaning. In "Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory in and with Visual Media," Annette Kuhn acknowledges that, while the content of a photograph is intimately connected to memory, so, too, are the actions taken by those interacting with the photograph:

> [W]hile family photos and albums can function prosthetically as substitutes for remembering, they are also used by their compilers and owners as prompts for performances of memory in private, interactive, collective, and sometimes even public contexts. The performance or enactment of memory in these instances takes place *with* (as opposed to *in*) the photographs and albums. (303)

The questions of how meaning is constructed around personal photographs or what personal photographs mean are slippery endeavors that have been taken up by scholars and nearly everyone who examines either their own photographs or those of others.

Pierre Bourdieu's *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art,* lays out an important

examination of photography as a field of study pregnant with rules and practices unique

to different social classes, with varying conventions regarding when to take photos, when

to look at photos, and whom to show photos to. Bourdieu conducted his research among

the Corsican people, uncovering distinct class differences related to camera ownership,

exhibition of photographs in the home, and everyday use. Bourdieu writes, "in most

peasant households, photographs are 'locked away' in a box, apart from wedding

photographs and certain portraits. It is considered indecent or ostentatious to show

pictures of members of the family to just anyone" (24). He found this to be in contrast to

the "petits bourgeois" who "adorn" the walls with large and small photographs marking

all kinds of occasions and family life (25). Though both practices may seem dated in

light of the ubiquity of family photos found on *Facebook*, Bourdieu's close observation

and interviews offer an early seminal study of photography that has informed the study of

photographic practice. What Bourdieu's study reveals most importantly are the ways

people incorporate photography into the rituals of everyday life according to implicit

cultural conventions. For example, Bourdieu notes that families of all kinds follow a

similar practice of taking photographs during "summer holidays" and "family festivities"

and that, as a general rule, photography in the home intensifies with the presence of

children. As he writes, "One cannot help but be struck first of all by the regular ways in

which ordinary practice is organized. There are few activities which are so stereotyped

and less abandoned to the anarchy of individual intentions" (19).

Catherine Zuromskis extends Bourdieu's examination of how photography connects a photographer to a society more than to his/her self by reminding us in *Snapshot Photography: The Lives of Images* that:

> Snapshot photography has historically served as a catalyst for a host of signifying actions: gathering friends or family members together for a group portrait, sharing snaps of a wedding or a new baby, inducting a fiancée into the family circle by browsing through old family albums, or placing a particularly meaningful image in a frame on the desk at work. (315)

Thus, everyday photography is full of what Bourdieu calls the "ritual of integration" across its practices and devices, whether it be through the photos of family made and shared amongst each other, the public or the social standing and currency one collects by owning the newest device, or the display to the world of your vacation highlights. Bourdieu writes, "There is nothing more unlike the introspective 'search for lost-time' than those displays of family photographs with their commentaries, the ritual of integration that the family makes its new members undergo" (30). To walk someone through photos of family and friends, with accompanying stories and commentary, is a common practice; it is through this practice—and others like it—that photographs induct individuals into a collective.

At this moment in photography's cultural history, when lost-and-found practices are occurring in both tangible and virtual spaces, there is also an increasing exploration of what it means to have digital and analog images coexist. On one hand, there is the almost complete cultural adoption of digital photography, which has allowed for immediate sharing, digital preservation, and "tagging" (the twenty-first-century equivalent of writing subjects' names on the back of a paper photo). On the other hand, interest in old paper

photographs has remained important as people figure out what to do with the heaps of old photo albums that contain family photographs. These two worlds often collide as people in great numbers digitize paper photographs and post them online yet also mourn the loss of the tangible nature of photo objects. While it seems the world has completely adopted digital technologies, paper photographs still exist by the millions in a not-too-distant past so that those over the age of thirty still remember wide spread use of analog photography. This straddling of the two worlds provides fertile conversations and research about digital versus paper images. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, in "Technologies of Memory: Practices of Remembering in Analogue and Digital Photography," explore possible differences between memory practices in digital and analogue photography and conclude with this thought: "With vernacular photography, technological change is in tension with earlier social and cultural practices and rituals, and at present what is most clearly observable is the awkward coexistence of different modes and uses, purposes and practices, in varying configurations" (590). According to Keightley and Pickering, vernacular photography holds its importance and meaning in photo taking, storing, and viewing and sharing as a result of digital and analog technologies interacting with each other.

The coexistence of paper photographs and digital images makes the narrative world of images and the memory functions they serve an especially attractive field of study at this moment in visual culture. These sources provide an introduction to some of the ways lost-and-found photographs are considered by scholars. They appear to be approaching the lost personal photograph in two ways. First, they are questioning its

importance as a cultural artifact and second, they are offering evidence of the importance of its use in scholarship.

This Scholar Finds Photos: The Project's Beginnings

The responses of Katanic and Whalen to photographs they had "found," as described above, were familiar to me. I also had photographs of unknown origins which I had purchased. On a bookcase, wedged between art-house published copies of August Sanders, Joel Peter-Witkin, and Cindy Sherman, was a silver brushed metal photo album holding around sixty photographs of a British family made during the late 1920s to the early 1990s. One woman in particular is the focus of these photographs. She appears in some of the images as a young girl, five or so, and later as an elderly woman in her late seventies. I happened upon these photographs in the basement of an antiquarian bookstore which sold individual photographs for about a dollar apiece. The photographs in the bookshop were categorized by topics: Children, Animals, Old People, Vacation, Cars. The photographs from this British family were strewn over a number of these boxes. The first image I saw and bought was of this woman as an adult, looking down into what I believed to be the eyes of a baby.

Figure 1: Photograph of a British woman, the first of my collection of images of her.

But I could not see the baby's face. I could only see a sliver of the top of the baby's head. I bought it because it was a humorous remnant of another era in that the photographer completely missed the shot. It was a "mistake," in the true photographic sense of the term. A mistake that would not be seen in the future of digital image printing, when accidental photo decapitations would be deleted, not printed. Who, other than someone trying to encode photographs with a snapshot aesthetic by recreating a mistake, would print a photograph such as this today?

It was a year later, while picking through boxes in the same basement of the same bookstore, that I came across another photograph composed almost exactly as the other one I had purchased, except in this photograph the main subject was an older woman, possibly the grandmother, holding the baby. But the mistake was the same: the baby still had no head. After this find, I picked through images for over two hours until I had found each photograph that I believed belonged to the woman's family. I ended up with a pile of the kinds of photographs that could be found in most albums from this era or

today. There are scenes from vacation at the beach, domestic life from the interiors of home, large family reunion gatherings, the woman and her husband before children, and then lots of photos with their babies. The babies turn into children. The mother of the babies turns from girl-daughter to woman-wife-mother before the eyes of the viewer. Her parents start off as a young couple with their own kids and appear later as grandparents. There are many photos of just the woman by herself, portraits, passport duplicates, and photos of her just standing and staring directly at the camera.

When laid out on the table, there is a time capsule that does not move forward like a traditional linear narrative of young to old, but a scattered, disorganized mess that challenges our notions of time and memory, awaiting the work of placing these photographs in some kind of sense-making order. The poet Mark Strand gets at this wonderment of out-of-order time jumping when he writes about a photograph of his sister, himself, and mother: "I have stared and stared at this photograph, and each time I have felt a deep and inexplicable rush of sadness. Is it my mother, who holds us and whose hand I hold, is now dead?" (17 - 18). He also contemplates the idea of his mother being the same age that he is now looking at the photograph. These are common reactions and thoughts people have when looking at old photographs of family. The almost surreal nature of "I am the same age they were then." This gives the illusion of the deceased subject being alive as the imagination takes over, situating old photographs not just in the "then" but also the "now."

When I encountered this woman's photographs, I had already been collecting snapshots, mostly from antique stores and *eBay*. By then, I had a small collection of portraits and hunting photographs. At the time I found these images, I had also been

thinking about how I could use the snapshots I had been buying as part of my academic

work. I had also just been exposed to a large collection of documentary and ethnographic

films that played with the perceived reality of home movies mixed with fiction. Films

like Ross McElwee's autobiographical documentaries that include reflexive inspection of

home movies and first-person documentary footage; Alan Berliner's The *Family Album*,

which pieces together a collection of "found" home movie footage to represent changing

American culture from the 1920s to the 1950s; and Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* that

mixes Citron's home movie footage with a diary voice-over and theatrical interactions

between two sisters to critically explore a mother / daughter relationship.   Add to this

short list Marlon Fuentes' *Bontoc Eulogy*, which fuses Fuentes' autobiographical

speculations about the fate of his Filipino grandfather with archive footage from the 1911

World's Fair, as well as Tim Asch's never-ending anthropological search that gets

repeated and more reflexive with each new developing technology.

Influenced by these attempts to peel back layers of complex social relationships

through the inspection of personal and found imagery and footage, I thought I might

attempt something like this, ultimately offering a new understanding of the anonymous

photographs I had collected. I filmed all of my photos and dubbed somber electronic

music over them, trying to evoke empathy for the lost photos. I wanted people to look at

the photos not as art subjects, but as photos that belonged to someone. These amateur

pieces, although a definite springboard into what has become this dissertation, were

nothing new. While I believe my slideshows evoked nostalgia and some consideration of

the fate of the people in the photographs, I would argue this happens in the same manner

every time someone looks at old photographs of strangers *without* a soundtrack. This

project was nothing achieving the level of engagement which Catherine Russell lays out in a chapter from *Experimental Ethnography* titled "Archival Apocalypse: Found Footage as Ethnography," in which she writes about the use of "found footage" in experimental films. Here, she describes found footage filmmaking as "a montage of memory traces, by which the filmmaker engages with the past through recall, retrieval, and recycling. The complex relation to the real that unfolds in found-footage filmmaking lies somewhere between documentary and fictional modes of representation. . ." (238).

Though low-fi, my homemade piece traded on the embedded aesthetics already saturated in the patina of personal photographs from strangers. Old photographs are alluring readymade objects, and while I had wanted to use the photographs as a vehicle to say something academic about old photographs, my slideshows were really more about "Look at what I've collected. Have you ever seen anything like this before? How does it make you feel?" My retrieval and recycling of the photos put them in motion and led back to my hand in pacing, image, and music selection, which put me in the role of the author of a high school photo project. This took me awhile to see. Once I recognized my initial misdirection, I began crafting an applied component to this dissertation that could provide voices to lost-and-found photographs through the use of audio. As I approached the visual, I needed visual culture to inform my exploration rather than a constructed visual performance / exhibition that really added nothing to the discourse surrounding these kinds of photographs. Ultimately, I had been making up narratives when there were real narratives to collect.

Visual Culture Landscape

It is important to place the study of lost-and-found photographs within a visual cultural landscape that is, if only by its comparative interrogation of the field of study it illuminates, deeply rooted in cultural studies. I write this fully aware that this dissertation is not a cultural study analysis. It is a study that progresses against the backdrop of visual culture, which is where the study of photography should always begin. Photographs do not exist as purely aesthetic objects to be appreciated and owned by art departments (Anne-Marie Willis suggests that the art department "colonized" the photograph). Nor should the aesthetics of photographs be diminished by suggesting they are purely part of a system of social rules. Irit Rogoff suggests the study of visual culture is the study of "how we actively interact with images from all arenas to remake the world in the shape of our fantasies and desires or to narrate the stories which we carry within us" (16). Nicholas Mirzoeff asserts that the study of visual culture pushes us away from "structured, formal viewing settings like the cinema and art gallery to the centrality of visual experience in everyday life" (7). Visual culture, Mirzoeff adds, is also "concerned" with the devices and technology that are used to "enhance" looking or the thing that is looked at. This puts materials and activities that fall under the realm of the study of visual culture in sites that prompt comparative examination that include, "importance of image making, the formal components of a given image, and the crucial completion of that work by its cultural reception" (3).

Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans write extensively of the importance of treating the visual as a specific part of culture that needs to be separated out from broader cultural study approaches. They warn that "the specific rhetoric, genres, institutional contexts

and uses of visual imagery can become lost in the more global identification of cultural trends and their epic narratives of transformations of consciousness in the rubric of 'postmodern culture'" (2). Here Hall and Evens are clear on visual culture's nature as a unique field of study, while still being reliant on semiotics for its interpretive theoretical tool. Hall and Evens point out the ubiquitous practice of duplicating photographic images, whether they be for institutional or family use. They write:

> It therefore makes no sense to consider the 'meaning of photography' without considering the ways in which the meanings and uses of photography are regulated by the formats and institutions of production, distribution and consumption (be they magazines or newspapers, the advertising and publicity industries, camera manufacturers—or other socially organized relations such as family). (2)

They emphasize not a large "global" critical lens through which to view all images but a closer examination of individual practices.

How scholars explore photography differs greatly depending on their discipline and their theoretical allegiances. My own involvement with the object of study is as an image creator (both professional and family), a collector of lost-and-found photographs, and a digital journalist collecting and editing audio interviews conducted with a wide array of individuals working with photography. I cannot claim to have a theoretical allegiance. Dare I say in a dissertation that more important than aligning myself with one theoretical approach, I find areas of critical research that consider personal (paper and digital) photographs, memory, and the archive important springboards for wrestling with an expansive, diverse data set. Accordingly, this dissertation draws equally from social science and the humanities in its approach to personal photography, not unlike the people

who originally took the photographs were caught up in the social ritual of documenting the family and the artistic draw of albums and images.

Conclusion

While I believe this dissertation and its accompanying website, *Lostandfoundphotos.org*, breathe life into static images, they also, I hope, breathe life into a discussion about lost-and-found photographs that has heretofore focused almost exclusively on the finders and the found. Many things have already been said about photographs that have been lost and / or found by scholars, collectors, genealogists, bloggers, and people, who are prompted by diverse motivations to articulate their perceptions / feelings regarding these photographic objects. Within this vast conversation, there often appears to be a hierarchy of uses and sentiments pertaining to lost-and-found photographs. Taking personal photographs from the family album or shoebox and entering them into a well-established art world or historic archive—where the mundane snapshot is no longer mundane, but a magical, refetished emblem of postmodernist snapshot aesthetics and collecting habits—projects these kinds of uses atop more prosaic practices such as classified ads that alert the public to the loss or finding of personal images. This dissertation seeks to add to this discussion by repositioning the conversation to include, not only the photographs that have been found, but the photographs that are missing. However, it is not my goal to merely contrast those who have lost photographs to those who have found photographs.

This study will describe and analyze the (1) practices and (2) perceptions that surround lost-and-found personal photographs and events. The following questions guided my inquiry:

1. Practices:

    - Are there common types of lost-and-found events?

    - Are there common types of circumstances in which loss occurs?

    - In what ways do people try to recover what is lost?

    - Are there common kinds of discovery?

    - Do digital technologies play a role in lost-and-found events?

2. Perceptions:

    - Are there common perceptions of lost-and-found photographs?

    - How do people identify and describe their relationships to personal photographs in the stories they tell about lost and found personal photographs and events?

    - What kinds of meanings do people attribute to photographs that are lost and found?

    - Do people believe meanings of personal photographs change after lost-and-found events? What perceptions of loss and discovery do people express when talking about lost and found personal photographs and events?

I examine materials (gallery bulletins, web pages, photo dealer catalogues, greeting cards, photography books) which feature lost-and-found photos; collect and analyze narratives about lost-and-found events; and conduct and analyze qualitative interviews to deeply explore lost-and-found practices and perceptions. Instead of singling out one particular

kind of visual phenomenon or image maker or image consumer, this dissertation casts a wide net to pull together, juxtapose, and conflate the different presentations of lost-and-found photographs.

In "Snapshots 'R' Us," Richard Chalfen writes that the "evidentiary value" that photographs may have held for the original owner is "diminished," but "may increase" as photographs move beyond their original homes and contexts (144). It was my intent to discover to what extent photographs gathered meanings as they were passed from person to person. My exploration focused primarily on the western, domestic world during the years of 2007 to 2015, with the majority of work occurring in the first half of that time period.

In 2007, image sharing on the Internet was certainly widely practiced, though there were fewer sites available for these practices. Thus, while I was examining a lost-and-found world that crisscrossed between paper photographs and digital images, this dissertation does not delve deeply into the power dynamics at play in collecting and publicly displaying other people's photographs. Increasing disinterest in personal privacy, which contributes to the current propensity to post vast amounts of personal photographs online for the world to see, coinciding with the trend toward moving photographs from hard drives to online storage sites, seems to negate the possibility for personal photographs to be lost or found. In this age of photo-sharing sites with questionable terms of service, many of the questions regarding personal photos remain the same as those I address in this dissertation: Who owns our photos? What right do people have posting photos of other people who have not given their consent? Yet, this dissertation examines photo practices just before the advent of a ubiquitous online photo

world; therefore, many contemporary and emerging online practices within the realm of personal photography were not examined.

Chapter 2 examines personal photography through the lens of memory, digital photography, and the archive. Given that qualitative methods can be employed in a number of diverse ways when collecting data, chapter 3 details the combination of methods employed in this dissertation. Chapter 4 examines the presentation of lost-and-found photographs in photography books and online presentations (websites, blogs, and social networks). Chapter 5 analyzes lost-and-found practices and perceptions in greater depth through a qualitative analysis of interviews with lost-and-found photo practitioners. Finally, chapter 6 offers an examination of digital audio stories regarding lost and found photos, collected over voicemail via the project's website, *Lostandfoundphotos.org*. These narratives add an aural dimension do the data and offer exciting possibilities for future work within the field of lost-and-found photography.

CHAPTER 2

MEMORY, PRACTICE, AND ARCHIVE: PERSONAL PHOTOS IN FLUX

"Ultimately—or at the limit—in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes."

~ Roland Barthes, from *Camera Lucida*

"But if we examine a little more closely how we recollect things, we will surely realize that the greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us."

~ Maurice Halbwachs, from *On Collective Memory*

<u>Introduction</u>

The week after my father died I did not want to look at photographs of him. But I did desire to know *where* my photographs of him were. Where was the Polaroid of him using the double-bowed orange Husqvarna chainsaw? I couldn't remember where I had stored the up-close photograph of his hand after he had been treated for a gunshot wound that had blown his little finger clean off. I forgot where the little photo booth photos of him holding me when I was a baby were. And where were the numerous photos I made just before his death? Like the image where he is looking right into the camera with the saddest expression I have ever seen. And those two photographs taken with my iPhone as he lay dead in the hospital, the ones that I cannot look upon, except with quick peeks to check if they are still there in the digital folder and have not evaporated from some error during frequent backup syncs.

This small collection of photographs immediately comes to mind as I write. Those images of my father are memories of something I cannot immediately see, but that I remember. I desire Roland Barthes' *punctum*, the "sting, speck, cut, little hole" to go to

work as I look upon these photos that I've seen before. But though I cannot look at them directly, I need them in front of me, on my computer, in a folder labeled "PUNCTUM." It is Barthes' *studium*, "a kind of general enthusiastic commitment, of course, without special acuity," that makes *punctum* (the practice and desire) possible, but I also suggest *studium* can be tied to the making of photographs or even the general everyday practices associated with personal photography, such as organizing and displaying photos in wallets or via social networks. The *punctum* goes to work later, after images have been produced, looked at many times or lost and/or found. And here the *punctum* reminds us that storage and organization of photographs is important to their future, when we may, at different points in our lives, have an unconscious desire to inspect personal photographs more closely—their visual presence remaining the same while our feelings about them change over time.

When thinking about lost-and-found photos, there are two very important aspects of the personal example of my photographs of my father that I consider in this review of statements about personal photography. First, the photographs I described of my father originated in two forms: analogue images (film and paper) and digital images (either scanned or produced by a digital camera). Yet, all of these images have now been digitized and reside on a hard drive. And the twinge of panic that I sometimes feel about forgetting where a paper image or slide is, is the same as when I can hear the heavy breathing of a creaking hard drive which could be going on the blink. While wild hyperbole exists around all the new things that can be done with digital images, they are still just images that can be lost and found, shared or destroyed, talked about or quietly hidden away.

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Secondly, this desire to know the whereabouts of photographs encourages some form of identification or categorization system that will assist in the formation of a personal archive. A personal archive may either retain its original form or location, or it may be broken away, detached from its owners, to become part of another collection with a new form, acquiring new identifications that may in the end produce a multitude of readings. These could be readings from associates *and* readings from strangers. These personal archives are being formed from the organized *or* disorganized efforts of people, professional and nonprofessional, snapping away with their cameras.

These archives also suggest passed-down oral or written stories that will not accompany the photographs into the future. They possess photographs that may offer researchers visual cultural evidence. But cultural evidence *of what*? And cultural evidence *for whom*? These questions of *what* or *why* photographs are collected and saved and how they play a role in personal memory arise at every turn in my exploration of lost-and-found photos.

Examining photography with its many cultural forms and practices takes a writer across diverse disciplines and popular culture critical commentaries published in magazines, newspapers, and online sources. This literature review, therefore, draws upon a wide range of these sources to illuminate polysemic perceptions and practices surrounding personal photography. These discussions are relevant to this dissertation because I see lost-and-found photographs both as individual objects *and* provokers of cultural practices that work to shape meaning and feeling around personal photographs in general. Personal photographs have powers that are difficult to grasp when the feelings

they generate are unstable, constantly developing as they are produced, organized, looked at, put away, closed in albums, and perpetually lost-and-found.

There are four important areas of research to examine when considering lost-and-found photographs. These areas are:

- Personal Photography as Social Practice

- Personal Photography and Memory

- Digitization of Personal Photography

- Personal Photography in the Archive

These four categories overlap and connect in important ways when personal photography is seen as a part of the visual cultural field, when the status of photography within cultural and collective memory is examined, when the tentative status of the disappearing tangible photo object in the digital age is considered, and when the photograph's continued residence in the archive is explored.

Personal Photography as Social Practice

Personal photographs are caught up in the artifacts and media people produce as part of their everyday lives. Yet, as Richard Chalfen writes in *Turning Leaves,* his analysis and exploration of two Japanese American photo albums and their owners, "Personal photography and family albums have received uneven attention within the social sciences and the humanities. . .[R]elatively little attention has been given to how these vernacular forms present and re-present life in pictorial form—as culturally structured representation" (2-3). John Ibson observes in his study of postwar boyhood and homophobia through "found" photographs that, "In spite of all the scholarly attention

given nowadays to visual culture, vernacular or everyday photography's considerable potential as cultural evidence remains largely untapped" (68). Both Chalfen and Ibson point out the relative absence of scholarship regarding personal photography, though they arrive at this conclusion through divergent approaches. Chalfen places personal photographs in possession of the family and conducts research with the owners of the albums. Ibson, on the other hand, uses anonymous snapshots, without associates of the photographs present, to explore social issues utilizing only what is visibly available in the photographs. His approach arises, in part, from the near impossibility of discovering the original author: "Because of the significance given to the gaze as a locus of power in contemporary cultural theory, knowing who took the photograph is useful information, but unfortunately is rarely possible with vernacular material" (69).

Chalfen and Ibson are working on a similar endeavor. They both are recovering, through different means, visual evidence of the past. They are finding the lost. *Turning Leaves* becomes an accompanying text that could travel with the albums, providing future family members with a rich narrative that would not exist without the assistance of a researcher. It is a reflexive work showing how to do a combination of oral history and qualitative interview work around a family history and photographic collection; at the same time, it shows the importance of personal photographs and the enormous amount of work involved in maintaining attached narratives for future recipients of the albums.

Ibson illustrates the importance of lost-and-found photographs through photographs of men in the 1950s, providing visual evidence of a cultural change in male relationships immediately following World War II. Using a large collection of photographs of people who are strangers to the new recipients (Ibson and the many people who read his work),

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Ibson highlights the distances between bodies in snapshots and studio photographs. When placed together, these snapshots start to reveal certain cultural trends that assist in answering Ibson's research questions. Such discoveries depend upon the study of a group of photos of strangers. Individual images, which illicit scrutiny, can sometimes miss the larger picture which Ibson points out.

Richard Chalfen defines personal photographs as part of "home mode" communication. In "Interpreting Family Photography as Pictorial Communication," he argues that, like audio clips and texts (email, letters, cards) meant for family and associates, personal photographs have meaning from within the process of communication: "An emphasis on communication process distinguishes this analytic approach from others. First, the snapshot is understood as a symbolic form embedded in a communication process that necessarily includes making (encoding), interpreting (decoding) , and a multi-faceted use of pictures" (215). The method by which Chalfen proceeds to find "symbolic form" is "embedded" in a communicative process, not in the categorization of individual images. This is because the content of images is only what can be seen. While their subject matter is interesting and worthy of study, Chalfen contends it is how photographs are talked about and used that makes them important beyond simple snapshots.

Personal images are both mundane and magical. They are seemingly mundane because family photographs, as Don Slater writes, "narrate our domestic lives as a traditional or even existential story of moments (birth, marriage, death). . ." (145). A.D. Coleman writes that the family album full of such photographs is "so ubiquitous and so much taken for granted as a part of life in our society that it seems both shocking and

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revealing to encounter a family that has not maintained one" (320). Each has an

underwhelming similarity with other people's family albums full of Bar Mitzvahs,

baptisms, birthdays, babies, graduations, weddings, trips to Disneyland, and clichéd poses

in front of the Hollywood sign and Niagara Falls. This may make personal photographs

easy marks for critics seeking to use them as evidence of consumerism and its infiltration

in everyday life. Although personal technologies can be used to move us beyond the

staged realities of the photo album (for example, by enabling the use of images for

empowering self-expression or grassroots activism), alternative uses of personal

technologies are implicitly discouraged. Advertisements for home media equipment

feature and teach the recording of idealistic versions of life which reinforce consumerism.

Slater argues camera companies work to "exploit profitable social relations and activities

in domestic life" to "structure everyday life in the very process of representing it" (130).

Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans concur, noting just how much personal photography is

influenced by profit-making corporations: "One cannot understand, for example, the

practices of the amateur snapshot photographer, nor account for the severely restricted

'style' of the images he or she typically produces, without also considering how this

practice intersects with the camera and film manufacturing industry" (3).

In what almost seems like a response to Slater, Hall, and Evans, one of Kodak's

last marketing campaigns shifted the emphasis to image sharing (via Kodak's software)

over image production. Leslie Dance, VP Brand Marketing & Communications, explains

their 2010 campaign in this way:

> When we did global research at the end of last year we learned that it's not
> the picture that matters to people, as much as the story behind it. That
> story rekindles memories, but it's actually when we share those stories that

we feel closer to our friends, our family, the people that matter. As our agency Partners + Napier, who helped us create our new campaign, defined it, the core insight into what really motivates our consumer (whom we call Katie) is that "My memories make me, me, but it's only when I share them that I become complete."

This campaign seems to reflect the decline of printed photo sales over the last decade and the increase in the sharing of photographs on social networks. Ironically, it also seems a portentous explanation of why Kodak (once the giant of the print photo world) filed for bankruptcy in 2012.

James M. Moran, however, dismisses critics who seek to view home media as a vehicle for the spread of consumerism. The material considered to be personal media, Moran argues, is important beyond reflections of the marketplace or mundane sentiment. Moran offers five important features of personal media:

- "The home mode provides an authentic, active mode of media production for representing everyday life" (59).

- "Construct[s] a liminal space in which practitioners may explore and negotiate the competing demands of their public, communal, and private, personal identities" (60).

- "[T]o provide a material articulation of generational continuity over time" (60).

- "It constructs an image of home as cognitive and affective foundation situating our place in the world" (61).

- "It provides a narrative format for communicating family legends and personal stories" (61).

While personal photographs may appear, as Coleman suggests, mundane to those not associated with the people or places in them, for many, personal photographs are vital to our existence. James Kaufman boldly claims in *Learning from the Fotomat*, that

> to admit that they [personal photographs] mean little and say less is to live with chaos. The purpose of the ritualistic making of photographs for a family album is not to reveal random truths, but to sanctify experience… Family snapshots are magical objects in the world of undisputed truth that we imagine all photographs inhabit. Therefore they serve as talismans which enable us to ward off the suspicion that our lives lack significance. (244)

Similarly, though Slater decries the strong influence corporations exert over image-making, he also acknowledges that domestic photography offers "the possibility of telling one's own stories" and "engaging in self-representations" (144). Images in photo albums may look similar, but their content holds different meanings for those who view and use them. Glenn Willumson proposes that "in choosing, sequencing, organizing and captioning the photographs for the album, the person responsible transforms the meaning of selected images into an intensely individualistic expression" (63).

The meanings which people produce and the feelings they derive from personal photographs cannot simply be seen as a reflection of advertising. It is the dynamic subjectivity at play that makes personal photographs so fascinating to their owners and to scholars. They are the representations of self, friends, and family that go beyond the visual representations. They move back and forth between past, present, and future narratives. And such movement, such meanings, may be beyond the original author's control. For, as José van Dijck reminds us, "While taking a picture, we may yet be unaware of its future material form or use. However, any picture—or, for that matter,

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any diary entry or video take—even if ordained to end up in a specific format, may materialize in an unintended or unforeseen arrangement" (7).

Personal Photography and Memory

Annette Kuhn suggests family photographs are not about marking that "we were once there," but "how we once were: to evoke memories which might have little or nothing to do with what is actually in the picture" ("Remembrance" 395-96). Personal photographs not only stand in for memory, they preserve a visual cue and clue to aspects of self, associates, and those no longer living. Susan Sontag writes that photographs are evidence that "supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family's photograph album is generally about the extended family—and, often, is all that remains of it" (9). Geoffrey Batchen writes of the tactility of daguerreotypes and their ability to give the visual a "thingness" when he writes "it is as if [the photo subjects] have reached out and impressed themselves on the surface of the photograph, leaving their own visual imprint, as faithful to the contour of the original object as a death-mask is to the newly departed" (*Each Wild* 61). Liz Jobey writes of inheriting family photographs, "Our parents die. We are the new repositories of family history. We want to find out more about where we've come from, to make sure of the details, so we'll know more about why things turned out as they did" (33).

Photographs provide viewers a web of meaning and memories that cannot be simply defined by the subject or understood by the fact that they offer a likeness or a death mask of the subject(s). Kuhn posits that the multiple meanings photographs hold for families can "stir things up, confuse matters—possibly productively"

("Remembrance" 401). As Tamara West points out, "The role of the photograph in memory is much more complex and diverse than its usage in most research suggests. Photography, the reviewing of a photograph and the actual act or event of being photographed are fundamentally embodied activities" (189). There is meaning to be found in each step of the photographic making and viewing process that places the photograph in an ongoing relationship with memory. As West's findings conclude, "photographs were often a space that called upon the past, present and future simultaneously" (189).

Two people may have different interpretations and feeling towards the same family photos. The poet bell hooks writes of sharing an image with her sisters of their father. hooks' younger sister calls the image of their father a "horrible photograph," a response that "saddens" hooks (44). hooks writes, "Our 'reading' and experience of this image is shaped by our relationship to him, to the world of childhood and the images that make our life what it is now. I want to rescue and preserve this image of our father, not let it be forgotten" (44). hooks' relationship with the photograph is different than that of her sisters, because it is tied into the memories the photograph evokes. This example illustrates diverse levels of attachment which different family members have with their family photographs.

There are many ways in which memory weaves through discussions of photography. As I look back at the introduction to this chapter and I read my reference to the Polaroid of my father and the Husqvarna chainsaw, I think again of how I cannot remember where that photo is. I'm fairly certain that I have a digital scan of the image somewhere. I'd like to say that I'm almost positive it is in a box of important

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photographs somewhere in our house. But I cannot be certain. Why did I think of that photograph at the time of my writing? Was it because of the macho activity that was being performed, in safety goggles and dirty white t-shirt, by my father, who spent a good portion of his adult years disabled? Or was it possibly the memory of this thing we shared, the masculine how-to of using a chainsaw? To split wood. To build a fire. Things I never do now. What am I remembering? What am I seeking to remember?

To look at a photograph is a memory action. While there is the direct memory prompted by seeing a photo of a person we know, there are also possibilities of being reminded of other places, other events. And, as with the photo of my father holding a chainsaw, there is the tangential memory action of remembering where the photograph is located which prompts me to close my eyes and try to recall where it might be. And I am also led to wonder what it will mean if I can't find it. Who might find it later, after I'm dead, and what will their memory of this photo and of me be? Marianne Hirsch writes, "Photographs offer a prism through which to study the postmodern space of cultural memory composed of leftovers, debris, single items that are left to be collected and assembled in many ways, to tell a variety of stories, from a variety of often competing perspectives" (13).

These competing perspectives—whether it be the passage of time or the views of others who are invested in a story the photograph might tell—are the cause for a slippery relationship between personal photography and memory. It would seem that personal photographs are a visualization of memory, automatically evoking a recognizable nostalgia for the viewer. Batchen, however, reminds us, with the help of Roland Barthes and film theorist Siegfried Kracauer, that photographs are "more about the extended act

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of remembrance," and although they may have become a "profitable commodity" in the business of "stimulating nostalgia," photographs may actually assist in preventing memory (*Forget Me Not* 14-15). Batchen points to a photograph's lack of sensory stimuli which aid memory, such as sounds, smells, touch, and specific mannerisms (*Forget Me Not* 15). Indeed, it is not the actual photograph that may engage this kind of sensory memory. Rather, it is the practices that surround personal photographs: creation, organization, presentation, and for this dissertation more specifically, the loss and discovery that construct and inspire activities that get tangled up with the elements of memory. Richard Terdiman writes,

> But "memory" is so omnipresent, so fundamental to our ability to conceive the world that it might seem impossible to analyze it at all. Memory stabilizes subjects and constitutes the present. It is the name we give to the faculty that sustains continuity in collective and individual experience. . .Memory functions in every act of perception, in every act of intellection, in every act of language. So even framing the questions one might ask about memory is difficult. We might as well attempt to see vision. (9)

I wish I could stop right there. It would be much easier to suggest that memory is so vast and incomprehensible that it comes to us like breathing.

Dominic W. Massaro and Elizabeth F. Loftus observe in a review of literature on sensory and perception storage, "that the perceptual experience of a briefly presented visual stimulus outlasts the stimulus itself" (68). According to Massaro and Loftus, proving this is quite easy. Present a "visual stimulus" for a flash of time followed by complete darkness. The "naïve" viewer believes that the image is fading, when the image's disappearing act is actually a "mental" activity (68). The mind retains a view of the object even though the object is no longer present to be viewed. A similar mental

process retains a visualization of photographs, even in the absence of the tangible objects. Personal photographs disappear and reappear in many ways throughout a person's life and sometimes their reappearance might not be in the form of the original image. The perception might be triggered by other images that remind one of the original image. We can think of this as a photographic déjà vu. The scene, the pose, even the photographic era denoted by the paper used to print the photograph might trigger a memory of another image.

Paul Connerton outlines three "classes" of memory for what he defines as social memory, that is, a memory separate from historical memory. He writes that there is *personal memory,* which are the memories of self. These are the memories that individuals have of "their own past," experienced as if one is looking at the self from a "distance" (22). Connerton writes that this memory has "a kind of access that in principle they cannot have to the histories and identities of other persons and things" (22). Connerton identifies *cognitive memory* as the memory of meanings of things learned. These memories do not need the context of personal interaction or a personal "state" of being, but "the person who remembers that thing must have met, experienced or learned of it in the past" (22). Connerton's third category is the *memory of performance*. It is the individual's "capacity to reproduce a certain performance." Upon reading these three categories, I was struck by their immediate application to photography and the photograph. There is the *personal memory* of experience that may be prompted by personal photographs. *Cognitive memory* may consider the individual's memory of the "rules" of photography as an activity that should be practiced to remember. And *performance memory* is the ability to "recall" what to do when a camera is produced:

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pose, smile, push closer together for a group photo. It is also the habit of knowing when

to produce a camera, and the ability to "recall" what to do after the photographs have

been made: organize, show, and protect. Thus, Connerton's social memory offers a

starting place for considering categories and actions of memories and their relation to

photography.

Maurice Halbwachs' seminal essay "On Collective Memory" offers a challenge to

the notion that memory is just *there*. . . that it just *happens*. Memory, according to

Halbwachs, is a result of our connection with others. He writes, " No matter how we

enter a family—by birth, marriage, or some other way—we find ourselves to be part of a

group where our position is determined not by personal feelings but by rules and customs

independent of us that existed before us" (55). All memory stems from these

relationships and connections. Here, within the "group" framework is where memory

lives, according to Halbwachs. He writes that it is our relationship to others and "the

degree [to which] our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and

participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection" (38). Halbwachs

presents recollection memory activities as being connected to a collective group of people

that surround the person attempting to use memory recollection. He writes, "the greatest

number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons

recall them to us" (38).

There are two distinct forms of the collective memory that Halbwachs fleshes out

throughout "On Collective Memory": *autobiographical memory* and *historical memory*.

Autobiographical memories are those memories that are formed from personal

experience. Yet, these memories are not formed or retrieved in a vacuum; rather they

occur within the framework of familial relations. This is what gives them a context. As

Halbwachs writes, "What makes recent memories hang together is not that they are

contiguous in time; it is rather that they are part of the totality of thoughts common to a

group. . ." (52). Our memories are formed and recalled through connections to people

who share these experiences and who are also involved in memory-recalling activities.

There is something very appealing about the use of the term "autobiographical memory"

to form a discussion of photography, particularly personal photography. It would seem

that photographs are visual records of these connections.

However, though these memories are formed from the raw material of familial

connections, the family need not be the primary focus of the memories. Halbwachs

reflects on a memory of an excursion he made with his brother to a French town. He

considers the question of what is actually remembered. There are two distinct

possibilities: the focus of this autobiographical memory could be his brother, or it could

be the French town they visited, and not his brother at all. Halbwachs writes,

> It would seem that I could substitute for my brother a friend who is not a
> relative without seriously modifying my recollection. My brother is
> simply like one actor among others within a scene whose main interest lies
> not in the relation of kinship that unites us, since I am concentrating on the
> town above all and trying to reconstruct how it looked, or since I am
> recalling some idea we discussed during our walk. (62)

This illustration of a memory removes the emotional and nostalgic feelings often

prompted by the word "memory," especially when connected to personal events and

family. He writes, "In this scenario, even though my brother comes to mind I

nevertheless do not feel that I recall an event of my family life" (62). Lewis Coser parses

this familial memory in his introduction to his translation of "On Collective Memory" by

emphasizing the ephemeral nature of autobiographical memory, which is completely dependent on contact with family members who keep familial connections to such memories in play. As Coser writes, "autobiographical memory is always rooted in other people. Only group members remember, and this memory nears extinction if they do not get together over long periods of time" (24).

Jan Assmann outlines components of what he terms "cultural memory" and "communicative memory," not in opposition to Halbwachs's concept of "collective memory," but as an approach that inserts culture as part of the "three dimensions" alongside personal and social memory. In a wonderful description, Assmann writes, "Things do not 'have' a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them, things such as dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other 'lieux de memoire'" (111). Assmann draws a clear line between the attributes of "communicative memory" and "cultural memory" that is crucial to the understanding of lost-and-found photographs. Assmann denotes "cultural memory" as a more "formalized" reflection of mythic and classical events, and as he writes, it contains a "high degree of formation, ceremonial communication" (117). In contrast, Assmann proposes a binary grid that defines "communicative memory" within the context of autobiographical vs. mythical history, everyday practices vs, ceremonial practices, and the recent past vs. primordial past. While the terms "collective" and "cultural" are used frequently within photography studies, "communicative" appears less often. Yet, the features of Assmann's "communicative memory" point towards the everyday practices that surround photography.

Van Dijck, in a significant text on personal memory and digital culture, defines two important concepts that assist in looking at the dual nature of lost-and-found photographs as part of both personal and collective memory. Van Dijck uses the term "personal cultural memory" to point out that the "personal and cultural can hardly be disentangled because there is a constant productive tension between our (personal) inclinations to stake out certain events and the (social) frameworks through which we do so" (6). Van Dijck defines personal culture memory in this way: "the acts and products of remembering in which individuals engage to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and place" (6).

Personal photography's relationship with memory crosses many different junctures. While larger cultural forces connected to an individual's race, socioeconomic status, or geographic region play an important role in how the memory is collectively developed in relation to photographs, both Assmann and van Dijck's explanations of "communicative memory" and "personal memory" are the most illuminating as they seek to situate memory in the everyday. It is, as van Dijck argues, that memory is mediated, and that while "our memories are embodied by individual brains and minds," they are nonetheless "embedded in social practices and cultural forms" (174). It is clear that memory is not a solo process conceived by an individual outside of exterior factors. Memory forms through external relationships, events, and actions that surround personal photographs. Personal photographs are at times the triggers to memory; at other times they are the vessels of memory. Yet, there is no clear, exact manner in which old photographs induce, carry, or preserve memory. The collective and communicative puts photographs in play with actions that surround photographs. The well-known cliché that

is often said as an absolute, that "a picture is worth a thousand words," works when people are willing to share a thousand words instead of asking a silent photograph to give its story, memory, history without interaction.

Digitization of the Personal Photograph

Walter Benjamin, in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," releases film and photography from the authority held by non-reproducible works of art. Reproduction wrenches images free from the "cult status" placed upon an "original" work of art. While the ritual status that Benjamin associates with high art loses power in favor of a more accessible art to the public, it also regains power by allowing for the images to become mass-produced. Once the ability to mass-produce occurred, the image traveled beyond the art gallery. When the image could travel, its meaning traveled as well. First, consumers discovered that they no longer had to travel to one location (e.g., an art gallery) to see a famous landscape painting—the landscape could be brought to them. Later they discovered that they could also take photos of the landscape that surrounded them. The demystification of art gives way for the mass production of photos by the consumer.

The ability to mechanically produce and reproduce photographs of the family and self-distinguished the act of having one's photo taken and taking one's own photo. The ability of an amateur to take one's own photographs, and to distribute or archive them, gave the public a certain amount of control at the expense of professional photographers who had previously wielded power over who and when someone could be photographed. This control only increases with the rise of digital photography. Digital photography has

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shed its paper skin and become a product for the mechanical age far beyond Benjamin's imaginings. Joanna Sassoon argues in "Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction" that while Benjamin's writings can be "understood independently of a specific technology," there has not been enough talk about what is "lost in the process of digitizing original photographs and the impact of this loss on research based on photographs" (187-188). Sassoon suggests the digitization of photographs prompts questions of image translation and what "aspects of the photographs are altered during the digitisation process" (189). The digital process impacts questions of fidelity, originality, viewing, and storing.

Personal photographs, previously ephemeral in their materiality because of their paper and often single-copy status, can now be digitized into something that can be replicated (and manipulated) endlessly, and easily shared over email and social networks. The adoption of digital photography continues to raise questions about the future of family photos.

The tangible photograph printed on paper that can be held has become outdated because of images produced with new technologies. Digitization had done a number of things to family photography. People print fewer photos. Photos now reside on hard drives instead of in family albums. And with discussions of hard drives we must now include storage in the digital cloud. The digital shoebox may not be able to be opened or even seen in the future. Or there might not even be a shoebox to open. With film, there was distance between the technology that produced the photograph and the photograph itself. The photograph made with a camera had to be sent to a lab, brought home, and put away in an album. The activities of photographing and exhibiting photos were

separate acts. The current status of digital photography puts image creation and exhibition in the same device: digital cameras have viewing screens; tablet computers and phones have built-in cameras.

Digital photography also allows for a greater quantity of photos of everyday life. Before, the film roll of twenty-four created an economy of image making. Now, the storage capacity of memory cards and the ease of taking (and deleting) photos again and again is changing the nature of personal photography. The digital camera's viewing screen allows users to view their images almost at the instant of pressing the shutter button, meaning that the answer to the question of "Did you get it?" is no longer guessed at until the roll of film comes back developed, but confirmed in the moment. While not predicting the future of digital photography, the questions it poses (e.g., Are people taking more photos? Are people printing their photos? Are people deleting unwanted photos or storing them in a digital shoebox? Are people finding different uses for their photos?) are important reasons to examine the vernacular photograph. While early photographs might be considered antiques or artifacts, the push towards a new form of creating the photograph "endows" the film-and-paper-bound twentieth-century photograph with a history that it didn't have before. Whether the photos are taken from photo albums or found in flea markets, the twenty-first-century move toward digitization turns them into analog artifacts produced by dead or dying technologies and processes. Presentation methods alone will not alter the meaning of family photos; they will only offer a greater potential for photos to go seen or unseen.

Years from now the clothes and hairstyles will divulge the antiquity of those featured in the digital photograph, but the image itself will still be bright, still vibrantly

glowing, as if new. The digital image will not mildew or fade. The lack of deterioration

of image quality may reduce the distance one feels from the original event. It may also

infuse the feelings one has for pre-digital photographs (the object and the content) with

an intensified longing and nostalgia. Fewer printed personal photos will find new

nostalgic resting places on digital devices and the Internet.

Ubiquitous monitors (big and small) take the place of the photo album, projection

screen, wall, wallet, frame, and shoebox. These objects could potentially create different

relationships with the photographic image. Martin Lister argues these relationships may

be formed, but that photographs are not "pure forms waiting to be divined" (226),

suggesting that that images carry with them evidence of prior relationships people have

experienced with analog photographs. For instance, Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart

(2004) posit in their introduction to *Photographic Object Histories: On the Materiality of

Images* that content that exists in a photographic image is important, but "its material and

the presentation forms and the uses to which they are put are central to the function of the

photograph as a socially salient object" (2). Thus, digitization alters the photo object. No

longer a tangible object, it enters the Internet data stream as a digital file.

Digitization of the photograph has shoved the private images of the photo album

kicking and smiling onto the Internet for everyone to see. It has also given photographers

more control over how they produce, edit, and distribute personal content. Once a photo

object has been digitized and placed on the Internet, it can be copied and pasted, dragged

and dropped, edited, and redistributed by anyone. The Internet offers digital

photographers a place to display their photographs. Homepages, photo blogs, *Facebook*,

and digital family albums offer places to store and present personal photographs. While

some password-protect their personal photographs, a perusal for personal photographs on the Internet proves overwhelming. On the photo community website *Flickr* there were over thirteen million photographs tagged with the keyword "family" available for the public to view in June of 2010. (NB: *Flickr* no longer provides the total number of photos resulting from a keyword search.)

The digital slideshow has become a popular media event at weddings, graduations, anniversaries, and funerals. A quick search of *YouTube* for "family slideshow" results in thousands of homemade slideshows packed with photographs and accompanying soundtracks. The creation of photographic presentations online, the public's adoption of the digital camera, and the Internet's rise as a place to distribute photos represent a new way of looking, producing, and sharing personal visual material. Private images have entered the public. Some people attempt to keep personal images from the Internet and others are conservative in protecting their online images from public viewing, but they may be in the minority. As personal photographs exist in the home and on the Internet, the context of home (shoe box, photo album, mantel, etc.) is broken. Sassoon argues that digitization and online sharing can strip paper photographs of their original contexts. For example, images within photo albums lose their chronological order as certain photographs are culled for digitization and presentation. Sassoon laments that images "that were once drawing meanings from their contexts of creation, production and function have been relegated to content-based digital orphans…" (192). How can the digital photograph "reconstitute or replace" its lost contexts? It may never regain its original context or form as it becomes part of an entirely new image culture, as it is copied and pasted into new digital and printed

contextual frameworks. In this way, digital images are malleable and porous, which becomes especially apparent as images become recontexualized within personal digital albums as well as within a community of collections.

This is important to lost-and-found photographs because it places the lost-and-found image into a public forum, where the image can be tagged, shared, and commented on. Tagging allows users to describe their photographs with keywords which help organize photographs and place them among other similarly tagged photos on the Internet. For example, if I upload a family photo to *Flickr* and tag it with words like "familyphotos," "georgia," "georgiagrandma," or "grandma," this photo would join the ranks of all the other photographs using one or more of these same tags.

Attempts to uncover the relationship people have with personal photographs gives the photographs importance beyond potential uses of the technologies that produce them. In "'Everyone's Cuddled Up and It Just Looks Really Nice': An Emotional Geography of Some Mums and their Family Photos," Gillian Rose interviewed white, middle-class mothers with young children, seeking to find out what they were "doing" with their photos**.** Rose found that her subjects perceived family photos as having a "material trace" of the person featured in the photo:

> As my interviewees showed me their photographs, they picked up photo frames and gave them to me, they turned the pages of albums and stroked particular photos, they took photos out of protective covers and mounts to see them better and, I think, just to hold them. There is tactility to looking at family photos, which is also about enacting a corporeal closeness between the viewer and the person pictured. (555)

People have both emotional *and* physical attachment to their personal photographs.

Anthropologist Yannick Geffroy describes one subject in his study of personal

photography as having an "unusual" relationship with the photos. Geffroy writes, "the

way she handled or even spoke of them aroused a complex and almost eerie feeling. She

seemed to know the long-dead people in the pictures very well, was practically

emotionally involved with them. . ." (374). A tactile experience is often part of the

intense feelings expressed towards personal photographs. Unlike other forms of media,

the personal photograph has been (until recently) something to hold and view. No

additional technology was needed to look at, manipulate, or carry photographs.

Photographs have textures, show fingerprints, and fade. Paper photographs can even

have a unique smell (e.g., they may smell of age, a specific photographic paper—like

Polaroids, darkroom chemicals, or they may have been scented by perfume or cologne).

Even as digital files replace paper photographs, we still long for tangible images, as

Patrizia Di Bello notes:

> Every high-street digital printers, and many kits for home-use, offer the
> possibility to print photographs on a variety of objects, from mugs to t-
> shirts, mouse mats to jewelry. We might not look very carefully at them,
> but these objects seem to testify to how strong the desire still is, to hold-on
> to photographs of our loved ones, and to mingle the photograph as a trace
> of the there-and-then, with the tactile trace of our emotions here-and-now.
> (160)

Today, personal photographs are either made out of paper or reside inside a

machine that is fraught with instability. There are names for this instability in the digital

world: crashes; viruses. These crashes and viruses threaten the virtual memory and

ultimately the human memory that is tethered to the machine. The materiality of paper

images, though fragile and ephemeral, does carry with it a stubborn will to survive, even

when such images are abandoned by their owners. This is evident in the photos found in antique shops, thrift stores, and *eBay*.

Digital images likewise have persistence, though the persistence of the digital file will depend on a number of factors. First, where will all the hard drives from the computers today end up and what will happen to all of the digital images stored on those hard drives? Much of the data we store on our personal computers lives on, long after the computers themselves are discarded (and long after we think we have wiped their hard drives clean). Imagine a post-apocalyptic briocollage junk-yard full of old computers from the 1990s and 2000s daisy-chained together, displaying the retrievable content (emails, taxes, wills, photos, video games, pornography) on a bank of cracked monitors. Imagine millions of computers running slideshows of billions of personal photos—who will have access to these archives? Who will find these lost photos?

Second, where will all the photos go that are being uploaded (now and future) by the billions to social networking sites like *Flickr* and *Facebook*? Facebook administrators, while writing about ownership and user data on the social media site, state the following:

> One of the questions about our new terms of use is whether Facebook can use this information forever. When a person shares something like a message with a friend, two copies of that information are created—one in the person's sent messages box and the other in their friend's inbox. Even if the person deactivates their account, their friend still has a copy of that message. ("On Facebook")

This is also the case when a person shares something like a photo with friends. And when those friends share the photos with *their* friends, and on and on. Even if one decides to delete images or perform a lobotomy-like destruction of a hard drive by

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drilling holes through it (as recommended), images that were shared through email and social network sites will live on and on and may return unexpectedly in some future lost-and-found moment. Because of the rise in the digitization of old photographs, it may not just be the digitally born photographs from the late 1990s onward that will resurface. The photos that re-emerge in the future might be digital duplicates of Kodachrome slides or old black-and-white snapshots that will make glowing reappearances with loads of visible and invisible metadata, the DNA-like hidden identifiers that can be added to digital images and include information like camera type, settings, GPS maps, and owner identifications. The very purpose of metadata, according to the National Information Standards Organization, is "ensuring that resources will survive and continue to be accessible into the future" (n.pag.). But in what form will these resources survive, and in what manner will we be able to access them?

It is anxiety generated by this instability that can prompt intense feelings, even more so than the usual feelings people have towards personal photographs. It is at this moment—when personal photographs and their meanings face the ongoing threat of leaving and arriving—that they are most vulnerable and most cherished. So while digitization has impacted many activities surrounding photographic images, the emotional connections people form with paper or digital photographs, especially when they go missing, may prove to be equal.

Personal Photographs in the Archive

An "archive," a weighty and static term, is quite simply a location to deposit a collection of something. In the case of personal photographs it could be a private or

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museum collection in the real world or in the digital cloud. The archive is in everyday life. The big thick photo albums on bookshelves in a home brimming with photos from the past are archives. The exhibit showcasing curated snapshots from rural civil-rights-era Alabama drawn from a museum collection is an archive. The hard drives and online repositories holding gigabytes of photographs are archives.

The construction of an archive and its activation and reception are important practices that surround lost-and-found photographs. As Christopher Pienney posits, "it is cultural practice that is the true motor of photography" (14). More important then *what* and *how* people take photos are the things they do with the photos once they are taken. While the data collection for this dissertation is confined to literal lost-and-found photographs (photographs that have for whatever reason been lost by original owners), considering the everyday activities through which personal photography is organized and curated (e.g., photo album construction) is an important way of looking at archives. Indeed, one of the most crucial aspects of an archive is its role in offering a space for narrative construction and meaning-making that come from the habits that surround everyday photography. An archive can take a seemingly random collection of photographs and give them an organization, a relationship to each other, and a static location in which to reside as time moves forward. Jacques Derrida in *Archive Fever* writes that the "archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass" (28-29). The archive's presence signifies a stability, an organization, and significance among a collection of images. Michel Foucault offers this description and critique of the archive:

> The archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions and levels, more fully, no doubt, and with greater sharpness, the greater the time that separates us from it: at most, were it not for the rarity of the documents, the greater chronological distance would be necessary to analyse it. (*Archaeology* 137)

Time, location, access, and the manner in which an archive is curated determine what can be done with the materials (digital or paper) that reside within it.

John Tagg directs the scholar of photography to focus the gaze not on what is immediately visible in a photograph, but on that which surrounds it. As Tagg writes, photography's "function as a mode of cultural production is tied to definite conditions of existence, and its products are meaningful and legible only within the particular currencies they have" (246). Tagg's analysis ties meanings associated with photographs to the authority that produces and possesses the archive in which the photographs reside. Hence, the production and archiving of images becomes a means of holding power over the photographs and the photographed. For example, Tagg cites an archive of photos which display prisoners. Collectively, the repetitive imagery produced from prisoners of insane asylums and police stations provides a social commentary which is a direct result of the control and distribution of resembling "texts." These "texts" become a "subtle web of discourse through which realism is enmeshed in a complex fabric of notions, representations, images, attitudes, gestures and mode of action which function as everyday know-how, 'practical ideology,' norms within and through which people live their relation to the world" (271). Meaning shifts with context. The photograph does not roam free, offering a window to truth for all who see it. It is presented, filtered, and contextualized by the powers and texts that surround it.

The creation of a photo archive, which can be as small as a family album or as big as a museum exhibit or as far-reaching as a photo blog, directs meaning of the archived images. Allan Sekula notes that archives can be owned and held by individuals or institutions. The manner in which photos are organized and made accessible creates important meaning-making space for the viewer (444). He writes,

> Archives, then, constitute a territory of images: the unity of an archive is first and foremost that imposed by ownership. Whether or not the photographs in a particular archive are offered for sale, the general condition of archives involves the subordination of use to the logic of exchange. Thus not only are the pictures in archives often literally for sale, but their meanings are up for grabs. New owners are invited, new interpretations are promised. (444)

The archivist becomes the organizer of what "constitutes a territory of images." In the case of lost-and-found photographs, the archivist might be the snap shooter, collector, book publisher, or photo dealer. The archive is an outcome of distinct practices performed by these social actors involved in the collecting of lost-and-found photographs, whether they are in a family album or museum storage awaiting exhibition.

Sekula emphasizes this ability of the archive to "liberate" photos from their original use, noting that "the specificity of 'original' uses and meanings can be avoided and even made invisible, when photographs are selected from an archive and reproduced" (445). Charles Merewether considers this "invisible" effect in observing that, "like photography, the archive gains its authority to present the past through an apparent neutrality, whereby difference is either erased or regulated" (160).

In the case of lost-and-found photographs, an archive can contribute to the erasure of the authors / owners by naming them "Anonymous" and disconnecting "found" photos from their original contexts. The lost-and-found photograph is, therefore, made open for

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interpretation, and the finder is given the right of ownership and control over both the image itself and its context. Foucault claims in "What is an Author,"

> We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: from where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend upon the manner in which we answer these questions. And if a text should be discovered in a state of anonymity—whether as a consequence of an accident or the author's explicit wish—the game becomes one of rediscovering the author. (215)

However, Roland Barthes writes, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (148). Barthes is suggesting that the author gets in the way of potential meanings created by an audience or reader. The author's residue builds up on the work so that in the end it is not just a work, but an authored work. Thus, for Barthes, and for many who "find" anonymous photos, the game becomes not one of *rediscovering* the author, but one of *becoming* the author. A new author of "found" photos is born when the "found" photo is taken (poached?) and archived in greeting cards, museums, auctions, coffee table books, and photo blogs. Such an archive can assist in making a "lost" photo "found." It also creates what may appear to be a blank slate, one which can accommodate new meanings bestowed by old and new owners.

The museum, the book, the blog, the archives, the human interest story in the newspaper all create quasi-nonfictional and fictional narratives about lost-and-found photographs, just as people author their own stories about personal photographs in their photo albums every day. Even when an author of a photograph is not anonymous, and even when the author of the image is in control of the archive within which the image resides, the viewer will always have some degree of authorship. As Susan Hiller writes,

> If you think about the narrative that collections or assemblages of things make, the interesting thing is there are always at least two possible stories: one is the story that the narrator, in this case the artist, thinks she's telling—the story-teller's story—and the other is the story that the listener is understanding, or hearing, or imagining on the basis of the same objects. (42)

Both the author and the audience create meaning with archives—the same collection inspiring what might be very different understandings. Especially important in Hiller's assessment is the narrative possibilities of the archive. What story is trying to be told? What story is actually told? And what story is actually heard? Narrative uses of an archive are especially worth investigating when considering lost-and-found photographs because these are the photographs that are often taken from their original location and placed in an archive.

Beyond institutional archives, millions of photos reside in personal archives. While visitors might cull photographs from an ancestor's past from museum collections, they hold within their own collection photos of family, friends, and community. Yannick Geffroy conducted a study of personal photographs, ultimately offering an extensive analysis of twenty-five hundred photographs from the South of France taken during the years between 1890 and 1950. What began for Geffroy as a method of strengthening life histories and photo interviews becomes an argument for a wider use of family photography within anthropology. As part of the process of culling these family images, Geffroy exhibited a large collection of photographs already gathered. The exhibit created an "atmosphere of excitement" along with "new meetings, intergenerational exchanges, discussions. . ." (376). From these meetings and discussions Geffroy was able to gain missing information about photographs already collected.

Geffroy was astonished by how family photographs prompted subjects to recall not just events about their own family, but about non-family members featured in the photographs. Running throughout Geffroy's work is a reflexive nod to the unique nature of using family photographs in anthropological research. Geffroy writes, "if one of the initial questions was whether these family photographs may be valuable anthropological data, my contribution here, of course, is an attempt to give an answer in the affirmative… [T]hese family photographers of the past could be seen as our first visual anthropologists" (407). If family photographers are to be seen as our "first visual anthropologists," they should also be seen as our early archivists. It is their preservation and organization of personal images that has made available images both for personal inspection as well as scholarly research.

Susan Schwartzenberg posits that the family album, an "informal archive," can also become an archive that constructs an "official" history of a family and the ways in which it is affected by cultural forces. Schwartzenberg examined photo albums of families with mentally disabled children. She interviewed parents of mentally disabled children and put together a book comprised of a lifetime of photographs taken from their personal archives. Schwartzenberg's intent was to place "individual stories in the context of broader historical processes. The photographs and the retold experiences of those who 'were just living their lives, doing what had to be done' provide richly textured accounts of the social changes these families lived through and helped shape" (71). Through interviews and by poring over photo albums in homes, Schwartzenberg found an everyday world often hidden in the visual landscape: images from families who raised children with disabilities during the 1950s, an era when their children were labeled

"genetic deviants." Very few images of mentally and physically handicapped children in everyday situations made / make their way to public viewing. The photos Schwartzenberg presents offer a unique visual history of post-WWII family life that has been rarely seen by the public.

Jo-Anne Driessens draws a similar conclusion as she recounts finding photos of her ancestors while volunteering for Michael Aird, curator of a collection of Aboriginal photographs in the Queensland Museum. Driessens has "mixed feelings" about the "anthrometric" photos she finds of her ancestors, but suggests the archive of photos provides many opportunities for "new discoveries" (22). Driessens calls the museum archive "my new family's shoeboxes and albums" (22). Michael Airds recounts in "Growing up with Aborigines" how many aboriginal visitors look past "stereotypical portraits" for images of ancestors. Visitors are grateful for the opportunity to see photos of ancestors. As Aird writes, "I myself have been able to experience, as well as share with numerous Aboriginal people, the joy and excitement of finding images of ancestors and relatives" (25). Aird continues:

> I have watched as a woman viewed photographs taken in the 1890s of her grandmother posing bare-breasted in a photographic studio. This image was in contrast to the way the woman remembered her grandmother, a woman who was always fully clothed. Yet she seemed undisturbed by the uncharacteristic way in which the photographer portrayed her grandmother and was simply grateful for the opportunity to view a photograph of her taken so long ago. (25)

These revelations do not condone or excuse racist photo-taking, but they offer a reason to protect photographs and support arguments for putting archives into the hands of cultures featured in the photographs—giving authorial control over collections to the subjects, not necessarily the photographers, collectors, or museum curators.

In each of these examples—Schwartzenberg's study of family images of disabled children, Geffroy's collection of regional photos from the early twentieth century, and Driessen's discovery of ancestral photos within an archive of Aboriginal images—the archive is "activated" or "animated," to borrow terms used by a number of scholars, most recently and notably digital humanities scholar Jeffrey Schnapp and archeologist Michael Shank.

Schnapp, writing in 2008 for the online peer-reviewed journal *First Monday,* looks to Web 2.0 as an "animator" of an archive. Schnapp writes, "The past was never really dead, of course; it always already belonged to the present. And Web 2.0 and toolkits that lie in the space between 2.0 and 3.0. . . provide some distinctive avenues for investing the present's ownership of the past with the attributes of life. In short, they hold out the promise of *animating* the archive." So what does it mean to animate the archive? Is it not just the fact that after a certain passage of time, the "greater chronological distance" that Foucault suggests exists between the originator and future finder of an archive automatically activates its ability to be something new, something different to the current holders (*Archaeology*)? Is it not the meaning-making that occurs upon entering the archive and interacting with the images, the photographic subjects, the photographers, and the cultural forces connected therein (as was the case with Schwartzenberg, Geffroy, and Dreissens)? What is activated? What prompts the activation?

As we have seen, it is clear that digitization of photography has changed practices and relationships with the photo object. Can we not then conclude that the way in which photo archives are activated has also changed?

Schnapp answers this question in the affirmative and sets up five important

revelations from the promise and potential of how an archive is activated in the digital

age. He sees the "the pervasiveness of copying, transforming, and sharing devices, and

expanding world-wide access to bandwidths that promote the rapid and unrestricted

circulation of data" as impactful on the "bricks-and-mortar" archives, leading to "file

sharing, remixing, and mash-ups practices." These two existences of the same material

compresses distance and time, as people can interact with material residing in the archive

and can be *with* without being *there*. Schnapp hopes this coexistence creates interaction

between the public and an archive as it is built "out into these and other domains of

intersection between the virtual and the physical in ways that reinforce not only access

and outreach but also establish new models of imagination, quality, and rigor." This new

model that Schnapp calls for puts the information sharing between the public and

institutions in a data flow that, as he puts it,

> contributes to the transformation of institutions of memory into not just
> producers and "deliverers" of finalized contents, but also into laboratories
> where, much as at the San Francisco Exploratorium, "stuff" is always
> happening that anybody can watch: stuff that invites observation and
> participation—thinking, commentary, conversation, construction, play.
> (n.pag.)

While idealistic, this innovative look at the archive, written almost a decade ago, seems

so obvious in the day and age of social networks, *WikiLeaks*, and a world where data

pours over the virtual dam walls we may try to construct. Schnapp is calling for an

exchange of archival materials and a flattening out of the kinds of hierarchal structures

which may have historically prevented many from activating an archive. He is

advocating for the construction of an archive that allows access. But it is more than just

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allowing access, it is creating a culture of sharing and curation that allows the content of the archive to be produced and organized and, as Schnapp suggests, "remixed" beyond the institution.

Archeologist Michael Shank, writing online just a few years later in 2010, formulates a framework utilizing the same term as Schnapp, "animating the archive," for seeing new digital "archives as active engagements with the past." The two most important aspects of Shank's outline for considering the new archive are how the archive is animated and the new ways in which archives can be "collaborative." He argues that to animate the archive, there must be a space available for "recollection, regeneration, reworking, remixing." This is made possible through what he calls "rich modes of engagement" dependent on "rich architecture" of digital systems that increase interactivity and "cocreation." Shank observes that "a paradigmatic shift is occurring from a principle of curation and managed access to archives (the orthodox model of stewardship) to one of the co-production of archives." Here, there is a democratization of the archive that allows for diverse creation and use. Yet, digitization does not immediately equal democratization. Nina Lager Vestberg points out one of the challenges of a digital photographic archives is " determining *for whom* it is intended: the same people, often specialists, who made use of the analogue archive, or a new and expanded audience, perhaps largely made up of amateurs?" (481). In the case of lost-and-found photographs it is often amateurs who are the audience and, in many cases, the curators of the archive.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The combination of sources and approaches to personal photography, memory, and archives presented here offer an important backdrop to consider what I've defined as "lost-and-found photographs." Lost-and-found photographs are unique in that they may travel away from the personal to the public sphere and, thereby, get caught up in the churn of institutional uses—anything from an advertising campaign that draws heavily from people's personal photographs to a museum exhibit of "found" snapshots. This prompts the broad question of what is being done across the visual cultural landscape which Mirzoeff defines in terms of three comparative modes: the contemporary, the everyday, and the networks. I am mindful that this analysis and its attendant examples cover a much smaller, domestic field of study than Mirzoeff's great span of historical time and location outlined in his modes. However, his framework is pertinent for personal photographs, which are dispersed through everyday life as they traverse the globe through networked nodes, cutting back and forth, lost *and* found, their collective and cultural memory patina reflecting everyday photography's expansive endeavors and accomplishments. I have not outlined a systematic approach to practices and perceptions connected with lost-and-found photographs. Yet, here, within scholarship on memory, digitization, and personal photography, are the filters through which to view my collected data, by which we can chart and analyze the nearly postmodernist route the lost-and-found photograph can take, as well as the perceptions that follow these routes.

From this examination of relevant literature, coupled with an approach to personal photography that pokes and culls from anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural critics, I

look to explore lost-and-found photos vis-a-vis the cultural impact of archives, memory,

and visual culture.

CHAPTER 3

"BUT WHERE DID YOU GET THIS?": METHODS FOR DATA COLLECTION

Introduction

Here is a lost-and-found photography story: According to a giant, fourteen-pound photo album with the name *The Elliots* emblazoned on the cover, Rufus and Rita got married. They had a honeymoon. They went on a number of vacations. Celebrated Christmas, Halloween, birthdays. Rufus played the guitar. Rita had a sharp wit, illustrated in the white captions written in long-hand beneath the photographs. A giant tree fell on their car after a storm. They had a baby boy. He grew up to about the age of six. And then the album stops, leaving many empty black pages.

Maybe the album was replaced by a smaller, more modern photo album. It did not, most likely, stop being an object of scrutiny for the Elliot family. They may not have looked at it every day. They may have had periods in which they lost track of the album, possibly during moves, room rearrangements, or even during the business of their daily lives. Since the collective viewing of family albums is widely practiced, one might imagine the Elliots looking at the big album with their son, showing him their early years. ("Here is the first photo we took of you," "Here is your first Christmas," "Here is when your dad and I were first married.")

And then the Elliots really lost the album. The physical object. They no longer possessed it. I did.

The album was purchased at an antique auction by a friend of my aunt who had been told to keep an eye out for old photographs. It became part of my modest collection

of vernacular photo albums and snapshots I had amassed as part of my growing interest in collecting "found" photographs.

The British album I discussed in chapter 1 had no names and almost no landmarks. In contrast, the Elliot family album was full of names and locations. The most important identifier was their surname plus all of the first names of the people featured in the album. Two of the names—Rufus (the father) and Herndon (the son)— were not at all common, so I was able to find them doing a fairly simple search on *Google*.

I remember sitting in my parents' living room looking at the giant album and feeling what many have described when looking at old photographs: somebody, somewhere must be interested in this album. I can't say it was an overwhelming emotional feeling. More of an obvious thought than projected empathy as I sat looking at the album, surrounded by my own family's holiday decorations, photos of which would someday be part of a collection documenting events similar to those pictured in the Elliot album. This was 2003. A lifetime ago in Internet years. It was before *YouTube*, *Flickr*, and *Facebook*, all common services used to share information, photographs, and contacts. While *Google* was a common and dominant search engine in 2003, the ability to share and correspond via social networks and other Web 2.0 services was not part of everyday life, as it has become at the writing of this chapter.

Meeting the Elliots

My initial search for Rufus Elliot lead me to a small bluegrass concert hall on a mountain in Tennessee. I emailed the concert hall, not thinking I would hear anything back since it was one of those generic information email addresses without a name associated with it. A week or so later, I received an email from Herndon. Staff at the venue had forwarded my email to him. I found out from Herndon that the album had been sold accidentally in an estate sale. After initial contact, he wrote, "I didn't know this album still existed, and honestly, I would like to have it back.......but you bought it fair and square, so I bear no ill will towards you on this subject." I wrote back that there was nothing I would rather do than return his family album. I asked Herndon if it would be possible to audio-record him and his father when we met. He said he'd ask his father, but he didn't see why not.

Adding Audio: The Project Takes Shape

I audio recorded our meeting. The audio recorder, a small Mini-Disc recorder with an attached microphone lay between us, recording our conversation (Figure 2). The album was open on the table in front of them so they could thumb through the photos while we talked. The first things Rufus asked me was: "But where did you get this?" I told him the story of how I had got the album. We spoke for about half an hour.

Figure 2: Rufus and Herndon Elliot looking through their "found" family photo album, with the microphone recording their conversation.

During our talk, Herndon said he believed the photographs would help his daughters get to know their grandmother whom they had never known prior to her memory loss. He also talked of scanning the photographs "to make some kind of an archive that I can keep around for a long time" so that a digital copy might be created to outlast its leather and paper materiality.

The return of these lost personal photographs, according to Herndon, would assist in restoring, redefining, teaching, and preserving the Elliot family identity, memory, and heritage. Herndon said the album "brought back vivid memories that weren't there. It shakes the cobwebs loose." These photos, once returned, provided an opportunity for Herndon to remember things from the past that were no longer part of the brain's catalogue. Along with resurrecting old stories, the lost-and-found album now has a new story that surrounds and recontextualizes it within the Elliot family. It becomes the album that was lost and returned. The recorded oral history of its content may travel with

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the album into the future. The digital archive that Herndon plans to create from the album's photographs will constitute a new form that can be endlessly copied onto storage devices or presented on the Internet for distant family members who, in turn, might find images of their grandfathers or grandmothers they've never seen or of whom they have only vague memories of seeing during childhood visits. They may drag-and-drop the photos onto their computer hard drives. They may print the photos and put them into a scrapbook. Or a stranger may stumble across the webpage and drag-and-drop a vintage holiday photograph from the album to add to a photo blog comprised of family holiday photographs found on the Internet. These are a few possibilities. It also might get shoved in a drawer and lost again before digital duplication can be achieved. Maybe it will accidentally be sold again. Maybe another collector will buy it.

Collectors *and* scholars like to believe they are the first to discover something unique and unknown. I, too, thought I had found something nobody was paying attention to. However, I quickly discovered that the study of these kinds of photos is not unique and not unknown. What contributes to this feeling of stumbling upon something new and exciting is that, unlike other mass-produced materials, personal photos are sometimes hidden away in homes, albums, shoeboxes, not unlike undiscovered people and objects that await archeologists and anthropologists. Yet, lost-and-found personal photographs and their textual stories (whether authored by associates of the photos or by complete strangers) are also widely available on the Internet. What have *not* been widely available to the public are the voices of the lost-and-found. The oral / audio stories of those who have lost or found personal photographs have been missing from the many different presentations of the lost-and-found. The recording I made of my conversation with Rufus

and Herndon was the catalyst for the methodology for this dissertation. While I believe

that my focus on combining photographs and oral stories unearths new discoveries within

the field of lost-and-found photography, at the time I didn't know what I really wanted

during our meeting.

After transcribing this recording I realized three important things that would

inform the rest of my data collection for this dissertation. First, what I had done—go

online, Google a name, travel to return someone's personal photograph album in

person—was entangled in the art world of snapshot collecting *and* Internet search

algorithms assisting people to find lost photos. Second, missing from the stories of lost-

and-found photos which are authored by strangers are the stories of the lost, authored by

the losers. Third, the audio recording that accompanied the duplication of the lost

photographs could become an important addition to a personal memory archive that went

beyond a simple documentation of photographs.

Data Collection

From the moment the father, Rufus, expressed doubtfully at the beginning, "I'm

not really sure what you want us to do," this project came to focus on the diverse

practices and perceptions surrounding lost-and-found photographs. As Annette Kuhn

writes in "Photography and Cultural Memory,"

> the task of the practitioner in memory work is not merely to analyse but
> also to understand—that is, to try to enter into the memory-world of the
> text, the account, the performance (though not of the informant—the task
> is not to psychoanalyse people but to be helpfully at hand at the birth of
> new insight and fresh understanding). (284)

In order to both analyze and understand, I sought a method or a group of methods that would attempt to triangulate, as Thomas Lindlof defines it, to offer a "comparative assessment of more than one form of evidence about an object of inquiry" (239). The methods I adopted incorporated a combination of data collection strategies which included printed sources as well as personal interviews. I collected websites, blogs, and photography books that featured lost-and-found photographs. These were areas that offered the richest evidence of practices and perceptions made about lost-and-found photographs. While collecting data from these sources, I simultaneously maintained a blog (*Lostandfoundphotos.org*) that documented the world I was studying. My posts to this blog were often embedded with quotes from essays or other blogs (e.g., a recent post of mine linked to the *Lost & Found Photo Project*, with a quote from an essay by the scholar Geoffrey Batchen which is featured on that site—see Figure 3). I also conducted interviews with people who worked with lost-and-found photographs found in books, museum exhibitions, antique shops, on blogs, and on websites.
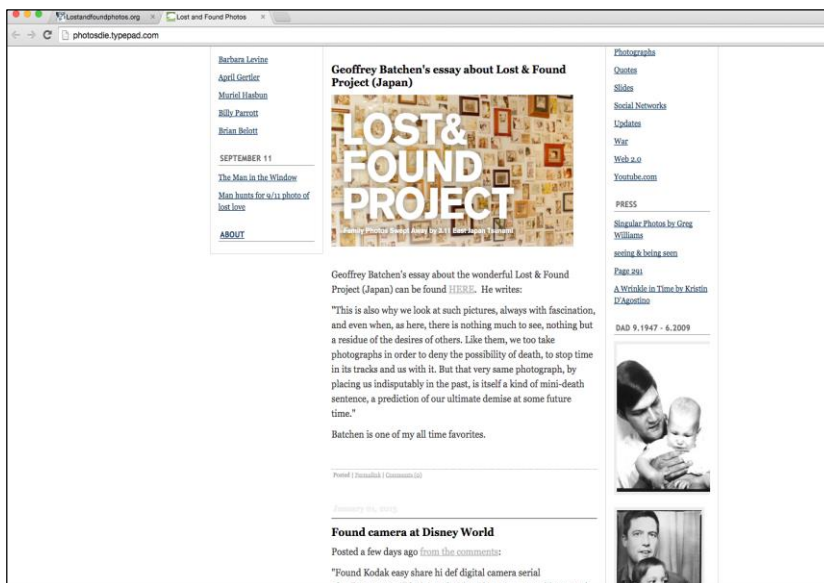
Figure 3: Screenshot of *Lostandfoundphotos.org*, showing a link to additional research.

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To fully describe and analyze practices and perceptions of lost-and-found photographs, qualitative methods were used to cull a variety of different kinds of data. The following kinds of data collection and public data presentation were used:

- Review of books and printed material.

- Review of materials found on the World Wide Web using traditional search engines.

- Story collection via voluntary called-in recorded voicemails.

- Traditional qualitative interviews face-to-face and over the phone.

As I've discussed, ownerless, authorless, banal personal photographs are lost and found by various people and institutions. The losers and finders often work to make these personal photographs significant, often by writing about them. These texts are valuable forms of data that offer insight into how lost-and-found photographs are perceived and used. These texts guide viewers to a set understanding of how recovered personal images should be seen. In *Visual Methodologies,* Gillian Rose writes that texts which surround images "work to prioritize" certain aspects of the visual (178). There are a number of common locations in which people express stories of a lost-and-found event. The texts that surround the lost-and-found can be found in academic and literary essays, newspaper classifieds, newspaper articles, coffee-table books, websites, blogs, and Internet classifieds (e.g., *Craigslist*, *Lostandfound.com*). Looking at diverse uses of lost-and-found personal photographs offers a comprehensive view of how these personal photographs travel through time and space to be found, sold, exhibited, discussed, and recontextualized. This is a study of loss and discovery of meaning and materiality, one which depends upon critically juxtaposing more traditional practices and perceptions

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relating to lost-and-found photographs with alternative approaches that are often overlooked.

Explanations of research methods are usually divided into sections that describe how participation was solicited, which tools were used, and how the tools were used to collect data. For this dissertation, these categories sometimes bled together. Using the Internet to solicit participation, to collect data, and to present and organize initial findings that are both interesting and instructive to the public conflates these sometimes separate methodological actions. I have tried to separate these acts in this chapter or at least show how they work in tandem. Research that collects data from online sources with the use of search engines and other Internet tools can be, like ethnographic field work in unfamiliar territory, nonlinear and fragmented, causing the researcher to go in not one direction, but many directions, and to talk to many people, in passing or in great detail and frequency. This has been the case with data collection for this project.

The Internet is a popular location for all kinds of lost-and-found material; accordingly, lost-and-found personal photographs travel to many online sites. While I did not exclusively collect and examine materials from the Internet, the role the Internet plays in the practice and distribution of lost-and-found personal photographs is essential to this study. The Internet offered powerful search capabilities, access to people in diverse geographic locations, and the ability for ongoing interactive conversations between participants and me, as well as with the public. Search engines revealed texts from web pages and online conversations from discussion threads and message boards.

Using the Internet as both a site for research and a tool for research has critical implications for any research project. Annette Markham argues that "mundane

decisions" about the uses of search engines, specific sites for data collection, whom to

talk to, and where to recruit from, "create boundaries around the field of inquiry" (801).

Beyond deciding which browser and search engine to use, the very words and phrases

used during the process of research were important, as the Internet points the researcher

to results based on those keywords. It is also important to indicate which online services

are used as well as how these services are used. There are many Internet tools available

to researchers that are frequently evolving, changing, being sold, or even disappearing.

Though this instability exists and many of the services I used—such as Skype, Tumblr,

and Delicious bookmarks—were bought and sold while writing this dissertation, each of

the services remained stable. While I made use of a number of different online services, I

primarily used:

- Typepad and Tumblr for setting up the project's website,
  Lostandfoundphotos.org

- Search Engines

- Skype

- *Flickr*

Books and Printed Material

Data from written texts that discuss lost-and-found photographs were collected

over seven years (2007-2014), and were drawn from a wide range of materials that

feature lost-and-found photographs: introductions to photography books, photo blogs and

websites, gallery exhibit catalogues, artist statements, dealer catalogues, greeting cards,

newspaper articles, documentaries, radio broadcasts, and genealogy websites. To find

these materials I conducted straightforward *Google* searches for "lost and found" photographs using search terms "lost and found photos," "lost photos," "found photos," "orphaned photos," or "vernacular photos."

I collected newspaper articles that discuss "lost and found" stories and exhibits using powerful newspaper databases such as *LexisNexis*. Books featuring lost-and-found photos were found using *Amazon.com* as well as references found during my *Google* searches. Some of these books were purchased since they are not available in libraries.

Books featuring lost-and-found photographs were discovered in multiple ways. *Amazon.com* turned out to be important, not just as a supplier of books but also as an alternative search engine. Before starting this dissertation, I already had collected about ten lost-and-found photography books. These titles were used as keywords using *Amazon*'s search engine. This prompted *Amazon*'s "recommendation algorithm" to assist in finding book titles of similar topics. However, not all books are sold on *Amazon*. Other books were found through scouring bookstores large and small and by visiting relevant events and venues. For example, *Accidental Mysteries*, an exhibit catalogue self-published by John and Teenuh Foster, was purchased at a talk given by John Foster at the Peabody Essex Museum.

Other kinds of printed materials—such as classified ads in newspapers, news articles, and exhibit catalogues—were gathered as I tried to collect everything that was even remotely associated with lost-and-found photographs. It was also my intent to use information gained from these materials to inform and shape my interviews.

Internet Sources

   While collecting Internet materials, it is important to keep track of where one has gone to avoid getting stuck in a hyperlink loop. Because of the magnitude of websites that feature lost-and-found photos, I bookmarked each site I visited and created a list of links in a Microsoft Word document. This Word document was printed and filed as well as emailed to an online email account. Because it is available in printed and online form, my list of materials can't be lost in a computer crash. Having a list of links allows a researcher to skim-read for duplicates. It also assists in a more systematic printing of these materials.

   The amount of materials gathered was immense. In the course of my search, I found approximately 230 web pages that refer to lost-and-found photographs and events. While I have not combed through each of these pages for references to other pages or resources, I provided a comprehensive collection that saturated categories developed from coding. An open coding method, as described by Anselm Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, was used to define, describe, compare, and categorize what I discovered within the different presentations of lost-and-found photos.

<u>Search Engines</u>

   The search engines *Google* and *Yahoo* were used to conduct initial searches for websites, book titles, photo blogs, companies that use anonymous photographs, message boards about lost-and-found photographs, and lost and found classifieds. Keywords such as "lost photos," "missing photos," "lost and found photos," "found photos," and "recovered photos," were used for these initial searches. Websites that were initially

found (around 150) were bookmarked using the Apple web browser Safari. These sites were examined for additional keywords, which were then used to find websites which did not show up in initial search engine queries. As I began gathering websites, I found many of the sites offered links to other sites that did not show up via the search engines. Because lost-and-found photographs are of interest to people maintaining and writing on traditional photography websites, as well as to those who have created the numerous websites devoted to lost-and-found photographs, many links to websites that are "off the grid" were found on these sites. These sites may not have been submitted to search engines by the webmasters who created the sites, or there may have been other reasons why I did not see them in my original search. Search engines cannot find everything. Many of the websites, or references to gallery shows, books, movies, or newspaper articles, did not appear in many of the keyword searches I conducted. I have found a number of materials by following leads found on websites that were found using search engines.

The blog service I used, Typepad, also allowed me to see what visitors to *Lostandfoundphotos.org* searched for (and where they searched from) to get to the website. For example, in the screenshot of *Lostandfoundphotos.org* "stats" below, there is a list of referring addresses that are active links (Figure 4). I checked the referring address list frequently to look to see which keywords were used to find *Lostandfoundphotos.org* and also to see if anyone wrote about or linked back to the site. Being able to track back from live links on the referring address list was helpful to find sites that did not show up in initial searches. It also provided me with additional keywords to use in my own research.

Recent Page Views

104 page views on Thur. July 16

1 mo — 2 mo — 4 mo

150

75

July 12 ———————————————————————— Today

Click the graph or drag the handles to get more information.

Summary

Lifetime page views:
32478

Average per day:
26.28

In the past 7 days:
225

Today since midnight GMT: *
46

Referrers in the Past Day

Time	Page Title	Referring Address
3:54 PM	/lostandfoundphotos/2008/10/greece-lost-cam.html	www.google.it/search
3:42 PM	/lostandfoundphotos/2008/01/the-museum-of-m.html	images.google.com/imgres
3:08 PM	/	www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/ontheroad1.htm
3:04 PM	/	www.morningsonmaplestreet.com/ontheroad1.htm
2:39 PM	/lostandfoundphotos/2008/10/greece-lost-cam.html	www.google.com/search
2:02 PM	/lostandfoundphotos/	www.payphone-project.com
2:01 PM	/lostandfoundphotos/	www.payphone-project.com
1:44 PM	/	www.google.co.uk/search
1:44 PM	/lostandfoundphotos/blogs/	photosdie.typepad.com

Figure 4: A screenshot of visitor statistics for *Lostandfoundphotos.org*.

It is important to note that these "referring addresses" did not link back to individuals who visited *Lostandfoundphotos.org*. It only revealed which websites were visited or which *Google* searches were conducted prior to visiting the site.

Delicious

All online data were bookmarked and tagged with keywords. Data were initially bookmarked with the browser Safari. At the same time online data were being bookmarked with Safari, they were organized in Typelists (a feature of Typepad) that allowed for lists of links to be embedded on *Lostandfoundphotos.org* for public viewing

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(see Figure 5 and Figure 6). The first of these collection strategies, Safari bookmarks, was merely a method to save the locations of findings. Typelists added a layer of organization, allowing me to create multiple categories for different kinds of data.
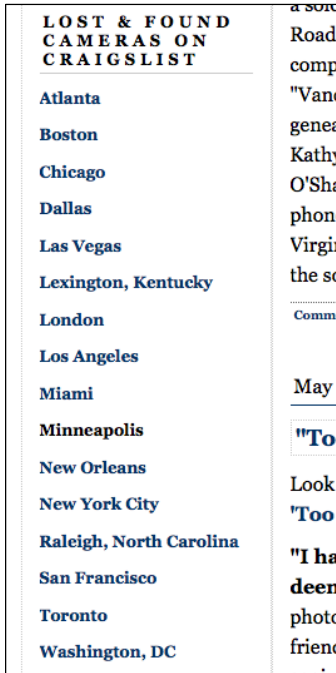
Figure 5: Example of Typelist featuring links to Craigslist classifieds of lost and found cameras from state to state.
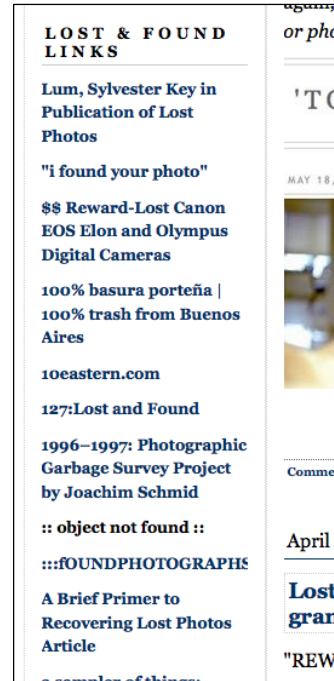
Figure 6: Example of a Typelist featuring links to lost-and-found photo projects.

Very few categories were made before I discovered the social bookmarking site, *Delicious*. *Delicious* is a social bookmarking service that allows users to save and organize links to websites using tagging. Gene Smith identifies these important benefits of tagging:

- Facilitating collaboration
- Obtaining descriptive metadata

- Enhancing findability
- Increasing participation
- Identifying patterns
- Augmenting existing classification efforts
- Sparking innovation. (31-34)

All online data for this project was exported to *Delicious,* which became an important

part of the analysis for this project, as it allowed for category building (Figure 7).
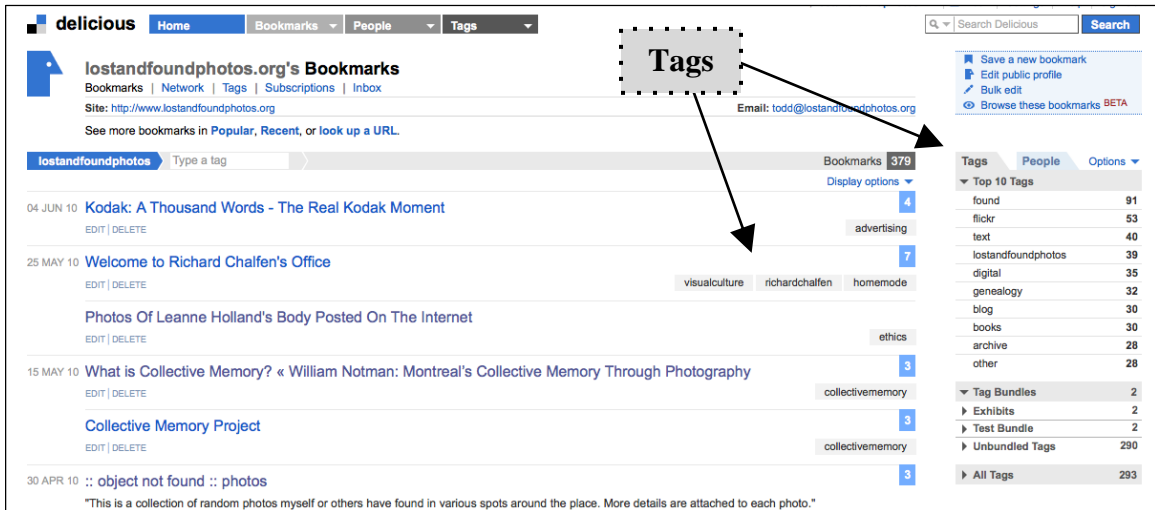
Figure 7: Screenshot of *Lostandfoundphotos.org* bookmarks organized in *Delicious*—

note the use of tags to organize links.

Flickr

Flickr, an online photography social network, was an important resource for data

collection. *Flickr* contains large collections of lost-and-found photographs that reside in

user galleries or in groups set up by *Flickr* members. As in other Web 2.0 services,

photographs on *Flickr* are tagged. *Flickr*'s tagging capabilities allowed for keyword

searches of images and groups. Keywords similar to those used in search engine searches

("lost photos," "missing photos," "lost and found photos," "found photos," "recovered

photos") were used. Many *Flickr* members that I found through keyword searches were

members of *Flickr* groups dedicated to lost-and-found photographs.
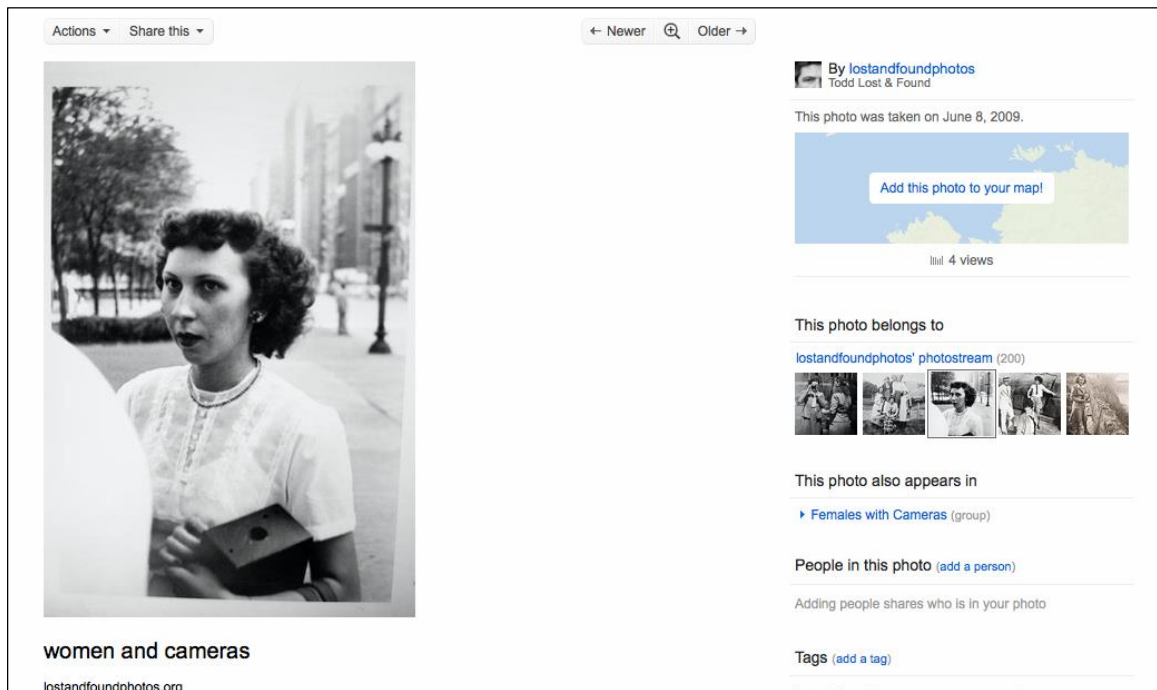
Figure 8: The project's *Flickr* photostream, to which I posted images from my own

collection of lost-and-found photos.

Flickr was used:

- As a means to solicit participation,

- As a means to invite visitors to *Lostandfoundphotos.org,*

- As a site to gather data, and

- As a site to exhibit my own snapshot collection (Figure 8).

Narratives and Interviews

While this study presents the different ways in which lost-and-found photographs

have been collected and recontextualized by the people who find them, storytelling and

qualitative interviews offer a way to hear the voices of the lost and found. The

qualitative interview is a methodology used to understand people's perceptions of the

world (Patton; Kvale; Rubin and Rubin). Interviews can also become ways of telling

important life stories that have meaning beyond a single project. Robert Atkinson

suggests that a life story which "we hear or read tells us that no person makes it alone

through life. The individual is very much interdependent with others. The more we

share our own stories, the closer we all become" (76). Irving Seidman posits that "at the

heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are

worthy" (3). Narratives are an important part of qualitative interviews. Susan Chase

writes that narrative inquiry is a developing "field" that combines interdisciplinary

approaches and progressive methodological approaches. This study used both interviews

and narratives in an innovative approach to qualitatively investigate an important visual

cultural phenomenon.

In the time since my interest in lost photographs began, I have asked a number of

people if they have ever lost or found photographs. A large percentage of people to

whom I have posed this question have told me both short and lengthy stories about the

loss or discovery of photographs. While I have not conducted a large random sampling

of the public, I truly believe that most people have a story that reveals important

information about the nature of lost-and-found photography. As a collector, I have also

had conversations with estate dealers and other vernacular photography collectors who

have been willing to discuss their practices. These conversations informed my interviews

and narrative collection.

Michael Quinn Patton suggests maximizing variation during site selection or case selection to increase importance of "patterns that emerge as common among sites" (102). The Internet has become a haven for vernacular photography dealers and collectors and a new site for the presentation and distribution of personal photographs. Thus, it also was an ideal location to find a diverse selection of interviewees (Mann and Stewart) as well as hard-to-find individuals who were members of groups (Brownlow and O'Dell). There were two types of participants I was looking for: a) callers to leave messages on a Skype voicemail and b) participants for qualitative interviews.

Lostandfoundphotos.org

When I proposed this dissertation topic, I intended to create an "interactive DVD" as a way to capture and present some of the dynamic materials I collected to a wider audience. This would be the means by which I would provide important visual and audio representation of websites, stories, and interviews.

I saw the DVD as the best medium to present the different multimedia pieces. This, I argued, would provide an important public component to the project which would offer a way for applied knowledge to be presented and used outside the scholarly community. My decision was influenced by my interest in documentary and ethnographic film, as well as by the possibilities inherent in the DVD as a nonlinear, interactive medium allowing for large amounts of content.

I began to plan a project that would offer differing voices surrounding, not just the found photograph, but the *lost* photograph. By creating the project, I hoped to introduce and educate the viewer to some of the issues surrounding not only lost-and-found

photographs, but also those surrounding the personal photographs they still had in their possession.

As I progressed with the research, I soon figured out that the DVD, an object, had limitations which impeded my intent. For one, a DVD must be distributed to individuals, and those individuals would need to invest time, playing the DVD in their computer or DVD player. For another, a DVD is not really an interactive tool, or at least it is not as interactive as a website or blog. Therefore, I abandoned my original plan and decided to start a blog that would document and exhibit my work over the course of the dissertation. I set up a blog on the blogging platform Typepad and I bought the domain names lostandfoundphotos.org and lostandfoundphotos.com, both of which forwarded to the Typepad blog. Typepad offered the structure, layout capabilities, and tools for presenting, organizing, and embedding text, audio, and video. Information about the project, consent, and instructions are offered in an organized manner on the site (Figure 9).

Typelists are a Typepad tool which allow for the placement of content such as links, notes, and photos in the left and right column. These Typelists assisted in presenting a *Twitter* feed, a *Delicious* bookmark badge, initial categories used to organize data, Flash audio players, and access to *Lostandfoundphoto.org*'s archives. Typepad applications also made it possible to embed a search field, making *Lostandfoundphotos.org* searchable by key words.
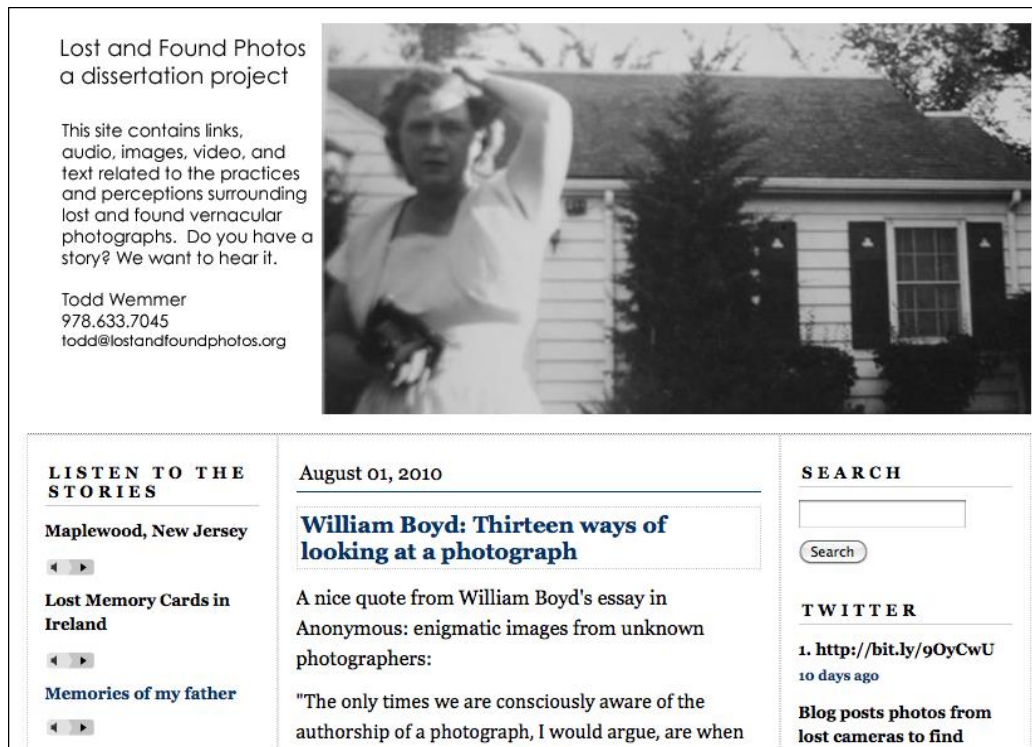
Figure 9: A screenshot of the Typepad blog, *Lostandfoundphotos.org*.

Because of my use of *Lostandfoundphotos.org* to gather participants and stories, its

design and reach made explicit the utility of soliciting stories and interview participants.

While more traditional analytical strategies were used to examine texts and

interviews, placing my data within a hypermedia environment allowed for different ways

of seeing and, more importantly, hearing the lost-and-found. Editing also became part of

the process of interrogating the data, as I edited large data files down to manageable

pieces that could be worked into interactive presentations for the public and posted to the

project's blog.

The method itself is a step into the digital storytelling world that has been created

and nurtured by online curators, the finders-keepers and the losers-weepers of personal

photographs. And while I worked to enter this world, I realized I was already there. I
had long had an account on *fotolog.net* (a precursor to *Flickr*). I had sold photos on *eBay*.
A *Google* search of my name would inform a curious surfer that I had taught a class titled
Lost and Found Media and that I had given a talk at a Society of Photographic Education
meeting entitled "Podcasting Photography: Talking about the Visual," in which I argued
that more recordings of people talking about photographs needed to be made. Moving
this dissertation to an online space, then, was a natural step for both the project and for
me as a researcher.

Incorporating a blog / website had important consequences for this project.
Douglas Harper suggests interactivity allows readers and viewers to "direct" and
"organize" materials in ways the researcher did not intend. This provides new and
interesting ways to read, interpret, and exhibit materials (752). It also offers a space for
readers and viewers to contribute materials to the project. In *Doing Ethnography:*
Images, Media and Representation in Research, Sarah Pink argues that "by creating a
series of different strands, hypermedia authors can represent simultaneous but different
narratives and knowledge and use hyperlinks to connect these strands" (166).
Hypermedia offers an "open-endedness" which reinforces the notion that knowledge is
never "complete." Pink writes, "this means that, unlike printed books and finished films,
on-line hypermedia texts may be up-dated, added to, or altered. Video sequences may be
re-edited, photographs manipulated in new ways, written words changed, and the
hyperlinks between them modified" (167).

The blog / website for this project provides this kind of interactivity.
Lostandfoundphotos.org is a hypermedia space that allows for stories and images to run

nonlinearly. Robert Coover writes that hypermedia ethnographies "gain strength from the range of perspectives they can offer rather than privileging only one mode of interpretation; they give maximum attention to the relationships between cultural narratives, objects and viewpoints" (8). Coover further states that as

> Potential tensions [are] revealed through visual juxtaposition across media, the images become potent: they evoke stories that have taken or might take place. Seemingly contradictory expressions are held together in a sense of the whole...As the fragments are not fixed and conflicting representations need not be resolved, the world described on the screen is fluid; like constructions of reality they change with new perspectives and information. (22)

Coover and Pink offer compelling reasons for contextualizing scholarly work that contains visual and oral materials within hypermedia.

Lostandfoundphotos.org began as an invitation to participate in this project. As the project progressed, I posted photographic, video, audio, and textual updates. First-hand accounts from those who had lost or found photos were placed alongside blog posts and links to news stories and scholarship within this blog space, creating a new context and new ways of approaching personal stories about personal photographs. For example, I linked and quoted from a *Guardian* article that examined the amount of personal photographs and data remaining on secondhand cell phones. I have written posts linking to print news articles about someone finding or losing photographs. I posted about museum shows, new books, and online projects. I also posted a number of *YouTube* videos that featured lost-and-found photographs (Figure 10).
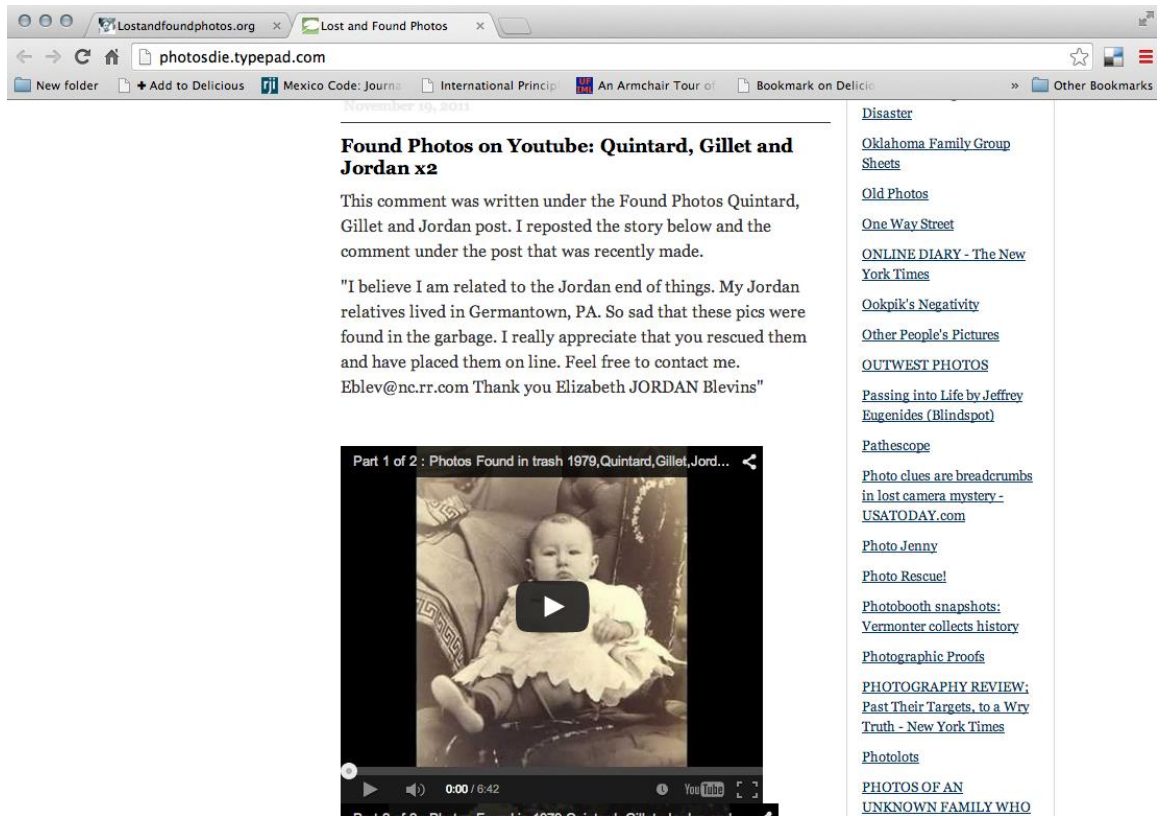
Figure 10: Screenshot of *Lostandfoundphotos.org,* showing a repost of a lost-and-found story discovered on *YouTube.*

While working on this dissertation, I have made 218 posts from July 2007 to June 2013.

I have received hundreds of comments under the blog posts. I received over 200 comments about lost or found photos; over 160 of them were alerts to missing cameras or memory cards. A majority of the comments were left by people who lost their cameras while on vacation. There were thirteen comments about lost cameras at Disney. Five lost on a honeymoon. Five on vacation in France. Eight lost at a beach. Over twenty lost in a taxi. Fifteen lost on airplanes. Over fifty offers of a reward. Almost all the

posted comments claim the photographs are important in some way, and almost all include details about the missing images.

Lostandfoundphotos.org thereby offers stories and images that represent some of the major questions that involve lost-and-found personal photographs beyond the scholarly community. *Lostandfoundphotos.org*, as well as the digital tools associated with it, have been instrumental in the analysis process as the project progressed. It was the springboard for the method. It was the result of the method.

While I am not calling it an "applied visual anthropology" project, I do hope that by combining publicly accessible resources, I can offer solutions to some of the questions raised in this dissertation as well as questions raised by people every day when they do *Google* searches for terms like "I lost my camera," "Lost memory card," or "Found old photo":

- What to do when you lose photos or cameras or memory cards,

- What to do when you find photos or cameras or memory cards,

- Advice on collecting lost-and-found photographs,

- Locations and sites to buy lost-and-found photographs,

- Identifying people in "old" photographs,

- Digital memory storage information,

- Academic conferences and proceedings that deal with cultural memory, photography, vernacular photography, and the digital humanities.

As of January 19, 2015, according to Typepad's analytics, the blog had received 100,405 visitors and an average of 31 page views a day, leading me to hope that my goal of moving the project out of the academy and into the public sphere was accomplished.

Interviews with people about lost-and-found photographs present opportunities for applied use as well. Applied scholarly work that uses alternative methods for analysis and distribution can create audiences for new knowledge beyond the scholarly community (Pink, "Applied Visual" 6). Recorded stories and interviews are research data, but they are also oral history for the interviewees and the public. My earlier work that examined lost-and-found personal photographs used a DVD as a method to widen the audience for the integration of the material I collected. This DVD provided different images and voices about lost-and-found photographs. By creating the project I hoped to introduce and educate the viewer to some of the issues surrounding their own personal photographs. Alternative methods, specifically the "range of media" of applied and visual anthropology, offer a greater potential to reach audiences beyond "academia" (Pink, "Applied Visual" 6). As an applied project, my previous work, the faux documentary *Where Will Your Photos Go When You Die?,* encouraged the viewers to think about their own interpretations and storage methods for personal photographs.

Skype

Skype, an online telephone service that features text messaging, phone service, video chat, and voicemail, was used to record the called-in stories. Skype has a variety of ways to make its use visible on a blog or website. In particular, the badge (see Figure 11) gives users the ability to embed a direct call button on their website or blog, as I did on *Lostandfoundphotos.org*. Skype provided a phone number (978-633-7045) that was not attached to my home phone number. When people called the Skype phone number, they were sent directly to a voicemail recording giving them instructions for telling their

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stories and asking for consent to use their stories. The callers were greeted with the

following message: "Thanks for calling Lost-and-Found Photos. I look forward to

hearing your story. Don't forget to let me know that you agree to let me use your story in

this project. Also let me know if you'd like your story to appear on this website."
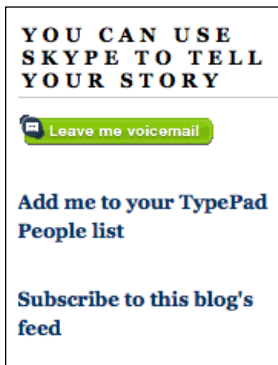
Figure 11: Skype badge which appears on *Lostandfoundphotos.org*.

Over the course of four years (2007-2010), I received twenty-two voicemails,

from both losers and finders. Twelve of the calls were made by people who discovered

the website by reading one of my posts on message boards or by finding the site though a

Google search for lost or found photos. One of these twelve calls, "Vietnam Slides" was

an anecdote that occurred during a phone interview. I asked the participant if he'd call in

that story to the voicemail. After some discussion and a few emails back and forth, we

made the decision to use the clip of the audio from our recorded interview in which he

told the story of finding and purchasing the slides. Ten of the voicemails were a result of

a conversation I had about my project with someone face-to-face. I initially thought of

excluding these calls because I knew some of the callers, but I felt these calls came to

represent something that trumped a possible methodological validity entanglement. The

decision to keep these calls made them no less important to the public I hoped would be

listening to the calls.

Recruiting Participants

I solicited participation in this project via four main channels:

- *YouTube* invitation

- Websites

- Coffee shop flyers

- Targeted email invitations

A variety of recruitment letters for this study, specifically for the collection of stories and

interviews, was placed on message boards, websites, and coffee shop information boards

(see Appendix A). This invitation directed those interested to my website,

Lostandfoundphotos.org, which offered a more detailed description of the project (see

Appendix B). Operators of websites that feature lost-and-found photographs were invited

to participate in this study via email invitation. I also placed a short video invitation on

YouTube that incorporated some audio of a few early callers and lost-and-found images

with instructions for participating. There may have been a snowballing effect as people

bookmarked or emailed links to my invitation which led to referrals from an unknown

number of untrackable sources. I do not know exactly how the word was spread. A

digital trail of my online solicitations can be found by Googling

"lostandfoundphotos.org" (Figure 12).
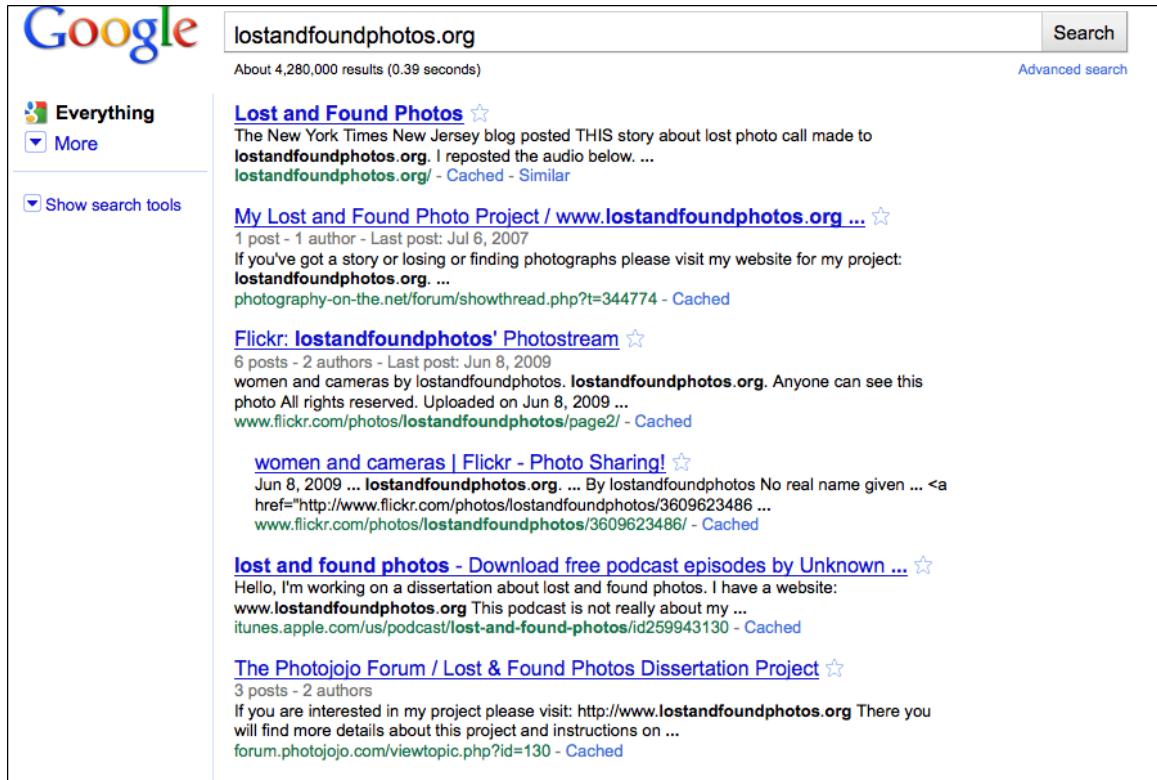
Figure 12: A screenshot of the first of over 4 million *Google* results using the keyword "lostandfoundphotos.org."

No matter how participants learned of the project—whether they read an invitation to participate in this study in their small town newspaper, or they spotted my posting in an online message board—they were asked to visit *Lostandfoundphotos.org* for instructions and consent information. The website included the following materials:

- Consent information

- Instructions for participating

- Answers to anticipated frequently asked questions

- Example stories

- Clips from *Where Will Your Photos Go When You Die?*

Instructions for telling a story were also given on the website. I provided example stories from early participants who offered to call in their lost-and-found stories when I told them about this project. The site also included my telling of the Rufus and Herndon Elliot family album story. Those interested in participating called a Skype phone number which I set up to record their stories of lost and/or found photographs.

The consent information let callers know that they were giving their implicit consent for their audio to be used in this study. It also asked them to say at the end of their recording, "I consent for use of my story in this research project." Callers were asked to send a short email with a few details from their story and an indication of whether they would be interested in participating in a follow-up interview. They were also asked to answer a few general, open-ended questions about their photographic habits (see Appendix C). I replied to each email with a confirmation that the call was completed.

Though I attempted to diversify the participant pool as much as possible and did not restrict contributions based on demographics, it could be assumed that the participants in this study are from a certain economic background. For instance, the participants in this study most likely had access to broadband Internet. They also most likely already used digital photography equipment and technology.

I conducted and recorded fifteen one-to-one open-ended narrative interviews with volunteers for this study that lasted an hour to an hour and a half. If respondents were local, I offered to conduct face-to-face interviews at a local library or community center. A topic guide prompted and structured my interviews (see Appendix D). It did not, as George Gaskell instructs, lay out specific questions, nor was it followed "slavishly" (40).

As the topic guide shows, these interviews used standard qualitative interviewing techniques. If participants had already told their stories to the Skype voicemail, I asked them to tell the stories again to begin the flow of conversation. I used narrative interviewing and oral history techniques to prompt each subject to tell the entire story, without interruption, before questions were asked (Richie 91). Interviewers often spend too much time collecting short, general biographical information that can shut down the flow of storytelling and openness between interviewer and subject. I often waited until the end of the interview to ask questions that required simple, short answers.

One of the problems inherent in conducting interviews over the Internet is establishing rapport. To mitigate this challenge, I included a text, audio, and video invitation on *Lostandfoundphotos.org*. I hoped that by showing my face and putting my voice on *Lostandfoundphotos.org,* rapport would more easily be established with potential participants as they contemplated telling personal stories over the Internet. Research which is not conducted face-to-face need not be cold and uninviting, like many research study invitations found on the Internet.

Validity of narratives and interviews may appear to be slippery with this unique method of gathering data. David Pittenger argues that the Internet provides an anonymity to participants that makes verification of identity and sincerity difficult. Each interview participant had public visibility through a book publication, website, blog, or business that allowed for confirmation of both their status and at times confirmation of some of their perceptions and narratives. As for the voicemails, while I did receive an email from callers, I had no real way to know if their stories were true other than a feeling of sincerity that can be heard from each caller. This study, I believe, has a number of steps

that made participation on one hand easier and on the other hand more involved than

emailing back answers to questions or taking an online survey. I also believe the

methodology I have set up—which incorporates a website, online narrative gathering,

and interviewing— is unique and could be useful to the larger research community.

Analysis of Narratives and Interviews

Steinar Kvale writes, "the ideal interview is already analyzed by the time the tape

recorder is turned off" (178). During stories and interviews, I took notes highlighting key

phrases or concepts that "jumped-out." Matthew Miles and A. Michael Huberman urge

early analysis so that the researcher may "cycle back and forth between thinking about

the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new, often better, data" (50).

Following this advice, stories and interviews were transcribed shortly after they were

conducted and recorded.

Analysis of stories and interviews was inductive, allowing data to reveal patterns

and perceptions, as transcriptions and audio recordings offer "regularities" that should be

categorized (Patton 310), and detailed transcriptions of stories and interviews will reveal

themes that can be seen and heard (Rubin and Rubin). Citing Egon Guba, Patton

recommends categories be judged by "internal homogeneity" and "external

heterogeneity." Internal homogeneity refers to ways in which data within the categories

should "hold together" by exhibiting similar features and patterns. External

heterogeneity refers to the ways in which differences between categories are "bold and

clear" (310). To assist with insuring internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity

after initial categories were established, the constant comparison method described by

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba's *Naturalistic Inquiry* informed data analysis. The constant comparison method puts categorized data in comparison with other data in other categories throughout the research process. This method was used to classify the diverse materials and voices that emerged from data collection.

Conclusion

It is prudent for researchers to start becoming familiar with a wide array of Internet services and tools. Specifically, Web 2.0 services have adopted powerful organizational and searching capabilities that impact examinations of large amounts of data. The capabilities of Web 2.0 played an important role in presenting and representing these data as they were made available to the public.

This dissertation employed a unique combination of methods that incorporated traditional qualitative research, traditional audio storytelling, and Web 2.0 capabilities. I posit that this integrated approach is especially useful to those working on traditional and digital ethnography. Using a phone number and voicemail to gather stories has great potential to an ethnographer working "in the field." Margaret Lecompte and Jean Schensul suggest that the "first defining characteristic of ethnography as scientific inquiry is its commitment to producing a story about events as they occur in their natural settings" (9). While I do not suggest the research I've conducted was ethnographic, I believe ethnography informed my interviews and the editing of narratives from the voicemails. This dissertation is an inspection of the visual that employs some current Web 2.0 services, yet it is firmly placed in one of earliest and, I would argue, most

powerful recording methods: audio. During the production of this dissertation I created

an audio project / podcast that mirrors and extends methods discussed herein. The

project is titled *Photos Die,* an expression of my belief that photos die, unless we talk

about them. This title could be applied to this dissertation. Research dies, or what

participants have to contribute dies, unless they get to talk about whatever is being

inspected. In this case, it is the narrative of the practices and perceptions that surround

lost-and-found photographs.

CHAPTER 4

BOOKS, WEBSITES, NEWSPAPER ARTICLES: PRESENTATIONS OF LOST-AND-FOUND PHOTOGRAPHS

"The only times we are consciously aware of the authorship of a photograph, I would argue, are when we contemplate the photographs we ourselves have taken (or those of friends and family) or when we go deliberately to the photographer's monograph or exhibition. The signed image—the appropriated, the owned image—is by far the rarest in this pullulating world of pictures."

~William Boyd, from *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Photograph*

<u>Introduction</u>

The everyday visual landscape is filled with personal photographs of familiar faces as well as the faces of strangers. Personal photographs viewed in everyday life are purposely exhibited by their owners in diverse locations like cubicles at work, hallways, emails, holiday cards, or social network photo galleries. They are ready to be exhibited at a moment's notice for show-and-tell, procured from wallets, smart phones, or photo albums in the home. Because of the ubiquitous nature of photographs, most people are familiar with some of the many practices surrounding their use and exhibition. One needs only to think about his or her own photographs or of visiting the houses of friends or new acquaintances, the photographs of friends and family on full display. Looking at personal photographs on others' walls and coffee tables prompts conversation and allows for the visitor to openly glimpse others' personal lives, or the lives they want to be seen. Here family relations, associates, pets, where they like to vacation, how they spend their holidays, how they mark time visually…are all on display. However, the prevalence of

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personal photographs in everyday life makes it likely that some of these photographs will get lost during the life of the owner or after the owner's death.

Photos get away from their owners in a number of ways. Sometimes they are lost, stolen, misplaced, or swept away by hurricanes or tornados. Personal photographs sometimes end up in strangers' hands. Dealers, collectors, photobloggers, greeting card companies, scholars, and disaster relief organizations actively seek what are frequently called "orphaned," "abandoned," "found," "anonymous," or "vernacular" photographs— or as I refer to them often in this dissertation, "lost-and-found photographs." The lost-and-found photographs are turned into coffee-table books, novelty cards, photoblogs, and "one of a kind" photo gallery art. Lost-and-found photographs may become part of museum archives or objects sold at ephemera shows or by *eBay* dealers. They become part of genealogical investigations or left in digital lost-and-found boxes. They also emerge in newspaper human-interest stories, ones which either question the whereabouts or identification of the people featured in the photographs or which tell tales of individuals reunited with their long-lost images.

Presentations of lost-and-found photographs inhabit the visual landscape in many different forms, spurring diverse practices and provoking diverse contexts presented by various losers *and* finders. In this chapter, I examine the practices surrounding the presentation of lost-and-found photographs in both (1) visible and tangible, and (2) virtual, online forms. I also scrutinize the perceptions and discourses surrounding lost-and-found photographs, most often found in the texts that accompany them when they are exhibited.

<u>**Practices of Presentation**</u>

While lost-and-found photographs can be seen on greeting cards, museum walls, novel book jackets, and crafts and collages sold on *Etsy*, in this dissertation, I focus on three locations where lost-and-found photographs are exhibited: (1) photography books, (2) Internet websites, blogs, and social networks, and (3) newspaper human-interest stories. I consider these three formats the most salient because of their rich and distinctly diverse forms of presentation. For my analysis, I examined twenty-six photography books, hundreds of websites, and nearly two hundred human-interest news stories. It is important to note that though photographs from these separate sites are at times obviously connected, at other times their contrasting practices push them apart into separate categories, and the connections are not so clear.

I begin with the lost-and-found photography book because of its authoritative stature among these forms. I next examine the online presentations, because in many ways they extend the book through digitization. I end this chapter with the newspaper human-interest stories that document the narratives of lost-and-found photographs.

The Lost-and-Found Photo Book

Using *Amazon'*s search tools and recommendation algorithms as well as my own instincts from working in the rare books industry, I identified and purchased twenty-nine lost-and-found photo books published from 1998 to 2014. While there are other titles, the twenty-nine titles in this data set represent the range of published offerings.

Photo books bring lost-and-found photographs from the personal collections of individuals and special collections of museums to book form for public consumption.

Lost-and-found photographs inhabit new homes in these books. The photo book provides

lost-and-found photographs (and those who collect them) a faithful rendering of the

original photograph for redistribution, what Susan Sontag refers to in *On Photography* as

the "image of an image" (5). On his website, *Photo Book* Guide, Ivar Brynjolfsson points

out the importance of the "physical characteristics" of the photo book: "It may have

unique packaging, or the design may be of the highest of quality. Always, however, the

photographs must be exemplary." Martin Parr, author of two massive volumes charting

the history of the photography book, explains the power of photographs in books in this

way:

> I find it an amazing idea that a volume of photographs, even one from the
> distant past, can explode into life at any time, when stumbled upon by a
> sympathetic reader. As one turns the pages, they can provide a flash of
> inspiration, changing the way in which both photographers and other
> readers think about the world. In terms of researching the history of
> photography, the photobook is the final frontier of the undiscovered; one
> is constantly coming across new finds. This makes the search for these
> elusive new titles all the more exciting. (4)

The end of Parr's quote seems tailored for lost-and-found photographs: "the final frontier

of the undiscovered; one is constantly coming across new finds" (4). The lost-and-found

photo book in this discourse of new discovery is a representation of the discovered, as it

showcases the collected and the collectable snapshot.

The results compiled in Appendix I display a similarity in the books I examined.

"Found" appears in five titles; "Anonymous" in three. Princeton Architectural Press

published five of the photo books, while many of the books were produced by art book

publishing houses like Steidl, Twin Palm Press, or Phaidon. Two of the titles were self-

published. Other titles are published by small presses like Quack! Media or by imprints

of a larger publishing house like Harper Collins' It Books. These books vary in

presentation and content. Some of the books contain photo captions, such as quotes from

the back of the original photographs (e.g., *Talking Picture: Images and Messages*

Rescued from the Past) or historical information (e.g., *Who We Were: A Snapshot History*

of America) or fictional narratives created by the author (e.g., *Found Lives*). Some of the

lost-and-found books are novelty; others stand out as tomes devoted to the history of

photography and American culture.

Form

Like other photography books, the lost-and-found photo book comes in a variety sizes

and shapes: landscape format, small pocket books, hard back, and soft cover. There is

the simple, small *Photobooth,* featuring only photo-booth photos throughout its pages.

There is the large folio-sized *Floh,* with its minimalist-design slipcase. There is the thin,

light-weight museum catalogue of *Accidental Mysteries* and the thick, heavy *Art of the*

American Snapshot. Lost-and-found photo books may also be intricately designed, like

Barbara Levine's *Snapshot Chronicles,* which features a soft green felt cover like an old

photo album. See Appendix I for a list of lost-and-found photo books and their

categories, organized chronologically by publication year.

The Tangible Book

  I have on a number of occasions witnessed people looking at my collection of

lost-and-found photo books: They start thumbing through a few of the titles and there is

usually an appraisal of the collection as a collection. "Are these all about the same

thing?" they ask. It is a collection that has weight in the physical world, which is unusual

as the visual is becoming weightless and the physicality of photographs is flickering away. And here the book, the copy of a copy, is not only replicating the organization and curating of the photo album, but also the physicality of an album and the pose and stance it takes to hold it. I may be making too much of this, but as I continually return to my bookshelf to retrieve a book and flip through the pages, looking for a quote that I may have dog-eared or rechecking a volume's content, I think of this process and the actual physicality of movement, the position my body takes when I hold these books and get lost in the photographs. Elise van de Hoven writes, "Digital media, consisting of bits and bytes, are just not as visible and present as physical or tangible media are" (370).

A mourning for the loss of a tactile relationship to objects infuses discussions of music (from the record to the CD to the digital mp3), photographs (from film to the paper photograph to digital imagery), and books (from the printed book to the digital tablet). Lost-and-found photo books, from the collected novelty photos to the curated academic images, are memorials to the loss of tactility. They are bound archives extending and protecting the photographs and reminding us of the enjoyable everyday practice of looking at tangible photographs, a last hurrah for physical objects in the digital age.

Genres of Lost-and-Found Photo Books

The following categories of lost-and-found books emerged as books were collected and examined and their accompanying essays were analyzed. While these categories were created to organize and feature the variety among lost-and-found photography books, it's important to note that these categories are malleable, and the

books featured in each category could in some cases stretch across more than one category.

The Art Book

The lost-and-found-photo art book's primary objective is to present snapshots as art. The titles in this category may include information that educates the reader about early photography or certain techniques found in amateur photography, but these books pay special attention to the aesthetics of snapshots. The art book not only seeks to present and value lost-and-found photographs as art, but the book itself is presented as a work of art.

For example, Tacita Dean's *Floh*, published by art publisher Steidl, is a limited-edition large folio printed in a run of 4,000 signed and numbered copies, each with a slipcase. *Floh* contains no essays, no introduction, and no statement by the collector. Most of the pages contain a large amount of white space, with the photo centered, creating a gallery-like setting for the images. It also has a muted green fabric cover embossed with the title. The smaller and stylish *Photo Trouvée*, published by art publisher *Phaidon*, features a cover with a collage of photographs and a title created with an artful script font. The pages within have a matching minimalism, each displaying a single snapshot floating in the center of the page. The page numbers are also stylized in green with a script font. Twin Palm's *Other Pictures* has a rich vellum-like book jacket and thick quality pages. It also states on its colophon that it is a limited-edition print. The art book often has better-quality paper, higher-quality image presentation, and gallery-like pages with no identification or captions. The photos within each book do not

seem to be ordered according to chronology, subject, historical importance, or

photographic practice used. The art book might be limited in edition and printed by an

art press or a subsidiary of a larger publishing house.

The Visual History Book

This visual history photo book generally includes an essay that sets the photos in a

historical / cultural context or uses the photos to illustrate a historical period or a

photographic practice. This is true of Babette Hines' *Photobooth,* which emphasizes the

importance of the photobooth to photographic history in the introduction. *Photobooth*

features only a singular type of image that elucidates the practice and manner in which

people used the photobooth. Barbara Levine's works, *Snapshot Chronicles: Inventing*

the American Photo Album and *Around the World: The Grand Tour in Photo Albums,*

also spotlight specific photographic practices. Levine explores not just the single

snapshot, but practices that surround putting together complete photo albums. Similarly,

the authors of *Who We Were: A Snapshot History of America* position the practice of

photo collecting within the context of American history. However, they are careful to

note the limitations of their work, announcing and framing their collection in this way:

> The photographs in this book, of course, don't tell the whole story. This is
> just one rambling walk through the briar patch of what we call America.
> It is a celebration—not a blind celebration—of an America that can never
> be resurrected or recreated. It tells of decades when farmers had all winter
> to while away their time. . .Not a better America. Not a worse America.
> But our America. (11)

While *Who We Were* is broad in its scope, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photographs in*

America is a collection of photographs on a single topic: lynching. It mixes photos taken

by named as well as anonymous photographers and contains four essays about the atrocities of lynching.

The visual history book featuring lost-and-found photos may be telling the history of photography itself, though in most cases it is using vernacular photographs to document a historical period. Sometimes these books include longer, detailed captions that become an extension of the essay. Photos in the books can be ordered chronologically or by category.

The Scholarly Book

The scholarly book is a hybrid that includes anonymous photographs plus informed inspection of cultural themes that are visually represented in the photographs. In these works, photos become almost mere illustrations to the text. However, the text would not exist without the photographs. *Dear Friends* is an important example of this hybrid, offering a rich collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century photographs featuring physical friendship between men. While academic in its approach, *Dear Friends,* as Deitcher writes, "is intended for all readers, regardless of whether or not they are familiar with the arcana of nineteenth-century photography techniques and formats" (7). Geoffrey Batchen's *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance* likewise blends essay and photographs throughout to show how people from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century decorated some of their personal photographs to emphasize their importance. Batchen shows visual representations of remembrance, like decorative photo lockets made out of pocket watches, folding photo frames that include mementos such as

scraps of letters or a lock of hair, and elaborate framed collages. Batchen connects these representations to theories and acts of memory.

I also include Marvin Heiferman's *Now is Then* in this category. It is a collection of donated photographs presented by the Newark Museum. *Now is Then* includes five essays, one of which is an interview with Marvin Heiferman, the collector of the photographs, and another being a forward by the Newark Museum director. These essays are straightforward, but there are two additional essays included in the volume that separate it from what might be considered at first glance an "art book" or "novelty book." One of those essays is written by Geoffrey Batchen, author of *Forget Me Not.* Though an author of a scholarly work on lost-and-found photos, himself, Batchen, offers a critical assessment of some of the titles mentioned in this chapter, taking them to task with a series of leading questions: "Are these publications a tribute to the snapshot or to the sharp eye of their collector/curator? Are they exercises in the history of photography or just in art appreciation? What do these publications actually tell us about the snapshot as a cultural or social phenomenon? Answer: very little" (124).

The other notable essay is written by Nancy Martha West, who continues the questioning of scholarly publications of lost-and-found photographs in her essay, "Telling Time: Found Photographs and the Stories They Inspire":

> But why does this flirtation with other people's lives make me slightly uneasy? And why am I both thrilled and worried that thousands of others have begun to narrate "found" snapshots as well? This last statement is no exaggeration, for writing about lost, discarded, or forgotten photos has become something of an international craze of the last five years. (80)

West goes on to provide a "taxonomic framework" as a "starting point" for analysis of lost-and-found-photograph publications. She puts forth three categories: the "discovery

narrative" that "invest[s] the scene of discovery with magical properties;" the "accidental

narrative" that "deliberately avoids interpretations" and trades on the photographs'

ambiguity; and a third category which "anthropomorphizes" lost-and-found photographs

by the repeated use of the word "nameless," which "evokes a loss of human identity, "

removing the authors, creators, and subjects of the photographs to offer photographs "that

do not exist." West writes,

> But this third impulse registers a much more apprehensive note. Giving
> voice to this note is the rhetorical mode that tends to accompany these
> anthropomorphizations. Neither nostalgia nor irony, but a mode
> somewhere between the two, it is the attraction to oblivion, an attraction
> that I find profoundly worrisome. (87)

West's essay takes aim at the endeavors of almost all lost-and-found photo books.

Yet the critiques which she and Batchen level at the practices found within scholarly

books of lost-and-found photos are unique to this genre, as these are the only two

instances I discovered. As the title of this category suggests, scholarly book are

predominately written by scholars from within academia. Though they are academic in

nature and, as such, cite research, they are accessible to the general public who may have

an interest in old photographs. True to form, these volumes also often include more

detailed indexes and end notes.

The Museum Exhibition Catalogue

The lost-and-found museum exhibition catalogue is published to coincide with a

museum exhibition. It is usually sold in the museum's gift shop as well as online through

booksellers like *Amazon*.

Two examples provide a sense of difference in form and approach: the first is John Foster's *Accidental Mysteries: Extraordinary Vernacular Photographs from the Collection of John and Teenuh Foster*, which documents the modest-sized traveling exhibition of the same name which was shown in multiple cities from 2006-2009. It is a thin square (7x7) paperback of about twenty pages in length, featuring two short essays. It appears to be self-published.

The other example is the massive four-pound *The Art of the American Snapshot: 1888-1978,* an accompaniment to an exhibit that traveled from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. to the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas. It includes seven essays that range in topic from the history of snapshots to a cultural history of photographic practices to a collector statement.

Other exhibition catalogues include *In the Vernacular: Photography of the Everyday* from the Boston University Art Gallery and *Close to Home: An American Album* from the J. Paul Getty Museum. Though they are slim volumes, they each feature images of the complete exhibition.

The most important feature of the exhibition catalogue is its emphasis on why the exhibition was shown and, more importantly, why snapshots are worthy of a museum exhibition at all. The exhibition catalogue also allows for a museum exhibit to live beyond its exhibition dates, as well as reach people who may not be able to travel to the exhibit.

The Novelty Gift Book

This type of book is most likely purchased as a gift or on impulse and typically has a wide public appeal. It may include text that offers discussion of the collected photographs. The novelty book may have a nostalgic feel, as with *Summer Vacation / Found Photographs,* which features early twentieth-century photos of people at the beach, at the lake, and in the backyard, along with people camping, sunbathing, swimming, and surfing. Alternately, the novelty book may have a humorous tone, like that used in *Photobooth Dogs,* which contains (as the title makes clear) images of dogs in photobooths, or like the tenor of *Dogs* by collector Catherine Johnson, which features snapshots of dogs and people with dogs. *Dogs* also includes an essay by the dog photographer William Wegman. This wonderful example of the novelty book clearly shows evidence of a collector's hard work while its primary message is uncomplicated: people love dogs. Johnson, writes, "I've been collecting dog images since before I could read or write" (n.pag.). Johnson ends her essay with a statement akin to a PSA: "There is no doubt that the prevalence of pet ownership today is part of our desperate need and desire to remain connected to the purity of the natural world. Please adopt or donate to your local animal shelter" (n.pag.).

Within the novelty gift book category are also two almost postcard-sized titles published by Roger Handy and Karin Elsener, *Couples: Found Photos* and *Rear Ends: Found Photos*, a collection of meant-to-be humorous photographs of people bent over showing their "rear ends." They write,

> The photos adorning the following pages, whether seen as peep show, sustained visual gag, or sociohistorical tract, have no object other than to serve as a humble tribute to the glories of the mighty gluteus maximus and

to offer a nostalgic and respectful salute to the quietly compelling majesty of a small but uniquely memorable selection of bygone behinds. (3)

Some novelty gift books capitalize on pop-culture trends, as with *Talking Pictures* by Ransom Riggs, which comes on the heels of his national best seller book series, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*—a work of young adult fiction which uses manipulated lost-and-found photos as a central device. *Talking Pictures* can be purchased in print or in digital format for Amazon's Kindle.

One might be able to guess what any of these lost-and-found photo books are by picking them up (no one would mistake them for a scholarly work, for instance), as the novelty book has a recognizable feel as a fun or sentimental book that could be purchased as a gift.

<u>Essays</u>

While photographs are the most prominent contents of lost-and-found photo books, essays often included in these books frame the images and guide the viewer / reader in how the photographs should be perceived. These essays vary from first-person accounts of collecting to museum curator accounts of the importance of the collection to more academic contemplations of the cultural meanings of lost-and-found photographs. Authors of the essays include museum curators, historians, professors, art critics, theorists, and photographers. Essays include statements about collecting in general or about the collection of the photographs contained in the volume. There are often stories about how the author became a collector and became interested in lost-and-found

photographs. There are also musings on memory, with the occasional speculation on previous owners.

I initially examined the essays within each genre with the idea of highlighting contrasting approaches, but I found that, while novelty gift books generally had shorter essays, some similar perceptions were commonly found across all genres. The novelty book may not employ the historical or scholarly approaches that essays from the other three genres incorporate, but pervasive throughout the essays, even the most casual of them, is a constant explicit desire to know the *meaning* of lost-and-found photographs as well as a recurring contemplation of what the photographs can teach us. For example, in the museum catalogue *Close to Home: An American Album,* D.J. Waldie writes, "The purpose in a found snapshot is, I suppose, to teach you pity and give you a human heart" (16), and Mia Fineman writes in the art book, *Other Pictures*, "Each of these pictures, in its own irreducible and untranslatable way, teaches us what art can be" (n.pag.). Though these examples are drawn from different genres, the sentiment is the same: each photograph has a purpose; each photograph is a teacher.

In my reading of the essays, I was drawn to statements that infuse a collection of photographs with guidance on how the photographs should be perceived. My reading of these essays coincided with my examination of existing scholarship surrounding lost-and-found photographs and the interviews I conducted with practitioners of lost-and-found endeavors. These categories did not emerge from a close reading of the essays alone; rather, after close reading of the essays and after speaking with practitioners in the field of lost-and-found photography, I looked for statements about the following topics that had arisen in interviews discussed in chapter 5 and the literature review in chapter 2:

- Art of Amateur Photography

- Memory

- Connoisseur and curator

- Speculation on previous owners

- Anonymous

- Digital Photography

Art of Amateur Photography

The essays, especially those within the art books and museum catalogues, often include discussions of the status of amateur photographs as art. While the art house publication of a book may in itself signal that the contents are to be seen as art, even within books of this genre many editorial statements remind the reader / viewer of the artistry of everyday photography. Lori Fogarty, Deputy Director of Curatorial Affairs at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, posits in the foreword to *Snapshots,* "None of these photographs were intended by their makers to be art, yet the correspondence between what these nameless amateurs have made and what we enjoy in a great picture is unmistakable." Sara Greenough, curator in the department of photographs at the National Gallery, echoes this sentiment in the introduction to *The Art of the American Snapshot*, claiming that, "The National Gallery of Art is not in the habit of celebrating bad works of art, and the photographs included in this catalogue and the accompanying exhibition are, like all other works presented in this museum, worthy of serious consideration" (2). These statements are explicit urgings for a viewer to consider the snapshot as art,

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anticipating the comments of a viewer / reader who may say, "I've got photos like that at home from Grandma."

When snapshots are positioned as art, it becomes the role of the museum to contextualize them, as Marvin Heiferman points out in *Now Is Then*. Within this guide to a collection of snapshots the museum acquired from a private donor, he offers an inside peek into how museums approach lost-and-found photographs: "As snapshots enter museum collections—poignant evidence of our constant and ever-evolving need for images of ourselves—questions about how we choose to look at and understand them will inevitably be raised. Every institution that collects snapshots projects its own values, meanings, and needs on them" (52). In the introduction to *Close to Home,* D.J. Waldie writes about the relationship between photographs and museums from a different vantage point, speculating on the placement of the photographs in the museum through the eyes of a viewer. He writes that, for him as a museum-goer, "Putting snapshots in the museum validates and regulates my eager looking-from-a-distance at the photographs' social nakedness" (14).

The art book *Photo Trouvée* asserts that what can be found within snapshots has "eluded painting, film, or art photography," existing only within this original art form. Mia Fineman writes in Thomas Walther's *Other Pictures* that snapshots are a "little lure for the imagination, an enticement, a revelation; some are minor masterpieces" (n.pag.).

While the above statements come from museum catalogues and art books, the novelty book *Rear Ends* makes a similar, albeit humorous, case for the consideration of snapshots as artistic. In this case, the subject is "the backside," and the authors provide an art historical context which spans centuries: "Aesthetic appreciation for the beauty of

the backside is easily perceived in Greek and Roman statuary, Egyptian murals, and Indo-Asian bas reliefs…A painting by the celebrated surrealist artist Salvador Dali exhibits, propped by a crutch, a buttock as long as a city block!" (n.pag.).

In the same manner, the authors of the visual history book *Who We Were: A Snapshot History of America* acknowledge the "aesthetic beauty of snapshots" (12). They write, "when presented properly, snapshots take on an undeniable artistic quality" (12) though they qualify that claim to separate this volume from books that focus solely on aesthetics: "But the value of snapshots goes far beyond that. This book celebrates the snapshot as a document" (12).

Throughout many essays found in all genres of the lost-and-found photo books, there is a nod to the snapshot as art. For some it is a serious argument that hinges on the place of photography in the art world, while for others it is just an assumption made by the writer that what you are looking at is most definitely art.

Memory Musings

Many of the writers of essays within all four genres make reference to how memory is triggered by looking at lost-and-found photos. Here the sentiment aims for the snapshot to function as an instant vessel of nostalgia as well as a trigger to collective and individual memory. Weston Naef, writing in *Close to Home: An American Album*, points to the important role of snapshot photography in relation to memory: "if all human existence is essentially social, then snapshot photography has become the chief visual instrument of social memory" (3). Robert Jackson writes of the role photographs play in distorting memory, noting in *The Art of the American Snapshot* that "[n]ot only does the

snapshot often represent to the photographer a nostalgic remembrance of time that is now (or will be soon) gone, but the viewer can also recognize and identify with that nostalgia, believing the image represents a simpler and happier time in our collective, or personal, history" (272). Geoffrey Batchen takes this idea a step further in *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance*, questioning whether photographs are prompts to memory or the "replacement" of memory. He writes, "Think back to childhood. Can you remember it? Or do the images that come to mind resemble the photographs you have been shown of your childhood? Has photography quietly replaced your memories with its own?" (15). In *Photobooth,* Babbette Hines suggests that it is only the moment captured in the photograph that we will remember: "Memory and imagination merge with fact and transform a single moment into an entire story, and eventually, all we will remember is the moment defined and distilled in the picture" (n.pag.). In these ways, the relationship and tensions between photographs and memory are frequently explored within the writings of those examining lost-and-found photographs.

Connoisseur and Curator

These volumes of lost-and-found photo books offer explicit evidence of work conducted by a collector. The evidence of a serious collector can be found in the sheer amount of photographs collected and featured in the books as well as in the lists of collaborators and dealers sometimes found in the appendices. While there are many people who collect old photographs, the collectors who have had their collections published in books are often noted for their connoisseur-like abilities to distinguish artistic and visually unique images from the millions of mundane personal snapshots that

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are often available in online auctions or flea markets. Likewise, they are praised for their ability to cull images from their collections for publication and exhibition.

Throughout the essays numerous statements are made to remind the audience of the work and the unique knowledge, talent, and ability to appreciate lost-and-found photographs that define the collector as a connoisseur and a curator. In *Accidental Mysteries,* John Foster recalls, "When it comes to looking for photographs, like an archeologist, I search for abandoned images that may inspire me or excite my eye. It is possible that some visitors to this exhibition may not see what I have seen in the photographs on display" (n.pag.). Foster is not alone in lauding the discerning eye of the collector—it is commonly referenced within lost-and-found-photo books. For example, David Haberstich praises Nakki Goranin in *American Photobooth*: "The photographs in this book are a testament to the visual power of a true connoisseur, who saw what most of us might have missed" (12). Haberstich goes on to describe Goranin as one who "has rescued from oblivion so many amazing self-portraits" (13).

Admiration for the collector's ability to seek out and "rescue" the most visually valuable photographs is repeated throughout many of the essays in all of the genres of lost-and-found photo books. Robert Flynn Johnson describes the "detection" of the snapshot connoisseur this way in the introductory essay to *The Face in the Lens: Anonymous Photographs*:

> Like panning for gold among worthless pebbles by those skillful at detection, photographs of transcendent beauty and psychological insight await discovery and rescue from obscurity. Essentially dead and forgotten images can be resurrected by the process of selection. This searching out and collecting is an example of a highly personal connoisseurship. (6)

The "obscurity" that Johnson refers to is a concept that is often touched upon in these essays. It is as if they photos were nowhere or dead until they were "resurrected" by the connoisseur. Stephanie Snyder writes in *Snapshot Chronicles* of Barbara Levine's importance in rescuing albums from "disappearance." Snyder writes, "Fortunately, in the case of albums in this exhibition and book, an intervening force—collector Barbara Levine—arrested their trajectory of loss, and brought these important objects into aesthetic and historical context with one another" (11-12). The photos were "rescued from obscurity" when the collector arrived to pluck them out of a box or *eBay* auction to display them as important objects.

Like the collector, the curator, too, is noted in the essays as having an eye that others do not when it comes to "discovering" and showcasing compelling images for publications. Sarah Greenwood writes in the introduction to *The Art of the Snapshot* of the curator's role in the promotion of the snapshot: "Curators, too, have recognized that some snapshots, once they are removed from the personal narratives that impelled their creation and endowed them with their original meanings, are immensely satisfying visual objects, worthy of careful scrutiny" (6). Weston Naef, photo curator at the John Paul Getty Museum, writes in the preface to *Close to Home: An American Album*, "As a curator of photographs, I began to recognize the profound gulf between the kind of photographs usually collected by art museums and amateur photography. Snapshots, which were often separated from their owners and then rediscovered by others, presented a mystery to be solved" (3). Here West's taxonomy of activities taken on by the collectors and curators of these kinds of books is important to recall. Naef employs the

"discovery narrative" framework in describing the work of amassing a collection, dependent on the talent and eye of the collector and curator.

It is almost impossible to look at a collection of photographs in these books and not be in awe of someone's ability in finding these photographs, though sometimes the extent of praise that is heaped on the collector can almost take away from the primacy of the photographs themselves.

Speculations on Previous Owners

There are a number of instances in which an essay refers to the previous owners of lost-and-found photographs. Though these essays reveal no clear consensus on what to think of the previous owners, there is consistency in that there is no mention of possible return, contact, or research regarding who the owners were. Instead, there is only mild speculation on why the photographs are no longer in the possession of their original owners. Robert Flynn Johnson wonders about events causing the loss of photographs when he writes in *Anonymous: Enigmatic Images from Unknown Photographers*, "The protective feelings that people traditionally have towards their family photographs make [the] discovery of such photographs in a flea market disturbing. . .The fact that these anonymous photographs have found their way to such an unfortunate end signals that something tragic, sad or cruel has occurred" (15).

Where Johnson supposes that distressing and uncontrollable forces separate photos from their authors, Babette Hines suggests the previous owners did not care enough about their images when she writes, "Events and milestones, once deemed noteworthy, were eventually discarded when, I imagine, the subjects of the photographs

were no longer valued or possibly even recognized by those who possessed them. Unlike those who let go of their family's images, I am extraordinarily interested in mine" (n.pag.). Hines' speculations about those she assumes to be (unlike her) careless and disinterested make it easy for her to dismiss the original owners of the photographs she finds, as well as any claims they may have on the images. Barbara Levine is more direct and matter-of-fact about her lack of interest: "I don't know the people in the albums, nor have I tried to contact their families. I am not interested in genealogy. I'm interested in these albums as objects, as visual explorations, as storytelling, and as visual concepts" (*Snapshot Chronicles* 20). Levine goes on to point out the attention and importance bestowed upon family albums, in ironic contrast to the "endless amounts of photographs" available for sale at flea markets.

Frits Gierstberg posits in "The Appearance and Disappearance of Private (Amateur) Photography" from Christian Skrein's *Snapshots* that it is because of "postmodernism" that the viewer has learned to "see without having to know." Gierstberg writes of postmodernism, "It taught us to look at private photos without any special reason and therefore paved the way for an unbiased interest in the quality as an image. Today we are able to hang them on the wall full of admiration without knowing even the very least about the life of the people who were depicted in them" (13).

It almost seems counter-intuitive to these collectors, authors, and museum curators to delve too deeply into the provenance of the photographs featured in these books. The photos have been collected. The books have been published. Reconnecting with the images' original authors in some fashion does not appear to be a noted responsibility, at least in most of the essays that accompany these books.

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Anonymous Nature of Photographs

In dismissing the original owner-authors of lost-and-found photographs, collectors and curators present themselves with images that have no context, no identity except that which they supply. While Edward M. Gomez writes in *Accidental Mysteries* what seems an obvious assessment that photographs "are anonymous only because those who stumble upon them may never learn the identities of the people who created them," (n.pag.) "anonymous" is a term used frequently to define lost-and-found photographs and to reject their prior contexts. William Boyd writes in the introduction to *Anonymous: Enigmatic Images from Unknown Photographers* that we are only "conscious" of the authored photo when we look at our own photographs or when one visits an exhibition by a named photographer; in all other circumstances, photographs are, for all intents and purposes, "anonymous." Indeed, the identifiably authored image, the owned image, Boyd writes, is "by far the rarest in the pullulating world of pictures" (7). Robert Jackson, in the *Art of the Snapshot,* posits that the very anonymity of lost-and-found photographs is their main attraction: "it is the anonymous snapshot's immediacy, inherent honesty, and unstudied freedom from external influence that are the draw" (273).

The term "anonymous" is used to imbue the photographs with mystery, as Mia Fineman writes in *Other Pictures*: "Because of their anonymity and shrouded provenance, many of these pictures hover just on the edge of intelligibility; like riddles, they push us up against the limits of our own thought" (n.pag.). Fineman's "riddle" assessment is a more common finding within essays accompanying lost-and-found-photo books than Gomez's matter-of-fact "they are anonymous because nobody looks for the owners" statement. A condition of anonymity provides fertile material for writers as they

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explore the meaning of lost-and-found photographs. For example, Alexander McCall

Smith wonders in *Face in the Lens: Anonymous Photographs:*

> But what about the photographs of others, of people whose identity we do
> not know? Because we do not know the subjects we are not distracted by
> memories of the particular, and are drawn, instead, to what the photograph
> says about people and their ways, about the human condition. It is this
> that explains the poignancy of old anonymous photographs: they show us
> in all our human vulnerability. (7)

And Sharon DeLano suggests in *Summer Vacation / Found Photographs* that it is

because anonymous photos are "not our family photographs that we are free to love"

them.

Erasing the identities of the subjects and the authors of lost-and-found photos

naturally leads these essayists to contemplate a transfer of relationship with the images—

from the original owner to the viewer or the collector. James Nocito writes in *Found*

Lives, "They belong to us, these images of nameless, ordinary people who worked and

ate and hoped and laughed; they carved out an existence and occasionally found time to

enjoy themselves. *These pictures are of us.* Enjoy them" (viii; emphasis added). Michel

Frizot and Cedric de Veigy write in *Photo Trouvée*, "We wish to give these images back

to everyone who has ever taken a photograph and has longed to take another look at it.

Whether or not these are their photographs, *they will find in them something of*

themselves" (n.pag.; emphasis added). James Allen in *Without Sanctuary* describes a

similar sentiment: "Then these portraits, torn from other family albums, *become the*

portraits of my own family and of myself. And the faces of the living and the faces of the

dead recur in me and in my daily life" (204; emphasis added).

This might be the most prevalent description of snapshots that weaves its way throughout the essays. It is also a common way to describe lost-and-found photos throughout other media as well. Using the descriptor "anonymous" sets the reader up for an open-ended interpretation: instead of being told what the photographs are by the author, the readers are allowed to tell the photos what they are. As Delano writes, it is a spirit of "we don't know them, never knew them" that allows the photograph and the people in them to "be whatever we want them to be" (11).

Digital Photography

Lurking in some of the essays is a look into the present and a gaze to the future as the paper, tangible photograph disappears from everyday use. Essayists and collectors speak of the "shifting" connection people have to photographs and cameras. It is from this perspective that the authors of *Who We Were: A Snapshot History of America* write,

> The digital snapshots of today are quite different from the film snapshots in this book. With cell phone cameras, digital point-and-shoot and single-lens reflex cameras, we fire at will, amassing hundreds of images of even a single event. Many of these images—what we consider our mistakes— are tossed away to the chagrin (and relief) of future historians. The photographic record that we now create is both remarkable and overwhelming. It tells of a new time in a new way. (11)

Such changes in photographic practices will naturally impact the future of lost-and-found photographs, as Frits Gierstberg notes in writing, "It is rather unlikely that we [will] find digital photo files on the flea market in fifty or a hundred years from now. Or will we then find them on the World Wide Web?" (11). Marvin Heiferman, in *Now Is Then,* writes of the loss of the uniqueness which paper photographs are often described as having: "As digital technology is turning cameras into everyday appliances and picture-

making into more of an everyday event, our relationship to snapshots is shifting. They are no longer the special, one-of-a-kind, fragile keepsakes we rely on to document special occasions" (42). Ransom Riggs agrees that digital cameras are changing the value we place on photographs, writing in *Talking Pictures* that, "Cameras have proliferated as never before, but the images they produce are ephemeral strings of ones and zeros, rarely printed, stored on chips and drives that are easily damaged or erased, susceptible to heat, magnets, wear, and obsolescence" (361).

While not all photo books refer directly to digital photography or the future, they are all presenting a pre-digital photographic history through the paper photographs they feature. Talking about "the way things were" is an implicit way of contrasting former habits to how things are now. Showing photographs of the past, and specifically how photographs were made and treasured in the past, is a reminder of the differences in how photos are made and looked at today.

Because of the celebratory discussion surrounding the tangible and paper photograph of the past, the discussion of digital images is limited. For some publications, particularly those published in the early years of the twenty-first century, this might be because digital had not yet evolved to everyday practice. It also seems almost out of place to be writing about the digital world in a printed book that is honoring pre-digital paper photographs.

Labor of Love in the Marketplace

While the authors and publishers of these lost-and-found photo books may have various audiences and different printing runs in mind, these publications are all

commercial in that lost-and-found photo books are bought and sold in the marketplace.

They are sold on *Amazon.com*. They are offered for sale in large chain bookstores like

Barnes and Noble and in specialized shops like the Dashwood bookstore in New York

City or Hennessey + Ingalls in Santa Monica, California. They are offered for sale in

boutique gift shops. They are sold in museum gift shops and at community lectures.

There is a potential to make money on these books.

Photography is intimately connected to the marketplace. Many critical studies of

camera culture reveal a photographic industry with a long history of marketing to the

consumer by encouraging habits and practices that promote the selling of cameras, film,

and now memory cards. As Stuart Hall and Jessica Evans advise, the practices of

everyday photography cannot be understood unless examined alongside the photographic

industry (3). Photographs in everyday life are intertwined in other practices, social

habits, and commercial forces; they do not exist untainted, or as Martin Lister writes, in

"pure forms waiting to be divined" (226). At each turn, the lost-and-found photo book

showcases myriad views of everyday life that may have been influenced by social

structures and commercial forces and that, in turn, find a second life in the market place.

It is a marketplace that seeks to show the reader / viewer how to look at lost-and-found

photographs. It is a marketplace of curators, collectors, and historians seeking to remind

us of the importance of photography and to offer a curated catalogue of visual imagery.

However, as impossible as it is to separate the profit motive from the

photographic imagery, it is unlikely that the publication of lost-and-found photography

books is undertaken solely as a money-making endeavor. I do not have access to the

proprietary business records on these volumes, but I wonder (and doubt) if profit is the

major desire for most of these authors / collectors, especially in the contemporary

publishing world where there is frequent discussion of book publishing as a money-losing

endeavor. While the publication of a photo book might not be financially beneficial in

direct ways, the book offers the author a trade in credibility capital and validation of the

collector's skills. It also gives collectors access to a network of relationships, as

documented in *Facebook* collector groups and in the naming of collectors throughout the

acknowledgement sections of many of the titles.

A wide assortment of people have authored lost-and-found photo books:

collectors, scholars, curators, fiction authors, graphic designers, and hobbyists. For the

scholar, a photo book is the visual representation and display of her or his research which

may lead to job opportunities or fulfill academic research requirements for promotion or

tenure. For the graphic designer it is an opportunity to combine original imagery and

stylish design to create a visual piece for the portfolio. By publishing and selling

catalogues of snapshot exhibits, a museum legitimizes and extends the reach of a

temporary exhibit into a permanent form, allowing the visitor to "take home the exhibit"

and possess a constant reminder of where the photographs were exhibited. In all these

cases, the publication of a book could lead to other projects and exhibitions as well as

allow others who did not attend the exhibit to gain access through the catalogue.

Although collector statements brim with narratives of discovery and descriptions

of collecting skills and eyes, their coveted object is not the exuberantly priced famous

artist photograph; rather, it is the everyday photograph which may sell for hundreds of

dollars, but is more commonly sold for only a few dollars And even though one might

point to the novelty book as the commercial medium of lost-and-found photography—

whimsical, inexpensive, and accessible—such books rarely appear on best-sellers lists. Novelty books such as the kitschy *Rear Ends* and *Summer Vacation / Found Photos* may capitalize on nostalgic feelings for book sales, but they do not net large profits. Because there has not been, as of yet, a clear financial gain from collecting snapshots, these books more often appear as long labors of love that require collecting, research, and design skills.

Different Genres, Different Years, Same Themes

When I received a copy of Barbara Levine's small (5 3/4 x 4", 96 pages) beautifully self-published limited edition (500) *Camera Era* in the mail, I was struck by her assertion that, "This book brings together a series of special photographs and the design sets them in motion, altering some and highlighting others with deliberate care" (n.pag.). Lost-and-found photos books published over the sixteen-year period represented here haven't changed much, other than by incorporating a nod to digital technologies in recent years. This is especially evident when rereading Douglas R. Nickel's "The Snapshot: Some Notes," an essay accompanying the book in my collection with the earliest publication date (1998), *Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life, 1888 to the Present.* Nickel's foundational essay lays the groundwork for many of the ways in which lost-and-found photographs would be examined and framed in subsequent books. He notes the interest by both museums and sociologists in the lost-and-found photograph, and offers a historical overview of the Kodak camera, with special attention given to the marketing of the camera to women.

Nickel questions the "power" these photographs have over the viewer. He touches on the anonymous nature of the photographs that allow viewers to make up their own meanings, whether they be modernistic art interpretations, voyeuristic enjoyments, mirrors reflecting back human experiences, or prompts for "our responsibilities as keepers of cultural memory" (14). Nickel wrote before the arrival of the consumer digital camera and the social media age. There is no nod to a digital world. This essay, academic, but accessible to the museum-goer, calls attention to the snapshot when placed in a museum. It is the movement from the original location and owner, to a flea market, and then to a museum that infuses the snapshot with an audience-ready draw. Nickel writes, "The snapshot, like other photographs, suffers an excess of potential meaning, but when removed from conditions that normally limit its polysemous nature, it may offer itself to the pleasure of our active, creative imaginations. Like haiku; it will ask us to complete it" (13). These are all sentiments repeated throughout these books.

Lost-and-Found Photos *Online*

Try this: Go to a computer and type "lost and found photos" or "lost photos" or "found photos" into a search engine. The results are overwhelming—millions of matches. The search engine does not scrutinize or select the kinds of lost *or* found photo sites one might be looking for, but sends the surfer deep into the Internet with a wide array of results featuring websites, blogs, social network pages, news stories, feature stories of loss and discovery, snapshot dealers' catalogues, classified ads placed by those seeking lost photos or those who found photographs, and genealogy sites. I have spent years combing through the Internet, watching sites appear, disappear, link to each other,

evolve, close down for remodeling, transfer to a different blog service, or sit dormant after an initial flurry of activity.

Websites exhibiting lost-and-found photographs contain many components of the book format: texts, collector statements, musings on the provenance of the photographs, for example; but they do not offer tangible replications. Online exhibits move paper lost-and-found photographs to the digital realm, where they glow alongside all other sites that are caught in the net of Internet searches. In this way, they offer their galleries to a public which may be looking for them directly or which may stumble upon them indirectly while looking for something else. While online sites may not enjoy the perceived credibility of a published book, they have the potential to reach a larger audience. The interactive digital form can be clicked through by an untold number of global viewers. Photography books that feature lost-and-found photographs, by contrast, appeal to a niche readership that includes both photography book collectors and snapshot collectors. Though they may be seen by a large group of people at a bookstore or museum book shop, they present a narrow view of the wider world of lost-and-found photographs. These books often offer storytelling, but it is only a one-way exchange about the snapshot personal photograph. In contrast, online offers the ability for viewers to interact with the images and those who posted them online by being able to comment or even appropriate the photo by dragging and dropping it onto a personal computer.

The old-world art and book culture (both collectable and academic) seems vintage, not only from the look and feel of photographs, but from the actual passage of time as we see the lost photo enter the digital world. Taking the paper lost-and-found photograph and converting it to digital transforms its uses. The photo resists the physical

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form and enters a new space and time where there is no guarantee for permanence. It is not yet apparent how the Internet will be archived. Alert to cloud crashes and the ephemeral nature of digital files, one might think that a box of photos under a bed has a better chance of future survival than some photos uploaded to the Internet on a social network that one may delete or deactivate. The truth is, there is much we don't know regarding Internet sustainability. Meanwhile, the drag-and-drop and reblog culture of *Tumblr* and *Pinterest* allows photographs to live across the Internet. It is the lost-and-found photograph's conversion to digital that allows for it to be moved in purposeful as well as random, chaotic, scattered ways. This trajectory launches lost-and-found photographs deep into a virtual, global realm of visual culture.

Similar to printed lost-and-found photography books, webpages offer visual examples of a diverse collection of personal photographs that are no longer in possession of the original owners as well as written statements that discuss aesthetics, memory, and the identity of people in the photographs. Like essays in lost-and-found photo books, texts accompanying these online presentations contain magical assessments, claims of artistic purity, and promises of complex mysteries radiating from the snapshots. However, unlike the photography books that are static and focused on memory and aesthetics, dynamic online lost-and-found-photograph projects showcase a number of distinct practices and perceptions. See Appendix J for a complete list of online sources examined.

Online Formats

Since there is an immense amount of data about lost-and-found photos on the Internet, it is important to consider the website, the blog, and the social network as three distinct online presentation forms. Each form structures the way photographs are presented and how visitors interact with them. While it may be more advantageous for specific projects to use one of these forms rather than another to assist with particular goals, there does not seem to be a trend determining which form different types of projects use. There are widely differing projects using websites, blogs, and social networks. Some projects, such as *House of Mirth,* use all three forms by creating sites that work in tandem to increase viewer traffic, interact with the public in multiple ways, or just diversify the manner in which content is presented.

Websites

While the Internet seems to be awash with websites that look like blogs and blogs that look like websites, I see the website as a more static online presentation than the blog, with little or no place for interaction (though interaction surrounding the website could be taking place in other locations such as *Twitter* or a connected blog). Websites may have periodic updates, but it is a form that should be seen as a permanent location for online content whose primary objective is to be viewed. The stand-alone website can offer unique, customized design possibilities and therefore requires someone with technical skills to build the site. Because of its customized nature, a website resembles the book in that much consideration is given to its formatting and design elements. For example, *Look at Me* features a minimalistic white background with a short menu of

options that do not take viewers away to other pages, but keep them there to experience the website on one page.

There is a consistency to formatting throughout the site as well, with all pages within the site exhibiting evidence of the site's "brand." A site may also be configured to match an institution's or a museum's branding. *Accidental Mysteries,* for example, was an exhibit and an exhibition catalogue. The website features photographs and images from the book and exhibit, replicating the look and feel of both with the use of text layout, image order, and color scheme.

However, though this general observation holds true for many of the websites I encountered, not all lost-and-found-photo websites deliver a high level of graphic design, as evident in the simplistic html coding of *Adopt a Photo* and *The Kodak Girl Collection*. *The Kodak Girl Collection* looks neatly laid out, but it contains hallmarks of early web design. For instance, there are text boxes, non-embedded links, and embedded photos that are not clickable and do not expand. There are still a number of websites that exist, but in recent years, it appears that blogs and social media are supplanting the use of this more static online format.

Blogs

Blogs are easier to create than websites. Blogging services like Typepad, Blogger, WordPress, and Tumblr allow people to "follow" changing content by subscribing to a blog. The rules and practices of these features change depending on which blog platform is used. Though Blogger, Typepad, and WordPress allow for comments that can be written and read by visitors, there does not seem to be much

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participation in these activities by visitors. I found a few blogs, such as *Photo Jenny* and *Ookpik's Negativity,* that had scattered comments on posts, though they were, for the most part, infrequent and briefer than the interactions one might see on *Flickr*. The most common blog design for lost-and-found photo projects incorporates two or three panels per page, with a narrow sidebar for menu items and links and a main central posting area for text and photos.
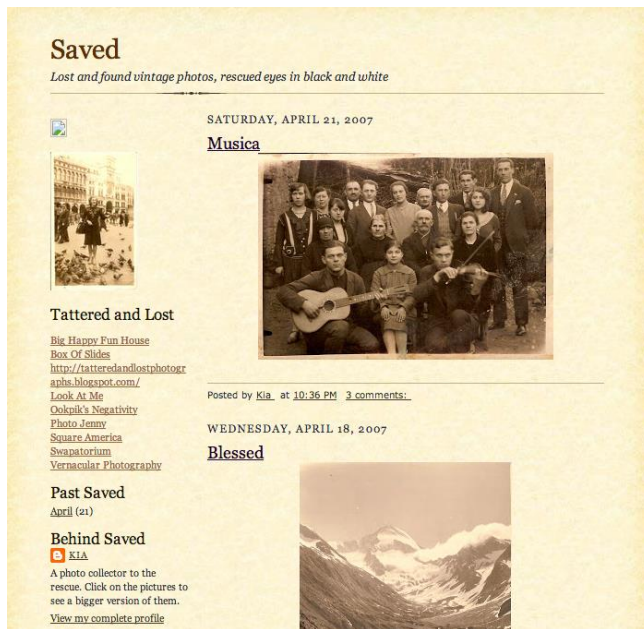
Figure 13: Example of a Blogger basic page, with main content in the middle and a sidebar to the left.

Tumblr has different rules and features than these other blogging services and allows users to reblog posts on their own blog and to "like" a post by clicking a red heart. In the example in Figure 14 below, a photo post by *The Boat Lullabies* has 899 notes. These are not comments written by users, but "likes" or reblogs. These actions are included in a pull-down menu that can be seen by visitors and can be explored by like-minded users.

MARCH 19, 2014

4:19PM
(Notes: 899)

Figure 14: Entry from *The Boat Lullabies* Tumblr blog page.

Most blogs offer a "responsive design" which makes them accessible across multiple platforms like phones, tablets, or websites. Some blogs are abandoned, their creators never formally deleting them; consequently, they continue to appear in search queries. For example, *I Found Your Photo* (Blogger) stopped posting on January 2006, and *Found Photo* (Tumblr) stopped in January 2010, yet their content is still available.

A lost-and-found photo blog is easy to create and maintain, yet if a creator does not inform a visitor somewhere on the site, it can be unclear if photos from the blog have just been dragged and dropped from other digital sources. This is not a critique of authenticity, since there is an understanding that people are posting photos that did not originally belong to them, but it is something to note if a visitor is interested in the origins of the photographs for any reason.

Social Networks

Online community sites such as *Flickr* and *Facebook* feature groups and pages devoted to lost-and-found photographs. The social network can reach the largest audience because of its connective tentacles, and it offers a place for dealers, bloggers, collectors, and genealogists to link back to a website or blog. Because of the social nature of these networks, they can be highly interactive and participative, more so than websites and blogs. These important outlets place the lost-and-found image into a public forum, where the image can be tagged, shared, and commented on. They become, in some cases, lost-and-found projects in themselves, combining art, genealogy, human interest, and cooperation, spanning time and space. Some groups are devoted to reuniting people with their lost photos after a natural disaster; others are lost-camera groups. There are lost-and-found photos groups utilizing most social networks, but I found the most popular networks were *Facebook* and *Flickr*.

The social network is optimal for reuniting people with photographs through their endless connectivity. For example, Lost Photos of Joplin, MO Tornado, the *Facebook* group for the website *Lost Photos of Joplin,* offers the project creators quick access and

connections with the community they are targeting through the use of the social network.

They post the photos with any information that was written on the back of photos along

with locations of where exactly the photos were found. They also alert the public to open

house photo identification events that occur in places like churches or community

centers.

Facebook is also a gathering place for people devoted to historical photographs

(Historical Pics Community), genealogical photographs (Old Photos), camera collectors

(FB Camera Collectors), and snapshot collectors (Found Photo Room). Examples cited

are just a few of the groups where people gather to post images they've purchased or

found, inviting comments and discussion and "likes." Some of the people I've come in

contact with or interviewed for chapter 5 are very active in these groups.

Found Photo Room on Facebook is notable for being run by a group of serious

collectors, many of whom are authors of books and notable dealers. Here they share

photographs, comments, "likes," short writings, and links back to their blogs, websites, or

eBay auctions.

The ability to share and communicate about photographs is the immediate draw

and utility of the social network. There is also an immediacy of response when one posts

a photo or comment and is able to get affirmation that photos have been viewed.

Online Practitioners

From the various websites, blogs, and social networks I examined, I culled forty

projects that exemplify the diverse offerings of the lost-and-found online world. From an

analysis of the sites that I explored, I developed the following five categories to describe the practitioners and practices of these online projects:

1. The Museum Curator

2. The Archivist

3. The Essayist / Editor

4. The Reuniter

5. The Dealer

What all of these sites have in common is that they are completely open to the public and can be found by doing simple Internet searches. Like the book categories, some of these sites stretch over multiple categories, but there does, as I will show, appear to be distinct motivations for the creation of these projects.

The Museum Curator

What I think of as the online museum curator collects and curates photographs primarily for viewing purposes; this is the most common role played by those engaging in lost-and-found-photo practices online. Note that while some of these websites contain the word "museum" in their titles or descriptions, they are rarely associated with an actual brick-and-mortar museum. The term is used simply to denote a curated virtual collection residing in an online space where multiple or one-time exhibits can be hosted, with images displayed on digital walls / webpages. Most sites have image galleries, and museum curators of these online exhibitions appear to be interested in aesthetics or collections devoted to a theme or topic. While written information may accompany the exhibition of photographs in an online format, the primary purpose is visual

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representation of the photograph. Texts accompanying these online displays are rarely

speculative on origins, and the websites themselves appear to be created exclusively for

the act of looking.

In the absence of concerns related to square footage and proper lighting, these

exhibits can be any size. Thus, a virtual museum might easily host a large collection,

such as *Time Tales,* a Netherlands-based website that organizes hundreds of photographs

"Found at fleamarkets, thriftshops, […] scooped up from streets and alleyways" by

decade starting "pre-1930" until "1990-present." The site has the feel of a white,

modern, minimalist gallery. It includes a press page featuring many articles from

European news agencies and websites, as well as feature articles from *The Financial

Times* and *USA Today*.

The smaller *Abandoned Photo Museum* features photographs "fallen on the

sidewalk" in the Philadelphia area. The website contains approximately sixty lost-and-

found photographs that appear to have been taken in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, and it

displays these images on a simple black background. The site includes the following

description: "The photos in the following gallery were all found on the sidewalk, mostly

in Philadelphia, either as entire discarded 'collections' that people had put out on garbage

day, or as individual pictures that had perhaps fallen out of their owners' pockets—or that

the garbage collectors had left behind." It does not appear to be an exhibit to which new

acquisitions have been added since its creation.

Look at Me is an online exhibit with minimalist design that is described by its

creator, Frederic Bonn as, "a collection of found photos," some of which "were found on

the street. Some were stacked in a box, bought cheap at a flea market." Both the website

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and a more recent Tumblr version of the site feature simple image galleries against a

white background showcasing photos discovered by the creator of the project. *Look at*

Me also invites visitors to send in photos to be part of the project.

John and Teenuh Foster's *Accidental Mysteries* website is a counterpart to an

actual museum exhibit that traveled to nine different locations from 2006 to 2009 that

also featured a museum catalogue. Photographs from the exhibit and the museum

catalogue now reside within a stylishly designed online site, as does John Foster's

statement from the original exhibition catalogue:

> When it comes to looking for photographs, like an archeologist, I search
> for abandoned images that may inspire me or excite my eye. It is possible
> that some visitors to this exhibition may not see what I have seen in the
> photographs on display. These enigmatic images, whose attachments to
> specific times, places and families have become unglued over the years,
> take on a new life in a gallery or exhibition setting.

The new setting is online. A visitor who may not have seen the exhibit in a museum or

have read and looked at the exhibition catalogue may now view images and read content

that accompanied both.

Not all exhibits have an independently designed site; some follow the template of

a blog or social network service. Since its creation in 2003, *The Last Photos of Natalie*

has lived on the social media photography site *Fotolog.net*. *Fotolog.net* features

photographs from millions of other users, like other social media sites—family photos,

photos of food, sunsets, selfies—which makes *The Last Photos of Natalie* so striking, as

its single subject, carefully preserved and curated, lives among the random images within

the same network.

Figure 15: Screenshot of the image gallery hosted on *The Last Photos of Natalie.*

The screen grab above shows one of the views of this collection of photographs purchased in a thrift store, all of which prominently feature a woman named Natalie from the 1970s to the 1980s. The common grid gallery view fills the center of the page; the numbers at the bottom of the page indicate that the gallery has multiple pages.

On the right side of this gallery, the *Fotolog* template allows for a statement by the photographer. The statement included alongside the photographs of Natalie resembles many others associated with these kinds of collections:

> We knew not why her life in pictures ended up here . . . . how could she and her husband both be willing to give up their wedding album? They're young enough. . . . Divorce for Natalie and Marcelo? Untimely death? We thought these pictures should be seen. There are too many gems here to be left to rot in a funky smelling shop…

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The visitor can read the creators' speculations about Natalie and her photographs while looking at the grid of one hundred and fourteen photographs. Some of them are accompanied by short quips or fictional musings. Under one photograph featuring Natalie relaxing in a chair, the site's administrators include a quippy caption: "After Passover, a glamour nap." They also entertain the idea of Natalie finding these photos they've posted: "Maybe Natalie will one day click on a photo of her younger self here. . .(Meanwhile, we get most of our kicks out of making up names for her pets and friends)." It is important to note that this collection of photographs has lived on a photography social network since before the days of *Flickr* or *Facebook*. The calendar that tracks posts shows that this collection has sat dormant since the initial posting of the photographs in 2003 and 2004.

While a website may be time-bound by its design, it can be redesigned. A book, however, does not have this option unless it is popular enough (and profitable enough) to be reprinted in a new edition. For instance, *The Last Photos of Natalie* looks dated on the older social network *Fotolog*, but could quite easily assume a more contemporary look on *Tumblr*. Were it to do so, Natalie might have a new life as she is "reblogged," thanks to the popular repost habits of Tumblr users.

The Internet and the ability to create websites and blogs with galleries invite content to be curated. Because of the ease of uploading and presenting photographs, it is almost as if websites and blogs were created primarily to host visual materials with their neat, organized, controllable galleries.

The Archivist / Preservationist

Archivists seek to collect and organize photographs to make these available to the public for viewing. While the museum curator and archivist are both vested in making photographs viewable, the archivist is generally more interested in providing information such as geographic location, content of the images, or the type of photographs or cameras used to make the images. While the term "archivist" conveys seriousness because of its association with museums or libraries, there are many grassroots / hobby archivists.

Flickr is a popular site for archivists and has been prevalent in creating large archives of photographs devoted to a historic period, to a geographic region, or to photographic history and the accompanying photographic type such as cabinet card, Polaroid, tin type, or daguerreotype. An example of this is *Early Photography in the USA*. The group administrator writes, "This group focuses on antique photographs taken in the United States of America, or by American photographers travelling abroad, from the invention of photography to the end of World War One. The photographic production of the short-lived Confederate States of America (1861-1866) naturally pertains to this group." Between its introduction in March 2011 and June 2015, the group amassed over one hundred members and over seven thousand posts.

Geographic locations are of especial interest to archivists. *MyFoundPhotos.com* hosts numerous collections of photos which spotlight specific geographic locations (see Figure 16), one of which is "Ord, Nebraska," an assortment of 1920s photos, all from (you guessed it) Ord, Nebraska. Most, if not all, of these pictures appear to be from the pages of a 1920s Ord High School yearbook.
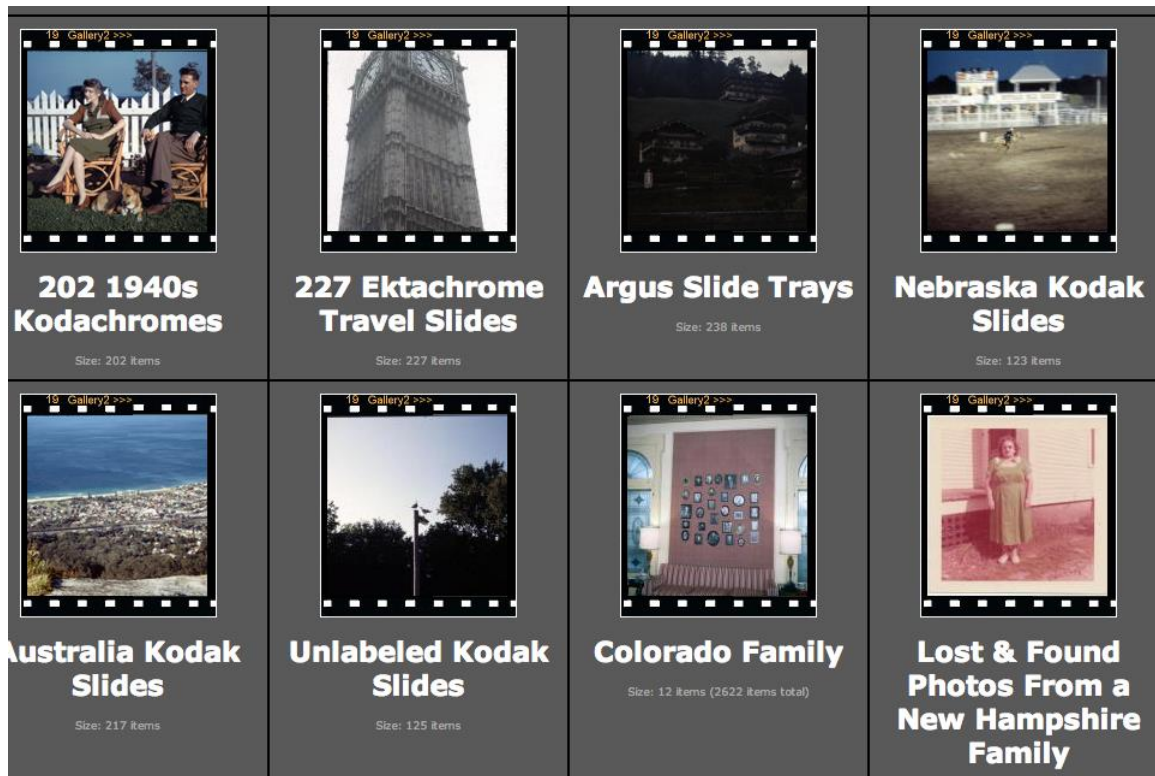
Figure 16: Screenshot from *MyFoundPhotos.com.*

Similarly, the website *Baltimore Nineteenth-Century Photo* works to build a

resource, with the help of the public, of photographs of nineteenth-century Baltimore.

While the desire to reunite people with lost photographs is made clear, the creator Gary

B. Ruppert's primary goal is to create a photographic record of historical Baltimore, and

he aims to make it as easy as possible for others to contribute to the collection:

> It's easy to share your photos with others on Baltimore City Nineteenth-
> Century Photos. If you have a scanner: scan your image at about 75 or
> 100 dpi (if you have a choice). Save your image in JPG format. Attach a
> copy of each image to an e-mail to me. That's all. No scanner? You may
> send a copy to me by the post office. Contact me for instructions.

Some archives personalize specific locales with images of individuals within that

geographic setting, as with "Lost & Found Photos from a New Hampshire Family" and

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"The White Family of Maine," photos centered around Margaret and Homer White of Maine. Photos within the White Family collection span 1912 to 1976, showing scenes from Maine, Canada, San Francisco, and Florida.

Other sites are devoted to a topic, historical period, or photographic technique, such as Martha Cooper's *The Kodak Girl Collection* which contains a large assortment of material devoted to women and Kodak camera culture. There are photographs, postcards, advertising materials, and objects with descriptive captions. The website, *Found Films,* features photos developed from found vintage cameras

Flickr is a massive online photo community / social network that allows users to post, categorize, and tag photographs. People can use it to post their most recent vacation or family photographs, making it a giant public family album. People can also post paper photographs that have been digitized or any visual materials, such as advertisements, documents, drawings, or paintings that have been digitized. There are many websites that allow for this sort of activity, such as Google's *Picasa* or the once popular *Fotolog.net*, yet *Flickr* has become the most used, and arguably the most important. *Flickr* works to create a massive archive both of personal and institution-owned photographs that reside in the same virtual real estate.

Social media tools offer the archivist the ability to crowd-source for identification, and they also allow people to contribute to different projects by submission and the use of tagging. Users make the archive searchable by tagging uploaded images with keywords associated with broad general categories (such as geographic location), detailed minutiae appearing in a photograph, or a topic somehow related to the photograph. Anyone with a camera or means of digitizing photographs can upload photographs (e.g., an average of

1.83 million photos per day were uploaded to *Flickr* in 2014). *Flickr* has worked to

engage public institutions with its service called The Commons, the tagline of which is

"Your opportunity to contribute to describe the world's public photo collections."

Institutions such as the The Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institute, and the George

Eastman House have created *Flickr* accounts that allow visitors to view and comment on

photographs. The Smithsonian photostream announces:

> Welcome to the Smithsonian Institution!
> The Smithsonian is happy to join the Flickr community. With our initial posting of 900 photographs, we look forward to your tags, comments, and general participation in this new venture. We will be adding more photos on a regular basis and hope you will often return to visit us. Take a short survey and tell us how we're doing.

This kind of interaction is typical of Web 2.0 applications. There are many opportunities

for interaction, organizing, and cooperative archiving of vast amounts of information.

The Essayist / Editor

Essayist / Editor projects feature photographs plus writings about photos by the

author of the project or a guest author. Essayist / Editor contributions are rarer than other

forms of online lost-and-found photography projects that primarily feature photographs.

These projects feature both short and longer pieces contemplating the nature of lost-and-

found photographs.

A rich example of this type is Stacy Waldman's *House of Mirth*. On this *Blogger*

site, Waldman curates themed online exhibits, like July 2013's "Stars and Stripes:

Vintage Photos of Flags" series, featuring snapshots of patriotic subjects submitted by

readers, or the May 2014 collection entitled "The Vintage Selfies." Along with the

images, she includes a number of short essays about vintage photography authored by herself or a guest writer. A March 2014 piece by the collector Robert E. Jackson focuses on the "understudied, undervalued (generally), and underappreciated (mostly)" cabinet card, a form of photo portrait popular in the late nineteenth century. Her banner positions these writings, not the images, as central to her site: "Stay tuned for more guest contributors writing about vintage photography!"

Joel Rotenberg's Tumblr blog *Looking for Snapshots* is also more of a textual than a visual offering. It is divided up into titled chapters, much like a printed book. Rotenberg writes,

> This blog is, among other things, an argument: though I hope it will reward browsing, it is not open-ended and not unordered. Effectively, it is a book, whose small sections I will post weekly until it is finished. The sections will be grouped into three large divisions: on snapshots, on found photos, and on collecting. Each division will be followed by a suite of photos. The last suite of photos will mark the end of the book.

Orla Fitzpatrick's *Jacolette,* a WordPress blog, features photographs of "mainly Irish and mostly amateur images— the type of vernacular photographs which seldom find their way into museum collections even though they are a rich visual resource" purchased from *eBay* auctions or thrift shops. Fitzpatrick writes in a recent post, "My family album: from Brockton to Bunno" of her process and goals:

> I collect photographs and write about them on my blog. Most of the people in these photographs are anonymous and will remain so. Sourced from online auctions, charity shops and even skips [i.e., dumpsters], the images have become separated from the families who once valued them. I look for interesting faces, extreme fashions and unusual formats or studios. I then research and write short pieces which I hope illuminate a moment in Irish social, photographic or fashion history.

The online projects that feature considerable amounts of writing about photographs serve to guide the viewer as essays in a lost-and-found photo book also do. Projects in this category push beyond short introductions or simple captions, as evident in the longer writing pieces that often appear throughout each site or blog.

The Reuniter

The primary focus of the reuniter is to do just that: reunite. Little or no attention is given to aesthetics or historical context on these sites. The goal is solely to put photographs into the hands of the original owners.

Within this category are websites like *Adopt a Photo,* which features vintage photographs the site administrator Anne White has "rescued" from antique stores and which she wants to reunite with their relatives. White writes the following of the photographs that can be found on her site, explicitly stating her motivation: "It is hoped that photographs can be claimed by relatives who are researching genealogy…A goal of *Adopt a Photo* is for a long-lost photograph to be claimed by a descendent." And if a photo is not claimed by a descendent, White writes, "it is hoped that all these photographs will be adopted by a caring custodian." White emphasizes the importance of reuniting people with their photographs when she writes, "Sometimes a family member becomes custodian of a family album which, more than likely, has photographs of unidentified individuals who could be relatives or friends of deceased grandparents. *Adopt a Photo* has created a Family Album Mysteries page with links to pages or sites that honor such individuals."

Photo Rescue!, a predominately Australian website, reunites "orphan photos with their lost families." Following a link titled "News of photos which have found a home" brings a visitor to an inventory of thirty photographs that have been "rescued" since July 2011. Unlike other sites that are mostly visual, *Photo Rescue*! is almost exclusively textual, with just a few images throughout the website, perhaps because of a focus on genealogical connections. Identification comes from surnames and other information carefully documented on the site.

Many reuniter projects utilize the connectivity of social networks like *Flickr* or *Facebook*. The group *Who are these (Unidentified) People* asks members of the group to *"*Post photos that you found in a shoebox, attic or a parent's photo collection and you don't know who some or all of the people in the photo are. Please supply any additional info you have in order to help others to identify the people." Members can discuss, identify, and claim photos through its comment section. On *Facebook*, members of the groups like *Lost Photos of Joplin* and *Joplin's Found Photos* have organized photographs blown across a town destroyed by a tornado on May 22, 2011. *Lost Photos of Joplin* provides each photo with a record number to assist people in claiming photographs. According to a news article posted on the site, as of May 2013, they've reunited 16,000 photographs with their original owners. *Joplin's Found Photos* is moderated by Abi Almandinger, a consultant for the scrapbook industry. While there could be a marketing angle for someone who sells scrapbooking supplies, the number of photographs and posts and reunited photographs make her efforts appear sincere.

These are examples of projects that explicitly work to reunite people with photos they've lost or those which they don't even know exist. They go beyond a passing

interest or curiosity in whom the photographs belonged to, usually adding as much

identification information as possible. They also often note their successful reuniting

stories on their sites, which could increase visitors' interest or belief that they might find

a lost photograph themselves.

The Dealer

While some snapshot photographs are actually found on the street, a majority are

purchased. Antique shops sell individual snapshots, complete family albums, or boxes of

photographs for a few dollars. Dealers sell snapshots online for anywhere between a

dollar and hundreds of dollars. While most online buying and selling of snapshots

transpires on *eBay,* some dealers (big and small) have websites that serve as store fronts.

The photographs offered for sale on the dealers' sites are often select images offered for

between twenty dollars and hundreds of dollars. A dealer's website usually features

galleries of photographs organized by labels describing the subjects of photographs.

While anyone can become a dealer by setting up a webpage or an *eBay* account,

there are also professional dealers. *Recycled Relatives* is a modest website with a small

number of photographs for sale**,** most snapshots selling for around five dollars. Steve

Bannos's *Gargantua Photos* features a selection of photographs with labels like "Wacky

World," "It's a Man's World," "Summer Vacation," "They are Women," "Love the One

You're With," and "What the?" Richard T. Rosenthal's *Vernacularphotography.com*

offers photos for sale within categories such as "Bathing Beauties," "Crime

Photography," "Cyanotypes," "French Collotypes," and "Travel Photography." Barbara

Levine's website *Project B* offers original snapshots as well as limited-edition enlarged

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snapshots for framing, "so you can enjoy their enduring mystery and allure in your personal space." Her site has some similarities to those of the essayist/editor, as she also blogs about photographic culture and about individual images she has sold or is planning to sell.

While there are a number of dealers who maintain sites to write about the photographs they are selling, there are a host of dealers on *eBay* that do not appear to have any other web presence other than their *eBay* accounts. The dealer's web presence can be both instructive on buying and selling as well as self-promotional in showcasing their abilities to recognize and offer only choice images (much like the connoisseurs lauded in photo books).

Online Practices

Though there are distinctions between the various categories I identify in describing online lost-and-found-photo sites (and their creators), the lines of separation are fluid, as sites change and site managers adapt their missions. Yet, across all of these categories are shared implicit and explicit practices. For instance, whether one is an archivist or an essayist, a reuniter or a dealer, before anyone uploads photographs to the Internet, the images must first be scanned—a simple, but time-consuming task. It also takes work to build, maintain, and design a website, social network community, or blog. Some projects sustain all three forms of internet presence, adding complexity. There is also a lot of work associated with identifying, tagging, and describing the photographs for exhibition. Identification may include historical information, the location where the photo was purchased or found, or the type of photographic process used. The amount of

work involved in maintaining sites for the display, assessment, and exchange of lost-and-found photos may be the reason that many projects do not continue long after their initial creation.

Creating Digital Archives

According to Joanna Sassoon, digitization is a cultural process that impacts reception, authenticity, and fidelity. Digitization also, she argues, contributes to a "loss" due to a snapshot's removal from being "contextually and materially derived to being content driven" in institutional "memory banks" (194). Sassoon's skepticism arises from how institutions manage the images they scan, recalling Evans and Hall's reminder to see photography through the "formats and institution of production, distribution and consumption." John Tagg, as well, posits that a photograph "is tied to definite conditions of existence" (246). The photographs scanned in for these online endeavors gain currency by the context in which they are placed. The lost-and-found photo online projects I've presented here are not tied to custodianship of institutions. They are the works of the everyday hobbyist, small business operator, or grassroots historian. Alan Sekula argues an archive can "liberate" photos from their original intentions. These projects are open to the public, thus they operate outside the restrictions of an institution which may be concerned with questions of access and use.

One of the most important features online projects share is the building of virtual galleries. The online lost-and-found gallery, regardless of form (whether a blog or website or social network, whether created by a curator or archivist or dealer) permeates everyday life, as it is always just a screen away from our eyes. We are directed to it in

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searches and through suggested links. It provokes interaction and invites participation, if only the clicking to the next image. It is the gallery that festoons the Internet and saturates the digital landscape with images.

Collections of lost-and-found photographs become online virtual exhibits by default the moment more than a few images are uploaded and put on a page. The templates available through various Internet services provide for a free-form space to create such galleries of images. A virtual exhibit may be an exact duplication of a physical counterpart like a book or museum space. Or it may be an extension or bonus material accompanying a material exhibit, showcasing work not featured in the exhibit (the B-sides, if you will). Or it might be a teaser offering a select view, with an abbreviated selection of images. It might also be a collection of photographs assembled on *Flickr* featuring photographs from a certain era.

Whatever its form or intent, the gallery appears as a feature in all online lost-and-found projects. Archivist *Flicker*-user "Vieilles Annonces" combines a number of galleries featuring vintage, color corrected slides. Dealer Steve Bannos's *Gargantua* contains many galleries of images for sale. Reuniter *Adopt a Photo* has page after page of photographs that visitors can click through. Once in gallery form, the photographs enter a world in which they are not just seen but also a part of an accessible digital archive which spans the Internet, held together by keyword searches. While not all galleries include metadata in the form of tags or descriptions, all galleries put their photos into the global visual landscape. The everyday personal photograph moves from the private family album to the hands of strangers (dealers, curators, researchers), and then on to the Internet in the modern practices of displaying personal photographs.

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Image galleries that offer multiple images with navigation tools and optimal

viewing are utilized by numerous Internet ventures. Website builders create galleries

from scratch, designing how images will be laid out and navigated. Blogging services

offer numerous options for galleries, including creative templates to display photographs

depending on the aesthetics or the taste of the user. For example, *Tumblr* has a seemingly

unlimited number of blog templates for the explicit purpose of showcasing photographs.

For sites like *Flickr*, *Instagram*, or other photography services, simple, easy-to-navigate

galleries are standard.

The photo gallery is also crucial to the interactivity of social networks like

Facebook, as people post, tag, and create albums. It could be argued that each time a

photograph is clicked, it awaits a virtual walk-through with glances and close looks.

Virtual exhibits set up across websites, blogs, or social networks can take on different

looks and offer various ways to interact. For instance, *The Last Photos of Natalie,* like

other social network galleries, allows for comments. Visitors who are users of a social

network can also "Like" the photographs in a gallery.

It is not guaranteed that once photographs are digitized and uploaded they will be

seen or recognized or that the photo sites (blogs, *Facebook*, *Flickr*) will remain online

indefinitely, but the digitization process and those who take part in it are engaging in

archive building and, more importantly, creating an access point to an archive. The ease

with which the public can access these archives allows for Barthes's *punctum* or the

ensuing *studium* to take effect, prodding the curiosity of viewers, possibly prompting

them to look deeper, to research the photographs they see. It makes way for activation of

the archive of lost-and-found photographs which are scattered across the Internet. The

optimism inherent in a digital archive, as described by Jeffrey Schnapp and Michael

Shanks, is evident over and over through the ubiquity of replicating in digital form the

old family photograph. Spend time looking through the projects and one will find that

these archive-building activities, practiced for different reasons and desires, all contribute

to a larger archive. An archive of critically juxtaposed and aligned materials of what is

ultimately the same material (snapshots featuring people) from diverse locations,

repurposed in different contexts, offering a variety of receptive options from the viewer.

It is an archive that allows for what Shanks sought from a digital archive, a space for

collaboration that can lead to "recollection, regeneration, reworking, remixing." This is

an example of what it is to activate the archive in the twenty-first century.

Lost-and-Found Photo News Stories

In 2009 the documentarian Errol Morris wrote a five-part article for the *New York

Times* exploring an October 19, 1863 article from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* about a Civil

War soldier found dead, clutching a photograph of three children: "In his hands, tightly

clasped, was an ambrotype containing the portraits of three small children, and upon this

picture his eyes, set in death, rested. The last object upon which the dying father looked

was the image of his children, and as he silently gazed upon them his soul passed away.

How touching! how solemn!" Thus, the unidentified "lost" photo was of interest even in

the 1800s, and through one such photograph, the Civil War's toll on a family became the

peg for an early human interest story. The original 1863 article contained the

exclamation, "How touching! how solemn!" in regard to the idea of a dead soldier

holding the photo of his children, reflecting the frequent pathos expressed within the

modern human interest stories that document photographs that are found or go missing. These stories often propose questions seen in other lost-and-found photo presentations: Who were these people? Where are they now? Where can they be found?

The layers of the particular Civil War story which started the trend are thick: The photo is found. Duplicates are made. And, in ways that are strikingly similar to the ways in which images "go viral" across social networks, it is passed around in various communities in hopes that someone would recognize the children in the photo. The dead man's wife reads about the soldier and the "found" photograph. After seeing a copy of the photograph, she confirms it is her husband. There is a certain reflexivity afoot here as well, in that this story, originally appearing in a newspaper over one hundred years ago, becomes the focus of a contemporary newspaper article—what modern audience members get from Morris is a human interest story about a human interest story about a heartrending photo, one which had been lost, found, and reunited with an associate of its original owner. Morris ends part one of his series of articles about the photograph in this way: "The first question is: What is his name? The second question: Who is he? Tell me something *about* Amos Humiston. And then, there is a *third* question: 'Who is he to *us*? What does he *mean* to us?'" (n.pag.).

Here, Morris pinpoints the questions explicitly and implicitly asked of lost-and-found photographs in human interest stories. What Morris is doing, what he does best, is digging deeply into a seemingly straightforward news story, as well as the story about the story, asking critical questions while turning up more information and ultimately supplying more mystery.

Today, news stories of lost *and* found photographs appear with great frequency in the news. Take, for example, the sensational story which appeared in *The Wichita Eagle* in 2012 about a thirteen-year-old boy, Addison, who bought a Polaroid camera at a garage sale. When he got home, he pulled out a photo that had been left in the camera and showed it to his grandmother. It was a photo of Scott Logan, her deceased son, the boy's uncle. They have no idea how the camera ended up in a yard sale in a different neighborhood, but its discovery was felt by many in the family as a sign. As Addison's father remarked, "It's almost like he's reaching out to us, saying he's still with us" (n.pag.).

Stories like this appear all the time, detailing heart-rending losses or miraculous discoveries. Consider just a handful of the news headlines that appeared within a period of a few weeks at the beginning of the summer of 2015: "This Woman Lost Her Camera and All the Photos on It. Here's How She Got Them Back," which appeared in *The Washington Post* on May 21, 2015; "Oak Forest Woman Seeks Lost Cell Phone Holding Photos of Late Brother: The Phone Means Nothing to Her—It's What's Stored on It that Means the World," which was posted on the *Orland Park Patch* on June 4, 2015; and "Devastated Mum Pleads for the Return of Her Lost Mobile with Precious Photographs of Her Stillborn Son," which was featured in *The Daily Post* on May 20, 2015. Headlines like this appear in newspapers, online and in print, all over the globe, nearly all the time.

These human-interest stories are constant reminders of this simple fact: Photos are ever being lost and found. While the activities of the lost-and-found online world provide a mashup of practices and perceptions surrounding lost-and-found photographs, newspapers (in print and online) are documenting the stories of losing and finding in the

lost-and-found-photo world. Lost-and-found photographs are ready-made subjects for newspaper human interest stories, as their loss and discovery taps into shared human emotions like grief, hope, and joy. They soften the daily murder and drug accounts with stories triggering positive engagement with the daily news. They also draw readers in by fueling an expectation of action: something is bound to happen.

Such stories are a mark of the journalistic ambition to humanize the news—to put a face with disaster. Norma Green writes that "long before TV, newspapers painted word pictures that made people react" (40). The lost-and-found photography news is painting word pictures about photos that are potent emotional triggers for a newspaper reader.

Types of News Stories

After my initial gathering of forty online news stories, I expanded my search in the news database *LexisNexis*. I used the search terms "lost photos," "found photos," and "lost-and-found photos." These provided an additional eighty-nine human interest articles that feature the losing and finding of paper photographs or cameras.

Headlines tell stories of lost photographs in mid-length features and extended classified advertisements that appear over and over again. *Is this one of your lost photographs?; Missing picture spells heartache; Help me trace lost photo—please,; Can you help to solve lost photos mystery?; Heartache over stolen photos; Mystery Photos: Man renovating house uncovers long-lost pictures in attic* (Abel). The collected stories and classified advertisements can be divided into three main categories of people associated with lost-and-found photos: *the losers, the finders,* and *the reuniters*.

The Losers

These stories focus on the person or people who lost photographs. There are accounts of photos being stolen, tornados destroying houses, photographs misplaced on a bus, and photos lost during vacation. These stories often feature locations where the loser thinks he or she lost the photographs. There are often quotes from the losers on why the lost photographs were important. Those who have lost photographs often describe them as "irreplaceable." For example, a woman who accidentally delivered all of her grandparents' photographs to the thrift store was quoted as saying, "The photographs are my whole history and are irreplaceable…When I discovered I'd lost them I sat in the middle of the floor and cried[;] they were things I held precious" (Wyong 17).

In another story, a gentleman's house was broken into and he is quoted as saying, "It is the photos of my mum I was more concerned about. Everything else can be replaced. Now I have got no photos of her over the past few years" ("Heartache" 11). An 84-year-old widower who lost a favorite portrait of his wife on the way to a frame shop lamented, "It's upsetting. It's the only copy of the picture I had and it's very sad because she's dead now" ("Missing Picture" 5). A mom who lost a small photo of her deceased daughter after a bingo game said, "I have plenty of photos but that's one I carried continuously. The picture is just something important to have with me everywhere I go" ("Grieving Mum's" 5).

Many of the articles include a plea by the loser for the return of the photographs, as in the case of a woman who states, "To the person who found the camera, please keep it with my blessing. […] But I would be so grateful if the SD card is returned, no questions asked" (Trieste 34). New parents are quoted as "appealing for help in finding

missing pictures" of their infant in an article titled "Parents' Plea for Lost Photos" (n.page.).   These examples from news stories are typical expressions from the losers mourning the loss of what are, to them, extraordinarily special photos.

The Finders

        "Finders" stories focus on the person or people who find photographs and usually discuss the location where the photographs were found. The articles may mention specific identifying features that may help reunite the photographs or albums with their owners. For example, one finder posted the following message: "A dog-walker found the blue A4 book in Pittville Park earlier this month. It had been left on the St Paul's side of the park, beside the pool" ("Karen" 14). Another account of lost photos appears in the *The Swindon News,* exhibiting just how detailed descriptions of "found" items can be:

> The red file box is red with more than a hundred photos in it including photos of children in school uniforms, a swimming gala, holiday pictures and some of funeral flowers. The photo album is also red with two stickers on the front and contains photos from a family holiday in Switzerland and contains the names of Madi, Ruth, Andrew, Katie and Hans. There is also a receipt in the album which is dated August 29, 1997. ("Have You Lost")

Sometimes these stories contain bits of information about the finders: "The woman who found the album did not want to be named but Mr. Hutchings plans to call and thank her" ("Photo Call" 7). Or: "Both photos have been well cared for and Liz would like to return them to their owner" ("Appeal"). Finders sometimes comment on the meaning of personal photography, as in, "I can't imagine what the person who lost these is going through" (Fiorito), or "There are 15 pictures of a little girl's third or fourth birthday party

and of her playing. Having children myself, I know how heartbreaking it is to lose

memories like that" ("Who Lost" 23).

> Longer comments reveal more empathy for unknown owners:

> > Lucy Burnett, marketing manager, at Touchwood said: "Photos hold fond memories for us all so we would dearly like to be able to reunite the book with its owner. We encourage anyone who recognises a familiar face or even themselves to get in touch so that we can return the album to its rightful home." ("Mystery Photo" 7)

In addition to empathy, some comments add a bit of scolding:

> > It just seems so unlikely that someone wouldn't want to hold on to part [of] their family history. You would have thought someone would have placed them in a bin if they had been having a clear out. It could be someone put them down and forgot them. I'd hate to think that someone out there thinks they are lost forever. I hope either relatives or their friends recognise these photos and they can be returned to where they belong. I know if it was me I would want to hold on to such treasured family memories as these. (Anderson 17)

Stories of finders are written with empathy for the losers, but also with a hope that the

story will assist in reuniting people with their lost photos.

The Reuniters

While stories of losers prompt sympathy from the reader, and finders stories often

provoke mystery, narratives of the reunited are feel-good stories. Stories of people being

reunited with their photographs are the completion and conclusion of the lost-or-found

mystery. The stories can retell losing or finding, and they often document the joy and

thankfulness of those who have had their photographs returned. These stories range from

accounts of photos found at a bus stop or on the street to more involved narratives, like

the story of Louisa Harland who found a roll of film in Florida (when she was sixteen

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years old) and kept it for over twenty years. She eventually developed the film, scanned in the images, and used the Internet and the local newspaper to track down the owners. Mrs. Eversham, the owner of the lost roll of film, is quoted as saying, "We very much appreciate all that Louisa has done and I email her quite often now, so I have made an internet friend." (Bills-Geddes n.pag.). One finder who returned a photo which had been lost for sixty years said, "It's wonderful news. I'm very pleased. I'm delighted it has an owner and it has some value . . . I'm delighted it belongs to David. I couldn't have thrown it away, it's not mine to destroy" (Banks n.pag.).

The self-congratulation newspapers sometimes exhibit upon reuniting photographs with their owners seems quaint alongside the powerful connection capabilities of social media. (Perhaps there is something of a kindred spirit between newspapers and personal photographs, as they both have migrated from a portable, tangible object to the digital realm.) I discovered many statements like the following in my examination of reunion stories printed in local newspapers:

- "Cleo Patterson is trying to do the right thing, and we're here to help. Let it never be said newspapers don't strive to serve the greater good." – *Wisconsin State Journal* (Moe n.pag.)

- "Precious family photographs lost in Florida 20 years ago have been reunited with their Ledbury owners, with the help of the Reporter." – *Ledbury Reporter* (Bills-Geddes n.pag.).

- "The mystery of a lost Marlow family portrait has been solved after a long-forgotten photograph was posted on the Free Press website." - *Bucks Free Press* (Banks n.pag.)

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- "A wartime portrait found by a Chelmsford postman has been returned to its rightful owner - thanks to the Essex Chronicle." – *The Essex Chronicle* ("Lost Photo Claimed" 14)
- "The owner of a photograph that was found at the petrol station at Morrison's supermarket has been found, thanks to the Derby Evening Telegraph." – *Derby Evening Telegraph* ("Owner of Lost" 17)

Newspaper stories of people being reunited with photos they cherish remind the reader that there is not an expiration date for the potential of a lost photograph to be found or a statute of limitations on what photographs mean to those who lose them. People who seek to return personal photographs when they find them are often described as being "good Samaritans." When people have their photographs returned, they are thankful. People grieve over lost photographs and what these stories imply is that they should therefore be returned if found. All stories of losers and finders have the potential (and the right) to become stories of joyful reunions.

Conclusion

In the end, these practices and the accompanying perceptions presented in this chapter are part of the construction of a worldwide archive of images, one which breaks the boundaries between the physical world and online environments and which is held together by a shared interest in personal photography. While separating and categorizing lost-and-found photographs projects to parse out their differences and reveal their meanings, there *is* one simple way to cut through the many different manifestations. It is in recognizing that while being the object of different methods and visions of what should

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and could be done with things that have "gotten away," the personal photograph at the center of all these categories is still just that: a personal photograph.

It is the personal photograph that was cherished, organized, scanned, placed in albums, exhibited in the home, and shown to others, long before it entered the lost-and-found photo world. It became part of a small archive, whether it was placed in a photo album or in a frame on the wall of a home. Through these practices, everyday photographers became curators, archivists, and possibly reuniters as they worked to identify the people in their own photos and share them with extended family. These practices continue when photographs become separated from their original owners and reappear in books, online projects, and news articles. Here, too, practitioners organize, scan, reunite, and cherish personal photographs, photographs that are not their own. And within these contexts, new presentations of old photos invite myriad interpretations, conversations, and possibilities.

Even the competing perspectives which can be found within lost-and-found photo projects mirror our understandings of our own photographs. Recall the account of how bell hooks interprets a photo differently than her sister, or the personal photograph which Miriam Hirsch suggests offer "competing perspectives" to the viewer. We, too, see various meanings within our photographs. We, too, view them as art, as history, as genealogy, as humorous artifacts of everyday life. These perceptions work their way into how we create photo albums, which Glen Willumson suggests are an important part of "transforming" the meaning of personal photographs and making them an important part of "individualistic expression" (63). There are a great many interpretations made about our own personal photographs that come from the way they are organized and displayed

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among family and associates. This is not unlike the many different ways lost-and-found photos are both contextualized by their finders and interpreted by their viewers.

The materials, both paper and digital, gathered for this chapter offer competing viewpoints on how old personal photographs should be seen and interpreted. The different locations to which a single snapshot travels often alter its original (perceived) meanings. When it appears in a book, it may be presented as art, or as an important historical artifact, or as an object for scholarly study. Online it may be an object that is meant to reconnect a viewer with long-lost ancestors, or it might be a conversation piece within social networks, or else it may be a commercial object to be bought and sold. Newspaper stories present lost-and-found snapshots as emotional objects that are cherished and mourned. The same photo assumes multiple meanings, as new locations offer new contexts, and new contexts offer new ways to see the personal snapshot. In so doing, there is often the implication that personal photographs, especially personal photographs that are "lost," are "blank slates" which can easily, and without any damage to the layers of meaning they may have accrued along their journey, take on the contextual cloaks that are constructed around them.

CHAPTER 5

"THESE LITTLE CONVERSATIONS": INTERVIEWS ABOUT LOST-AND-FOUND PHOTOGRAPHS

"And sometimes what I try to do is enclose a few photos inside the casket to be buried with the person."

~Sylvia, Antique Dealer & Collector

"No, I am purely aesthetic. I don't care about the narrative. I don't care about context. I don't care about anything. If I like the photo I want it in my collection. And it stops there."

~Fred, Collector and Author

Introduction

During an interview with a woman who had called in a story to the *Lostandfoundphotos.org* voicemail, I was told about a photo album the participant's father had purchased at an estate sale in Pennsylvania. It was a black rectangular album with black pages that contained photographs from an orphanage taken in the 1930s. The photos were of the children. Some were of small groups and others were individual photographs with descriptions of the child's personality and dates of when he arrived and when he left, and on some occasions, when he returned to the orphanage. During our conversation, she questioned what she could do with the album:

> And I kept thinking . . . I could give it to the Warren township historical society. So I thought a few times of getting those numbers and calling and asking people and then at that point I wasn't ready to give it away. It's one thing to hand it to someone whose face is in the album and it's another thing…finding you and talking to you I just know it has another journey that it needs to go on. . .I am giving you the album. Okay? You can do with it what you want.

The album arrived during the time I was conducting the interviews for this chapter. It was as she described. There was simple writing in white that identified the orphans by name. The album had an artful feel to it, with a black cover, black pages, and the black and white images of the children, some of which had been cut, in a collagen scrapbook style, from their original photographs. It appeared that someone who worked at the orphanage had created this album of collaged photos, since it included dates, names, and diary-like entries. It was a lost-and-found photo album that begged for identification. Someone in these photos would want this album, wouldn't they? Maybe the family of the people in the photos would be interested? Or the historical society from the town in which the orphanage was located? A notice placed in a local Pennsylvania newspaper could serve as a call to the public to help in the identification of the album. But what if the subjects of the photos didn't want to be identified? Or perhaps their personal stories were just that, personal?

I digitally scanned the entire album. My immediate impulse was to display it on *Lostandfoundphotos.org*. I could create a book from the photographs using the bookmaking service Blurb. I thought of contacting someone in Pennsylvania who could do something with the album. This Depression-Era orphanage album could even lead to a number of research projects. It could be the springboard to talking to people who worked in orphanages from that era, or it could be used as a tool for discussing orphanages with the adults who had personal experience with them. It is certainly a human-interest story waiting to be written for a newspaper or magazine.

As I thought about the album and the materials I was preparing for this dissertation, I began to worry about the possible invasion of privacy incurred by

uploading something so complete, with names and dates along with the photographs. The album was a document that gave the origins of others' personal histories, and the short jottings were like early private medical records. One of the entries even spoke of a boy who had left with a family and then returned to stay at the orphanage.

I let the album sit on my shelf. Every once in a while I would look through it and feel some guilt as I read the accompanying note from the woman I will call Jenn:

> I also thank you for accepting the album and letting it begin a new journey. I have felt since the first day I saw it that it should not be in my hands only, but in a place where others can experience history through these children. I think you are the man to take it on its next journey, perhaps something we can do together.

I was not allowing it to have a new story. I was not allowing it to take a journey where new eyes would look upon it and read the empathetic comments, possibly written by someone in the group photo at the end of the album, someone whose face looks back out at the viewer.

I kept the album for about a year while Jenn wondered when I was going to do something with it. She had said I could do what I wanted with it. I eventually sent the album back.

I begin this chapter with the story of Jenn's offering of the album because it embodies many decisions that might be made surrounding lost-and-found photo projects. Although I agonized about what to do with the photographs, where or how to exhibit them, and though I eventually abandoned them due to ethical reservations, the people I interviewed for this chapter had no such mixed thoughts, actions or perceptions around photographs.

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This chapter contains interviews conducted with people who work with lost-and-found photographs. These are not interviews with the people who *lost* the photos. These are also not interviews with people who happen across photos on the street or in a dumpster or on the lawn after a tornado. These are people who "find" photos by purchasing them at auctions, antique stores, and from dealers, and who display photos for public viewing in books, on blogs and websites, in museum galleries, in antique stores, and on online auction sites. These are the reuniters, the curators, the historians who work with various lost-and-found projects and endeavors explored in chapter 4.

The following findings were culled from my conversations with fifteen people working with lost-and-found photographs. As I argue in chapter 3, I believe it was important to find participants who were working on different kinds of lost-and-found photo projects rather than focus my attention on one type of participant (such as a collector *or* curator). It was important because personal photographs—that make up all lost-and-found photo endeavors, whether they be motivated by aesthetics, history or hobby—are the same. They are images that were created as part of the everyday practice of photography and then, for whatever reason, came to no longer belong to the original owners or associates of the owner. The participants in these interviews engage in a variety of practices that make personal photographs public.

The Participants

I interviewed fifteen people for about an hour each. Each participant was from the U.S. I found them over the course of collecting and reading photography books, blogs, and websites about lost-and-found photos. I posted invitations on photography

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message boards and *Flickr* "found" photo groups. I also emailed invitations to bloggers,

authors, photo dealers, and curators directly. Because of the location of fourteen of the

interviewees, I conducted most interviews over the phone. However, two of the

participants lived in cities that were a short drive from my home, so those interviews

were conducted face-to-face.

I worked to set a conversational tone prior to the interviews by directing potential

participants to my blog. There, they could hear a few of the voicemails I had received

from callers, read through the project's design, review the human subject statement, and

see how I had been documenting the lost-and-found photo world in short blog posts. We

often engaged in short emails back and forth prior to interviews that sometimes

communicated a general idea of what the interview would be like or just conversation

about our shared interest in snapshots. The interviewee group was comprised of nine

men and six women. Since many were established professionals, their ages ranged from

35-60, except for one participant, a blogger, who was in college at the time.

Other than a museum curator and an author who also sells snapshots, the project

participants worked in a wide array of fields outside of photography. For most, their

interest in photographs and their work on lost-and-found photo projects was not part of

their occupation, but closer to hobbies.

I have assigned a pseudonym to each interviewee described below:

- **Fred** is a snapshot collector who owns thousands of photographs. His

  collection has been exhibited at a major big-city museum as well as within

  the definitive book featuring lost-and-found photographs. Fred's interests lie

  in the aesthetics of snapshots.

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- **Sam** is a collector of snapshots and a self-defined curator who maintains a website and blog featuring photos from his collection. He co-authored a book about Chicago history featuring many of the photos in his collection.

- **Jenn** is an author who works in an administrative role at a college and who is a self-defined "minor collector" who purchases photographs that "catch her eye." Jenn called in a story to *Lostandfoundphotos.org* about purchasing a photograph of a woman on her wedding day at an estate sale. She is the owner of the adoption album discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

- **Lisa** is a curator at a university photography museum. She put together a "vernacular" photography show and catalogue for the museum which included lost-and-found images as well as art installations featuring personal photography of the artists.

- **Jason** is a website hobbyist who finds photos on lost-and-found photos sites and sometimes *Flickr* accounts and who writes short fictional pieces (one thousand words or less) to accompany them.

- **Alan** has put together an "ongoing" collection of about one thousand nineteenth- and twentieth-century postmortem photographs which, he writes, is not available for "morbid fascination," but as an online "resource for both the anthropologist and artist alike."

- **Ron** has a BFA in painting and drawing and is interested in the aesthetics of personal photography. He collects lost-and-found photographs and folk art. Ron's collection of lost-and-found photographs has been exhibited at a number of museums throughout the U.S.

- **Ted** is a physician in Baltimore who primarily collects nineteenth-century images of Baltimore and displays the photographs on his website. He adds as much information about each image as he can to assist in the identification of locations and people. He also invites the public to submit photographs for the site. The rules dictate that the photographs must be geographically connected to Baltimore, and if there is a person in the photograph, identification must be attempted.

- **Sue** is a retired schoolteacher who operates a site that has a genealogical focus. She buys photos at antique shops and posts them to her blog. She provides as much information (names, location, date) as she can so that someone might be able to identify the people in the photos.

- **Joe** operates a web project to reunite people with lost cameras and photographs. His website received a lot of press soon after its creation in 2008. Numerous articles and radio stations have interviewed him about his site. Joe's site features almost exclusively digital cameras and photos.

- **Liz** is the author of three books that feature snapshots from her collection. She curates small exhibits and writes about photography and also maintains a website where she offers some snapshots for sale.

- **Sylvia** is an antiques dealer who started including photographs when she was buying items for her various booths. She sells some photos and keeps others for herself. She sometimes makes greeting cards with the photographs to send to friends or family members.

- **Claire** is an artist who has worked on a number of art projects using lost-and-found photographs. The project she was working on at the time of our interview involved cutting up snapshots and, with the use of materials like string and paint, creating minimalist collage art pieces that she sold online.

- **Rick** operates a photography message board that hosts conversations about cameras, films, and other photographic issues. He purchased a large collection of slides that were taken during the Vietnam War. Rick tracked down the photographer of the slides and uploaded the photos to *Flickr*, where they can be seen by the public.

- **Billy** is an artist and a dealer who started buying lost-and-found photographs for art materials to manipulate for various art projects. He also buys photographs to collect and to sell on *eBay*.

Interview Results

A range of specific goals and interests in working with lost-and-found photographs are embedded in the responses of these sixteen individuals. Consider the following two anecdotes that illustrate two views of lost-and-found photographs. The first anecdote is from Ron, who tells the story of the appraisal made of him by a visitor to one of his museum exhibition openings:

> This man comes up to me and he says, "Hi there, you're the photographer right?" and I just told myself, 'Oh God, this guy . . .' It just flashed through my head this guy has completely just missed the boat. Because I've got pictures from the whole century, I mean how could I be the one to take these pictures from 1920, or 1930. So I said, "No sir," (I was polite), I said, "No, sir, I didn't take the pictures, I just found them." And I'm explaining these found pictures, and he said, "Oh, no, no, no, you're the photographer. Let me explain, you're really the photographer without a

camera. You're the one, you go out and you look through boxes and you find these pictures, and you look, and look and look, just like a photographer looks and looks and looks through a viewfinder and he doesn't choose that and he doesn't choose that and he doesn't choose that. But," he said, "you make these choices by the selections you make and then the picture you find and put up on this wall now becomes yours."

Ron welcomed this assessment of what he was doing. Ted, on the other hand, narrated the origin of his interest in lost-and-found photos with this tale of examining the estate of his Aunt Helen, who was the "keeper of the family history, papers, and photos":

I went to my uncle's home and we did a little interview, and during the time I was there I asked to see specifically the family photos, papers, and letters that were part of Aunt Helen's estate. And he gave me a funny look and said, "There aren't any." And I said, "Well I heard there were quite a few, and she was keeper of the family papers." And, ultimately, he said, "Those folks are dead; nobody is interested in that stuff; we threw it away." And I, uh, just couldn't believe it. I was kind of speechless and I didn't really say anything. He went on a little bit...and I said, "Did you even save the family Bible?" And he again said, "No." "What did you do with that?" "We burned it." That's what you do with unwanted Bibles apparently, but he had ripped out the pages with the family data in it and he did give that to me.

Ted reveals his own role as family historian in this anecdote as being antithetical to his uncle's decision to throw out old family photos. In contrast, Ron saw himself as the artist / author of the photographs in his exhibition when a visitor defined him as such.

Participants told many anecdotes like these that revealed their specific interests in personal photographs, their feelings about what they do, and how they entered into the world of collecting, archiving, and presenting lost-and-found photographs. My literature review outlines research and writings on authorship, digitization, personal photography, archive, and memory, all of which were instrumental in the creation of my interview prompts. Conversation categories were drawn from these writings as well as from my prompts and interview guidelines for these topics.

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I have culled the most salient and illuminating perceptions surrounding lost-and-found photos and their accompanying practices that were revealed during the recorded conversations. Interview responses are organized by the following categories, informed by those established in chapters 2 and 4:

- Defining Lost-and-Found Photographs

- The Tangible and Digital

- Authorship and New Readers

- Memory and Preservation

- Ethics

Defining Lost-and-Found Photographs

Many of the participants offered perceptions about lost-and-found photographs in our conversations that expanded upon and offered a more nuanced look, beyond the writings accompanying their various projects (books, blogs, websites). How participants defined lost-and-found photos and their analyses of the terms used for such photographs were mostly related to their specific endeavors and projects. These discussions revealed contrasting perceptions and drew a bright line between the practices and attitudes that separate the participants' ventures.

"Lost-and-found photographs" is a term which reflects my own views and is not an expression used by collectors; however, most of the terms utilized within the field have *something* to do with the photograph's status as an object that has been separated from its original owner and has somehow wound up in a stranger's hands. "Found" is one of the most common terms for these photos, one that has been appearing with

increasing frequency in recent years. As I discuss in chapter 4, and as seen in the social

bookmark collection on *Lostandfoundphotos.org* or by doing a Google search with the

expression "found photos," there are numerous sites (and a *Wikipedia* entry) using this

term.

Despite the trendiness of the term, some collectors take issue with the word

"found," noting its limitations. Fred is one such collector:

> There are actually specific sites for people who have actually found
> photos, and they put up the photos they have found, in a book, on the
> street, on a site, and I sometimes associate that when I hear the word
> "found." There's a lot on that now. If you put in the word "found photo,"
> you get all kinds of weird sites that come up. That's not what a lot of the
> people I know of, and a lot of the people you know that I know . . ."Found
> photo" is just not a word that ever comes up.

Fred is clearly distancing himself from those who commonly use the term "found" to

describe lost-and-found photos. Perhaps he is right to do so, since "found," as a stand-

alone term, ignores the "lost" aspect of these photos. It also denotes a lack of seriousness

or agency on the part of the person who has "found" the photographs. As Fred pointed

out, "found" could imply accidentally finding a loose photo on the street instead of what

collectors actually do, which is actively seek out photographs, using specific criteria.

Other descriptors seem to anthropomorphize lost-and-found photos, as if these

images are protagonists in narratives of misfortune. For example, Sue described what she

was doing as "adoption":

> I set the site up to try to get people to claim the photographs, whether it
> was their relatives or they just wanted to have that photograph. That is
> fairly impractical. I thought there would be a few people who might like
> that, so when someone adopts a photograph, essentially I send the
> photograph I found to them for a fee. Usually I try to get back the money
> I paid for it and a little bit of a profit, not much. So those photos are
> adopted, so to speak.

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While the term "orphan" has been used many times to describe lost-and-found

photographs, "adoption" is used less often. It is a useful term to describe the practice of

collecting photographs, with the idea that the photographs have found a new home or that

the new owner plans to help find the photographs a home where they are wanted.

While Rick does not use the word "adoption," the manner in which he speaks of

his rescue of a collection of Vietnam slides at a thrift store, which he then scans and

shares, is an adoption of sorts. Rick describes the collection of Vietnam slides he

purchased in this way:

> You know, those images could've been…they were hours away from
> being taken to the dump and just totally ruined. So that's joy enough right
> there. That they're actually being seen, which is what I think needs to
> happen with them. So the more viral they become, the better. As far as
> I'm concerned, they need to be seen. Images need to be seen by as many
> people as possible. And I don't have any desire to wall them up and hide
> them from anybody and charge an entry fee.

For Rick, a collection of slides he purchased that depicted scenes from the Vietnam War

are important in their historic importance, and he found joy in saving them from

obscurity at the eleventh hour. Rick told me during our conversation how he eventually

found the photographer of the slides, who was happy he had rescued the photographs and

made them public. Sue and Rick differ in their practices, but clearly wish for their photos

to be rescued, cared for, and (hopefully) reunited.

Sue and Rick embrace their roles as guardians of photos in need of good homes;

other collectors, however, like Fred, reject that interpretation: "I don't look at it as I'm a

caretaker of this lost orphan or something. All that kind of talk doesn't do much for me.

I don't really conceptualize or articulate what I do in terms of my function vis-à-vis a

photo as itself. It's more of for whatever reason I'm drawn to visually aesthetic images

and thus want to acquire them." Ron likewise emphasized the aesthetic awareness at

work within him when he decides to purchase a photograph: "I really wasn't interested

in its sociology or where it was taken, or who was in it. Or, that it was a birthday or

anything, a wedding, all I cared about was, is the image compelling? Is the image

exciting? Does the image hold up under the scrutiny of an artistic eye?"

Fred and Ron are blunt about their interests. For them, a lost-and-found photo is

not an emotional object with a back story; it is an art object with an aesthetic appeal. One

might interpret this perspective as being aloof in comparison to the work of those whose

goal is reuniting people with lost photographs, but their role is clear: They are

knowledgeable collectors who carefully assemble collections for the purpose of public

exhibitions, either online, in a museum, or in a photo book. This role is also important to

Sam, who works on projects similar to both Fred and Ron. Sam conveyed the importance

of being seen as a curator versus an archivist: "I know a lot of collectors that would say,

in their heart of hearts, that they were artists. That they're creating this thing. . .I think

especially now I'm much more interested in curating and even feeding the idea of I'm a

curator rather than saying I'm an archivist. To take myself out of the equation is almost

impossible."

These types of statements clarify the differences between those who post

photographs on a blog and label them "found," those who spend time looking for the

owners of lost photographs, and those who are drawn to the artistry of a snapshot.

Overall, participants exhibited self-awareness regarding the photographs they were

exhibiting. The ways in which they spoke about lost-and-found photographs revealed their perceptions of their roles and the field.

The Tangible and the Digital

Throughout the course of my research, I have found that the nature of tangible objects is often discussed in relation to the photograph and its current digital status. In a similar fashion, participants were conscious of the tangible, haptic nature of what they were doing with paper photographs in the digital age. Even though many of the interviewees used digital technologies and talked about the usefulness of digital technology for presenting, preserving, and identifying photographs, they all expressed the importance of the paper photograph.

Alan said, "there's something nostalgic about these photos, even if they're not yours. Some people just like something that's real." Lisa reiterated the primacy of paper photographs in a museum exhibition that she had curated: "But what I feel the purpose of the exhibition, too, is to see the real thing and to feel it, you know. To see the fingerprint, to see the age, to see all that gets a little lost. Or to spend time flipping through all these things and the smells and things in the flea market." Included in Lisa's description of "the real" are accompanying sensory experiences with the paper photograph. In comparison to the digital, the paper photograph is capable of absorbing "finger prints," having a "smell," and accumulating a layer of experience from its owners. Fred also commented on the tactile pleasure of paper photographs and their visual power: "It's a different thing to hold them in your hand as opposed to seeing them on the wall. . .I didn't think any different of it once I saw them on the wall except that I figured they

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seem to have as much power and beauty to them that would hold their own against any paper photograph in our conversations. Claire, who cuts up snapshots to make collages, spoke lovingly of paper photographs:

> Well, you really feel the material when you are using an X-Acto knife and cutting out these images, you really feel the layers of paper that you're cutting through, and you see the silver and you see . . . the surfaces… You're talking real paper here, you're not talking this resin-coated business, which is really different. And it's really nice as just a paper itself, you know.

In this, Claire echoes Patrizia Di Bello who describes the "cuts and wounds" of paper photographs which are erased on the smoothness of digital.

While the mention of paper and digital photographs came up in our conversations, it was seldom for the purposes of comparison. Overall, participants' ideas resonated with Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering's research that explores differences between memory practices in digital and analogue photography and its "awkward coexistence of different modes and uses, purposes and practices, in varying configurations" (590). Their work centers on the processes of digital photography and the "various ways" it is "continuous" with analogue photography (579). Liz, the snapshot collector and lost-and-found book author, alluded to this kind of "continuous" link among the practices between digital and analogue:

> Well I think . . . new technology is great in the same way that I think it was great in 1900 when people could take their own pictures for the first time and they took so many pictures it initiated the arrival of books to put your pictures in. I think the thing that's interesting to me now is that people are more interested in operating the camera and operating the software and operating all the gadgets, more than they're interested in having the actual object in their hands. There's more of a delight in taking the pictures and printing them out.

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The conversations around digital images versus paper that took place during these interviews were temperate compared to the essays that accompany books or that appear on blogs and websites which often suggest a fetishistic yearning for the tangible. Lisa, the museum curator, even pointed out the dual role paper and digital photographs play in her life when she said, "You know what, it's kind of funny because, in a way, I have hardly any of my own photographs in my house of my own family. I have all these other people. So maybe it's just taken over. And maybe because now I take snapshots digitally they never make it physical. I hardly ever print them. They exist on my computer."

Overall, in regard to digital and paper images, there were no dueling tensions pitting the two against each other, but an acknowledgement of the existences and uses of both mediums. Although Joe, who primarily works with digital lost-and-found photos (usually in the form of a memory card or lost camera), did make this observation about the differing emotional connections one can have to paper photographs in comparison to digital images: "I think a picture is a picture and they still carry the same emotional attachment regardless. I think the only difference, maybe, is that older pictures from older technologies, there may be a slight more emotional attachment because they are actual, physical artifacts as opposed to digital." For most of the participants, it seemed there was no battle-between, no need-to-convince. Most participants worked with paper photographs, and their admiration and appraisal of the tangible image's significance in the art world and its importance to personal and public history was not seen as being in opposition to digital imagery.

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Authorship and New Readers

The lost-and-found photograph can be contextualized and managed by its finder, as evident in many of the books and websites and discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation. Throughout statements about lost-and-found photographs which appear on blogs and in photo books, there is the perception that snapshots are, in the eye of the beholder, a malleable visual cue allowing for many possible narratives. Likewise, many of the participants spoke about how lost-and-found photographs allow interpretations from those who find them and those who view them. For example, Alan, the collector of postmortem photos, said the following:

> One of the things is that I feel like I can relate to them differently and you can give the person or whatever it is in the photos any meaning you want. It's a different kind of intimacy. It's more imaginary. It's kind of nice actually. It's kind of nice to imagine what someone could've been. But without all the baggage that comes along with that person.

Participants acknowledged the tendency for those who come into visual contact with lost-and-found photos to assume the role of an author. Sam, the author and self-defined curator, pointed out how these photos provide an entrance into speculating on other people's lives:

> I think there's the whole "found" aspect, which is kind of another thing altogether—sort of these mysterious little glimpses of other people's lives that allow you kind of wild speculation of what those people might have been like. I think that's also very attractive. And in some I think that's probably the most common thing. You know when people come to my site, that's what they're looking for, is that little glimpse into someone's life that feels very specific, but it's also completely not specific, so they can project whatever they want to project into that experience.

Statements on blogs and in photo books often suggest this kind of voyeurism, which surrounds lost-and-found photographs.

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As Sam notes, voyeuristic feeling fuels the varied "conversations" that surround lost-and-found photographs: "I mean there are a million conversations going on using found photographs. Some of them are really about the found photographs and some of them have nothing to do with it, so in some ways, the site for me now is a way to facilitate all of those conversations." Sue, the retired teacher whose website focuses on genealogy, also spoke of assisting in creating "conversations" with her site:

> You know, I'm using all these little conversations that are going on, and hopefully in the negative space around those conversations, that's where the snapshot is. Because it's so big. People took photographs for every reason possible. It's really difficult to get your head around it. So I'm helping by facilitating all these little conversations…

Both Sam and Sue talk about "facilitating" conversations related to lost-and-found photographs. These "conversations" are made possible by presenting photographs for public viewing online, where the audience size is expanded compared to that of a book or museum exhibit of lost-and-found photographs. As Lisa points out, "Yeah, many authors. Many authors. And that's what it is about found, that's what's about a lot of the stuff on the Internet. It's authored by many."

Presenting anonymously photographed images in a public forum is what provides an opportunity for viewers to seize authorship. How this authorship is manifested varies. Billy, an artist and dealer, highlights what happens when viewers see lost-and-found photographs: "You know, anyone in the general public will look at the picture and it will remind them of something. That whole idea of collective consciousness, the way snapshots kind of work, everybody has this kind of … relationship to family photographs, I guess." Jason, who writes fictional pieces to accompany photos on his website, expands

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the notion of "collective consciousness" when he links lost-and-found photographs to specific eras:

> [A]ll these photographs people have put online today … [provide] a window, a valuable window that the photograph represents and so historically it has a context; it has a purpose; it has a value. Creatively, it has a value and, of course, to future generations even in the same family, it could even have a genealogical value, where you could look back and say these are the photographs of my great, great, great grandparents and this is the place they lived in, this is [what] Los Angeles or Georgia looked like at this time. These are the events that affected their lives, these are the things that shaped who we are today.

Like Jason, all of the lost-and-found photo practitioners saw "value" and "purpose" in what they were doing. While their authorship is evident in the ways they choose to display their work to the public, they also see their work as creating authors among the public, who become part of a "collective consciousness" surrounding lost-and-found photos.

Memory and Preservation

There were many times during our conversations about their own projects and experiences when participants talked about the preservation of their own personal photographs. I found these discussions to be some of the most stimulating parts of our conversations. While I did not press for such discussions, they offered valuable insights as participants talked about the role of photographs in their own lives.

Rick, who operates a photo message board, contemplated what might happen to his own photos while discussing attempts to return the slides he purchased:

> [M]y intention was to contact the family and offer to return the slides to them outright, without any blackmail or anything along those lines. Just because I think sometimes with these images and the lost rolls of film and

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Grandpa's camera that sat in a closet from 1950 onward until he passed away and somebody sold it, you know…I think, 'What's going to happen to my photographs? What's going to happen to my negatives? My cameras, et cetera? What's going to happen to my history?'

Sylvia, the antique dealer, showed me early on in one of two face-to-face interviews the photo collages she makes of family members who die. She called these collages "a history of that person." She explained the need for someone to rescue, protect, and preserve photos while showing me photos from her antique store:

[I]t breaks my heart to think of all of these people and my own family unfortunately—but thank goodness for me, I took them all—but they get lost and that's the history of a family that's lost that shouldn't be, really. But then you also have to have someone who continues on in the family come to the end of a family and there's no place else for them to go. As long as there's someone in the family who has a slight interest to collect the photos, keep them for history, for future generations.

In considering the loss of their own family photos, many participants spoke about the links between photos and memory. Joe, who runs a website reuniting photos with their original owners, empathized with those who had lost cameras or photographs and pondered losing his own photos:

I can really sympathize with that because I haven't lost a camera or anything like that myself, but I couldn't imagine having something like that being almost erased. Memories are good, but when you don't have pictures to go back on, it's kind of hard to almost relive certain scenarios and certain feelings that you are feeling at the time because sometimes pictures capture things that we forget about.

Billy took this a step further in suggesting that photographs are more than just a memory trigger, but a stimulus for the construction of memories: "I'm in that photograph or I take my parents' word for it that that's me, but you have no recollection of those particular events. So that idea, of kind of, you know, the idea of memories being fabricated from photographs of the events rather than the actual real event."

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Beyond the preservation and construction of their own memories, some participants connected their practices to broader questions, as was the case with Alan: "Basically I was interested in the idea of memory practice in general. . .But I have interests I guess like anyone else, but, you know, trying to figure out how we use objects and artifacts to identify with time, place, and our personal remembrance. And obviously mourning photography fits within that category. It's a memorial practice."

While participants were quick to note the importance of preserving their own family photographs (thereby ensuring the preservation of their own family memories), interestingly, they did not view their work with others' family photographs through this same lens. Most of the collectors I interviewed did not see themselves as "preservationists." Take Fred, for example, who described his practices in this way: "I might buy albums to take out one or two pictures, and then I don't care about that album anymore. There are certain albums I have kept intact. But generally, I don't care about context because context is not an aesthetic approach. It's a narrative and historical approach, and that's not what I care about." Fred explicitly separates himself from preservation of the "narrative and historical," focusing solely on the aesthetic. Liz did not consider what she was doing to be "preservation," either:

> I don't think what I'm doing is preservation. Again, I think of it as a recycling, repurposing. It's a fluke that these things came to me at all, because I wasn't, I meant to have them in the respect that we tend to have this myth about family photographs staying in the family. So I don't think of it as preservation, because I feel like the album itself was removed from its intended circle, and the way I'm looking at it now is a retelling of the story. And I think that's also a very big focus in vintage photography. We bring our own telling of the story; we make our own narrative in relationship to these pictures…So I don't think I think of that as preservation because I don't really take a scientific conservation treatment methodical point of view. . .

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Even Sylvia, who lamented "the history of a family that's lost and shouldn't be," said she had a "traditional" view of preservation, one which does not apply to her practice of using lost-and-found photographs within collages: "Preservation for me is keeping something intact in its original form, which I'm not doing, so in that sense I don't think it's really preservation because I'm altering its form of its original so it becomes, it is becoming something else, and it's not in its original context anymore. So in that sense, I don't see it as preservation. I see it as having a new life." Both Sylvia's and Liz's explanations of preservation are valid in light of their respective activities—Sylvia uses lost-and-found photos to create new visual objects, while Liz uses them to create new contexts, in the form of photo books. While they are both working on different kinds of projects, they see a "new life" and a "new narrative" that reaches beyond the "intended circle" of those who made or were associated with the photographs. In this sense, they are not strict "preservationists."

However, this understanding of "preservation" reduces the practice to simply keeping collections and historical narratives intact. Yet, in salvaging aesthetically pleasing photographs, is not Fred preserving works of art? In offering new contexts for old images, are not Sylvia and Liz preserving (and sustaining) the life of these photos? While other collectors may deny their work is about preservation, Jenn mentions a simple, yet important, fact: Acquiring other people's photos is a form of preservation. She offered this explanation when discussing antique dealers:

> I think they are preserving. They're not being thrown away. If you go to a yard sale and if they don't sell them, they toss them. So you're saving somebody else's history for them. You may not have a knowledge of anything about them or maybe not even their names or anything but you

> can see what they thought was great to photo[graph]. You can see part of
> their history in the albums because the albums usually include at least
> thirty or forty years of history and sometimes longer.

Though collectors may not be conscious of it, there is a form of preservation running

throughout all lost-and-found projects, whether it be preserving the physical objects or

the memories that might accompany or might be constructed with the photographs once

they are offered for public viewing.

Ethics

There are obvious ethical issues inherent in the act of taking other people's

photographs and posting them online or publishing them in a book, yet these issues rarely

come up, if at all, in presentations such as galleries, websites, and books. Likewise,

legalities of photograph ownership are seldom discussed in these venues. If they were to

come up, it would seem that stances on these issues might be divided between the

collectors and the reuniters. On one hand, there are those who collect or present

photographs without intending to have them identified; on the other hand, there are those

for whom identifying and returning photographs is the most important part of working

with lost-and-found photographs. Prompted in conversation, participants revealed

thoughts on ethical issues related to posting someone's photographs online without his or

her permission, buying and keeping something that may belong to someone else, gaining

notoriety by presenting other people's photographs in galleries or books, and taking

personal photographs out of context and repurposing them for other causes.

Participants spoke about ethics in a number of ways. Alan questioned the

legalities of the whole lost-and-found photo enterprise: "If you take a photograph of a

photograph, or say a scan. . . a scan is almost the same thing as a photograph, in my mind

at least. It's almost like you're creating a new piece of art in general. It's who owns the

copyright of the photograph of the photograph. I don't know what the lines or the

boundaries are." Alan maintains that the digital copy is a "new" creation which is owned

by the person who created it. In doing so, though, he acknowledged that his

understanding may not be correct: "I guess if someone wants to sue me . . .They're not

going to get anything, so…[Laughs] But I'd just be curious to know what's legal.

Because I mean, you see all these postcards out there, greeting cards, using these

vernacular photos."

Beyond considerations of copyright, participants discussed issues surrounding

photographs' original owners and associates. There were speculations on what would

happen if someone came looking for their photographs. A few expressed indifference as

to knowing the identity of people in the photographs. Ron considered what he might do

if he encountered a person in a photograph that was an important image from his book

and exhibition:

> I mean, if I got a call and someone said, "I'm the girl . . . in that
> photograph," it would be of interest to me, that I found that connection,
> but I could live without it. For me, it's light and dark, it's the
> photographic process, the moment, and the sort of whole scenario of that
> picture that I love. If I knew that the girl's name was Sally Johnson and
> she lived in Louisville, Kentucky and she had four children now, that
> would just be really of minor interest to me.

Fred was more adamant about his disinterest in identifying a photograph's original

owner. On the possibilities of giving back a photograph, he said,

> Well "back" meaning they had it to begin with, right? You got rid of it. It
> wasn't stolen from you, was it? It left you for some reason. Maybe you
> didn't pay the amount on your storage locker, which is where a lot of these

things come from, or someone in your family decided to get rid of it. Generally things are gotten rid of because of divorce or death, so the fact that someone is contacting me saying, "I want it back," doesn't seem to make much sense. People normally get rid of things because they want to get rid of them. They might never have thought it would end up in a museum and now might want to capitalize on that.

It is not difficult to see the sheer amount of photographs at antique shops and on *eBay* and know that many, possibly most, of these photographs were abandoned for many of the reasons Fred mentions. Although Fred's response might seem callous, I wonder if he was drawing a distinct difference between what he was doing and what he thought I was doing. At the time of these interviews, I had posted a story about how I had returned an album to a family who had lost it by accident in an estate sale. I could see where asking participants if they would give back photos may be interpreted as a "gotcha" against the background of such recovery stories.

For all but Sam, however, these were hypothetical scenarios. None of the collectors had ever been confronted with someone who recognized family members or themselves in photographs. Sam, though, told this story about someone finding photos on his site:

> [T]he one time anyone contacted me…You know, I put up all these photographs by this guy Martin Johnson who took these road trip photographs. I got 70 carousels of slides; I got 5,000 slides of this guy's photographs, and I put a bunch of them up. And his grandson emailed me and said, I'm so glad that they found a home. That somebody who actually loved them and found them and is presenting his work as photography rather than just, whatever…So that's the one time. If he asked for them back, that would have been really tough because that's one of the best things I have. But I mean, if he really wanted them back, I suppose I would've, but he's the one who sold them, I'm sure.

The hesitation that Sam expressed runs counter to the position of those creating projects for the express purpose of reuniting people with their photographs. Unlike those

primarily interested in the visual content of the lost-and-found photograph, Sue talked

about how she posts as much information to accompany a photograph as possible: "I put

down where I found the photograph, if there are any markings on it. Sometimes I'll find

a photograph and buy one but not the other, but the other photograph is obviously

connected with it. In a couple cases, I actually put the information that was on another

photograph at the same site to provide more information." Sue's practices concerning

lost-and-found photos are connected with her belief that the images rightfully belong with

their original owners. Ted, the physician in Baltimore who collects regional historical

photos, shares this belief, as evidenced in the following reunion story:

> One of my patients had a very unusual last name, and I recognized it as
> one of photos that I had, actually three photos that I'd collected from an
> antique shop and identified and put up on the website. And so during one
> of her visits, and she came back on her next visit and said, "Yes, those are
> my husband's great-something grandparents," so I gave her the photos so
> she would have that for her family.

There is an obvious tension between those who are attempting to identify and reunite

photos with their original owners and those who are interested in the aesthetics of the

snapshot, yet this tension does not appear to be one that causes a division between these

two groups.

Even though they don't seem to be interested in finding out the identities of the

previous owners or associates, many seem to feel the need to respect the dignity of the

people featured in the photographs. For instance, Sam, the collector and webmaster,

pointed out that he does not allow visitors to post comments under the collection he

presents on his website in order to prevent the inevitable sarcastic remarks: "[W]hen you

put up other people's photos online, you kind of want to do it respectfully and not feel

like you're making fun of people. And it all too easily descends into a big joke. So in that light, my site doesn't really allow much interactivity." One need only turn to *YouTube* to see how quickly comments on amateur videos become inappropriate and harsh. Sam, therefore, presents his photographs in a manner not unlike a traditional gallery, in which a viewer can stop and stare for as long as she or he wishes, without writing on the walls. Sue also spoke of "respect": "I have a comment on the site about how, you know, the photographs are there but I want them treated with respect, in the spirit of the site, not to be used for frivolous purposes."

What would appear to be an obvious topic, privacy, didn't really come up that much. Yet, privacy concerns were acknowledged by Joe, who puts photos up from lost cameras, when he offered these thoughts:

> There has been some concern, not a whole lot of concern, and I haven't really thought a lot about this concern, because, as I said, I think the positive outweighs the negative a lot in this case, but a lot of people are saying, "There's privacy issues here, you could be sued," et cetera, et cetera, and, I mean, that is a reality. But ultimately, I'm trying to do a good thing and give people the opportunity to do a good thing for a stranger and I think that people that are presented with that opportunity will more often than not take it. . .No one has requested pictures to be taken down.

Those who work with lost-and-found photographs may consider privacy issues, but their ultimate concern is to fulfill their specific missions. In the case of a collector / exhibitor, the goal is not to find previous owners, but to display lost-and-found photos for an audience. For those working to reunite people with their missing photos, the goal is to collect as much identification data as possible, and to share it with as wide an audience as possible. Because the public sharing of lost-and-found photos is central to the aims of both the collector and the reuniter, the ethics of publishing other people's photographs

did not appear to be a concern among participants. They did not see what they were doing as "stealing" photographs.

Discussion

The conversations I had with participants told a nuanced story of lost-and-found photo projects. Our conversations offered a more thoughtful account of practices, separate from the managed statements produced for specific audiences, like the human-interest newspaper articles constructed to create sympathy around the loss of photographs, or like the essays in photo books which offer corresponding statements of fascination with paper images and disdain for digital photography. While these participants' individual projects reveal different types of practices—from the genealogical to the artistic—that separate them, they are all working to create an easily accessible visual landscape of everyday photographs. All of these participants have the urge to make photographs public, to "do something" with photographs that come into their possession. Each participant is working with essentially the same material, photographs that once belonged to someone else, and behind the scenes, they are directing the varied ways lost-and-found photos are exhibited and viewed. While I discerned a love for paper photographs within each participant, more important than that love is the drive to make photographs available for exhibition. As Rick said of the Vietnam slides he purchased that would have been thrown away, "they're actually being seen, which is what I think needs to happen with them. . .Images need to be seen by as many people as possible."

I saw their dedication to photographs as pushing beyond Nancy Martha West's analysis of the discourse surrounding many lost-and-found photo projects. West posits that projects often employ discovery narratives, narrative indeterminacy, and narrative anthropomorphization to impose authorship onto photographs. While there was evidence of these narratives throughout our conversations, they were not defined or carefully crafted for an audience. When Ron told the story of the exhibition visitor telling him that he (Ron) was the "real" photographer of the photos being exhibited because he had found them, this was not relayed as a story of magical discovery. Rather, Ron offered it as an example of his prowess for finding, through much work, artistic photographs among the many for sale. In fact, none of the participants expressed wonderment about their endeavors—the photos they discovered were not, in James Kaufman's words, "magical objects in the world of undisputed truth" (244), and these practitioners did not, as West contends, "invest the scene of discovery with magical properties" (87). Instead, they were often very matter-of-fact in their accounts.

While some of them may not have been interested in the origins of the photographs, they were deeply invested in photography. This is not an enchanted world of anonymous photographs for these participants, rife with revelations, but a more prosaic environment in which lost-and-found photos play two distinct roles: as art objects, and as articles for identifying the anonymous. The wistful "Who were these people?" appeal that is so often cited as the fascination of these projects was not present in my conversations with the project participants.

The Lost-and-Found Photography Cycle

As discussed in the conclusion to chapter 4, lost-and-found photo practices are similar to the practices of everyday photography. Claire, talking about looking for photographs to cut up, said, "it takes me hours to find them, and I'm sifting and sorting and kind of looking, you know." In this way, she is not unlike a person picking the right photographs to show in a family album or on social media. The question could be asked of both: "Why did you choose that photo and not this one or that one?" In the same vein, the reuniters' desire to identify people in photographs is not unlike a family genealogist's desire to do the same. The creative work involved in setting up blogs and websites for lost-and-found photo projects is akin to the contemporary practice of building and arranging personal images in photo albums on social networks or on a photo blog of personal photographs.

Before these photographs came into the possession of lost-and-found photo practitioners, before they were assembled for public viewing, people made them, organized them, placed them in albums, or threw them in a box under the bed; they talked about them, showed them, and displayed the photos in their homes. Lost-and-found photographs and projects thus exist within the intimate spaces of everyday objects as well as within the domain of public consumption. They are in a constant state of movement between these two realms. As I have considered the popularity of these projects and have talked to people who create them, I have pondered how these lost-and-found photo projects might inform personal photographic habits among those who have interacted with them. It has put me in mind of Jose van Dijck's definition of "mediated memories," which Dijck defines as "activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of

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media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others" (21). Lost-and-found photo projects can be seen as "media technologies" which influence the subsequent activities and objects which viewers construct. The results of such experiences, "mediated memories," Dijck argues, are not static, but "move back and forth between the personal and collective, and they travel up and down between past and future" (22).

It is in light of Dijck's framework that I propose a pathway (Figure 17) along which all lost-and-found photo projects travel.
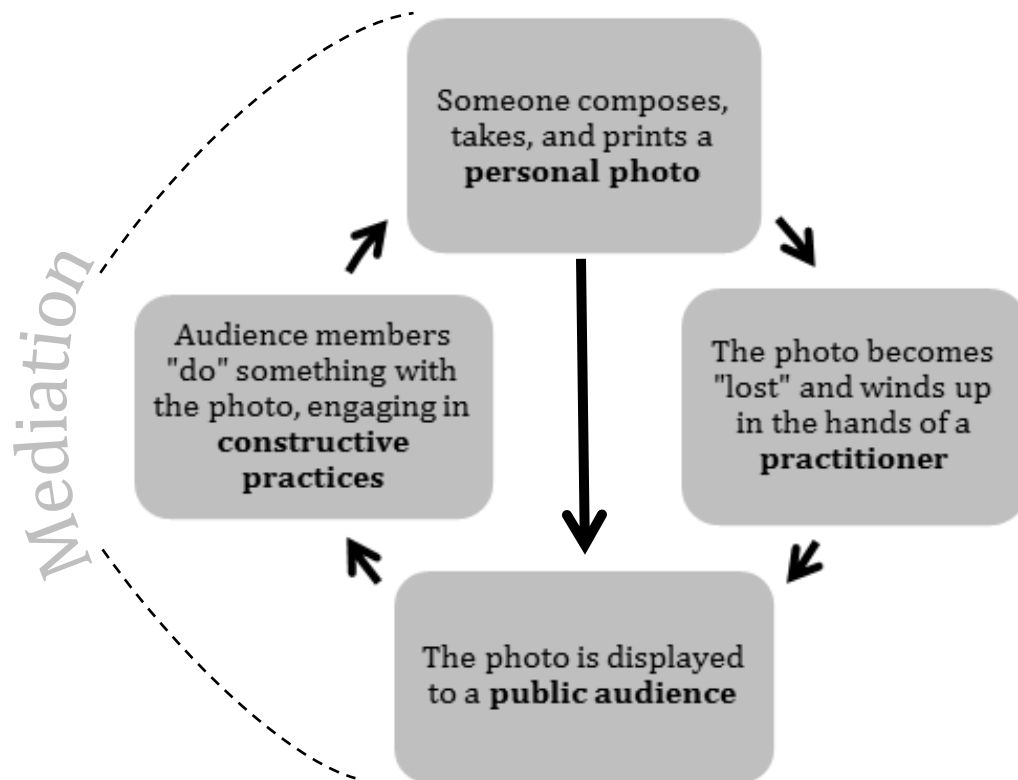
Figure 17: The lost-and-found photography cycle.

Personal Photography

It begins with personal photographs made as part of everyday life. These photographs can be paper or digital. Such photos inhabit the life of a person in a variety of ways, and for many they become important personal artifacts. Here is where the many activities and emotions surrounding the photos occur. Here is where the "ritual of integration" within the family, about which Pierre Bourdieu writes, takes place (30). Here is where "the possibility of telling one's own stories" and "engaging in self-representations," of which Don Slater writes, transpires (144).

Despite their importance to their owners, these photos often get away. Echoing Barbara Gould's concern with making a plan about what should be done with photographs after one's death, some interview participants questioned what would become of their photographs when they died. Rick asked, "What's going to happen to my photographs? What's going to happen to my negatives? My cameras, et cetera? What's going to happen to my history?" Sylvia hoped that there would be "someone in the family who has a slight interest to collect the photos, keep them for history, for future generations." As collectors of others' "lost" photos, the project participants were very aware that even cherished photos wind up in places like antique shops, *eBay,* estate sales, and ultimately in the hands of a lost-and-found photo practitioner.

The Lost-and-Found Photo Practitioner

The lost-and-found photo practitioner comes into possession of photographs that have been lost or abandoned in a number of different ways. Each practitioner is, as Fred observed of his own practices, "drawn" to certain images. If the people who made the

photographs are, in the words of Yannick Geffroy, "our first visual anthropologists," lost-and-found photo practitioners are their curators and archivists as they pick and choose photos to be seen, working beyond institutional rules and boundaries and creating conditions which allow for a large viewing audience. They make decisions regarding which photographs should be selected for exhibition, how and where they should be exhibited. It does not matter if the photographs are for art exhibits or genealogical websites—each practitioner engages in a careful curatorial process, choosing images and formats based on his/her own criteria for the pursuit of his/her own goals.

While there has been, as John Ibson pointed out in his study of postwar boyhood and homophobia within "found" photographs, a lack of scholarly work on everyday photography as cultural evidence (68), there is no lack of these photographs online. Hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of photographs have been scanned and presented on the Internet by the lost-and-found photo practitioners presented in these interviews.

As revealed in my interviews with them, these practitioners are what artist and scholar Uriel Orlow might call "archivists of the future" who are "not trying to know or understand history but simply to meditate on its associations and become ever more absorbed in a contemplative devotion to its images" (404). The devotion to personal photographs is evident throughout these interviews. There do appear to be varying levels to this devotion as the interviewees not only have different motivations, but different personal lives that impact their time to pursue their different projects and possibly their ability to financially participate in activities that involve buying old photographs.

The Public Audience

From the hands of the practitioners, the photographs are offered for public viewing in locations like museums, on blogs and websites, or in photo books. There are many ways and locations in which people may encounter lost-and-found photographs; these interactions have increased over recent years as the number of museum exhibitions that feature snapshots has grown and as social networks such as *Facebook* and *Instagram* have become popular locations for promoting and presenting lost-and-found photo projects.

But who are the people who consume these projects? Are they sitting at home surfing the Internet on their home computers, with folders full of their own personal photographs just a few clicks away? Or are they in a museum, looking at framed and matted snapshots in a quiet space? If so, do they buy a catalogue of the exhibition on their way through the gift shop? Are they "losers" of photographs who are conducting an Internet search for their lost photos and, in so doing, happen across one of the many blogs or websites?

My study does not look at how this diverse audience of online web surfers, book readers, museum goers, and antique browsers interacts with lost-and-found photographs. This makes the answer to the question, "How does the audience receive these public presentations of lost-and-found photographs?" speculative. Perhaps they view each project just as each collector intends, using presentation style and textual accompaniments as a guide. They may, like some of the collectors I interviewed, see lost-and-found images as art and make connections to the snapshot aesthetics in art photography. They might stare and wonder who the people were, which may lead them

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to make connections to their own family albums which may also include photos of unidentified people. They may have private interior dialogues with the photographs. Or perhaps they engage in dialogues via online community sites, as Sam and Sue noted in revealing that their projects were stimulating "conversations."

Billy suggested that old photographs "remind" the viewer of something, but *what*? Are the photographs a reminder of the viewers' own photos? Or are they reminders of the viewers' own mortality? David Deitcher, author of *Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840-1918*, writes that his study of photos revealing close personal relationships reminds him that "no children of my own will survive to remember my morbid attraction to these mementos of forgotten men, caught in a moment of intimate connection" (14). He confesses "the suspicion that some of my eight nieces and nephews may forget me too" (25). He wonders, as I do, "Are some individuals more susceptible than others to interacting with old photographs in this way?" (19). As a heavy consumer and as someone who introduces people to all forms of lost-and-found photographs, I have witnessed and experienced many reactions. These reactions have ranged from emotional connections that produce stories of viewers' own photographs to conversations about the place of snapshots in the art world of a museum or book. Sometimes those conversations include statements like, "I've got photos like this at home" or "I never thought of snapshots as art." There appears to be an audience for all manner of presentations offered throughout this dissertation, and any number of ways in which viewers engage with lost-and-found photos.

The Constructive Practices

In discussing the public perceptions of their many different photo projects, the participants in these interviews are clear: Something happens as a result of looking at lost-and-found photographs. I wonder how much of what happens while looking at lost-and-found photograph projects feeds back into an audience's own photographic practices. Roland Barthes' concepts of *studium* and *punctum* are helpful in considering how a viewer may encounter lost-and-found photographs. *Studium* is the cultural interpretation or relationship that people have with everyday photographs which allows them to thumb through a book or walk through an exhibit. Previous knowledge and ownership of personal photographs make these photographs readable. When viewing these projects, *punctum* is the moment when the viewer is moved. The catalyst for this response might be something obvious, like a look on someone's face or a pose of a subject that could remind viewers of their own photographs.

A lost-and-found project, whether it be a massive collection of personal postmortem photographs from the nineteenth century or a simple website that uses lost-and-found photographs for fictional narrative purposes, is in the business of implicitly and explicitly prompting constructive practices among viewers. For instance, thanks to some of these presentations, the photographs' previous owners will find them and bring them home, where new stories may be made of what was lost and found. Some projects offer photographs to new owners, who may invent narratives to accompany them or who may experience through these photos a flash of memory as they consider their own personal photographs.

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Viewing a lost-and-found photo project is not a passive act—viewing leads to constructing. For some, it inspires the construction of stories. Tamara West posits in her examinations of "(re)viewing" old photographs, "Images serve not only to initiate and expand stories, they are also a space in which to include others in this process" (189). These projects offer up what Marianne Hirsch might call "leftovers" or "items that are left to be collected and assembled in many ways" that in the end "tell a variety of stories, from a variety of often competing perspectives" (13). Susan Hiller beautifully describes how collections can beget "at least two possible stories" (42). In the case of lost-and-found photo projects, there is the story the practitioner tells, but as Hiller writes, there is also "the story that the listener is understanding, or hearing, or imagining on the basis of the same objects" (42). Liz, the author of three lost-and-found photo books, describes a similar response in noting how, in one of her projects, an "album itself was removed from its intended circle and the way I'm looking at it now is a retelling of the story. . .We bring our own telling of the story, we make our own narrative in relationship to these pictures"

In so doing, those who interact with lost-and-found photo projects are engaging in meaning-making. Amy Shuman writes,

> In everyday life, the circumstances in which stories travel beyond their owners and beyond the content of shared experiences can attempt to produce shared interpretations. Access to meaning is controlled by access to stories. But stories very rarely stay with their owners. In fact, what might be the most compelling feature of a storytelling is the possibility that its power to transfer and transform will change the meaning of experience. (6)

Encounters with lost-and-found photos, like encounters with stories, "represent more than an individual experience" (Shuman 6). The experience extends beyond itself, its impact seeping into other interactions. Accordingly, many participants expressed a belief that

their projects offer spaces for conversations and stories not only about the photographs they offer to the public, but also about the photographs viewers currently have in their possession or those which they will eventually inherit. Thus, the meaning of viewers' experiences with their own personal photographs changes. Photographs in lost-and-found photo projects may inspire viewers to attempt to tell the stories of their own photographs, stories that have not yet been told. They may influence viewers' preservation practices in the hope that photos do not get lost. Viewers of lost-and-found photo projects may even be moved to share their personal photographs in public spaces, influencing the constructive practices of other viewers. And the cycle goes on.

Conclusion

It has been almost six years since I conducted interviews with this group of participants. They have all continued with their projects. They have published more books, curated more museum shows, added more photos to their blogs, reunited more people with lost photographs, written more stories about photographs, sold more photographs online and in their shops. While it is impossible to know if their perceptions have changed, from what I can observe, their practices, for the most part, have not. What has changed is that their projects now exist within an environment in which a great many vintage personal photographs are being scanned and uploaded to the Internet. Many of these photos are a part of a new data stream curated by hashtags, causing an intertwining of everyday photographs with lost-and-found photographs. There is already interesting evidence of new kinds of projects on Instagram that blur the line between lost-and-found photo projects compiled of other people's photographs and stories of people "finding"

their own old photographs. The increasing use of hashtags such as #oldphotos, #snapshots, or #foundphotos is linking diverse projects across the Internet, conflating the practices of the professional and the hobbyist, the dealer and the reuniter, the lost and the found.

These interviews came out of an attempt to understand a group of people who work with lost-and-found photographs in different ways. The varying intentions of the practitioners, as revealed in these conversations, provide a framework for thinking of lost-and-found photograph projects as important ventures that may impact cultural activities such as personal archive construction, autobiographical storytelling, and both public and personal memory construction.

The perceptions and practices provided in these interviews offered both an affirmation of formal statements that accompany lost-and-found projects as well as more nuanced perceptions about the creation and meaning of lost-and-found photo projects. Participants defined their motives and practices with terms like "adoption" and "aesthetic," or they self-identified as "archivists." Our conversations downplayed the comparisons often made between paper and digital images. There was no disdain for digital images in the love participants showed for paper. Like the books and websites which insinuate that lost-and-found photos are blank slates, participants offered a variety of ways in which images spark conversations and new narratives, created by viewers. Lost-and-found photo projects populate a visual world with other people's photographs that participants found to be part of collective memory and ultimately, I posit from the interviews, an important aspect of preserving memory for the public.

Rick, the man who tracked down the photographer of the Vietnam slides, looked

to a future without paper photographs: "What's going to happen to lost-and-found? I mean presumably that at some point in time, all the possible rolls of film have been developed. All the possible images at antique stores everywhere have been snatched up and stowed away." Rick's comment makes me think of Jenn's adoption album that is "stowed away." As it stands now, the album is part of an unfinished project stalled somewhere along the lost-and-found photo route depicted in Figure 17. Someone took the pictures and labeled the photographs with captions and names and arranged them in an album. At some point the album left the owner who assembled it and it ended up in a yard sale for a few dollars, where Jenn came into possession of it. And here is where it now lives, in an in-between state, not yet completing the cycle by being made public, which would allow the images to be seen and interacted with. There are no new constructive practices associated with this album—no one is "doing" anything with it. Though my worries about the ethics of posting Jenn's adoption album online are warranted, I wonder, both because of my participants' devotion to photographs coupled with the gusto with which people are posting all manners of photographs online, if I might be overly sensitive. While I don't think I am the person to send it on to the next stage of its journey, as Jenn had hoped, I think that it needs to be made public. It needs to be seen, if only for the purpose of identification. It should become a lost-and-found photo project. I believe that it should take "another journey" in the hands of the people I spoke to. They would reproduce the album and jettison it on a public journey, where it would enter the visual world of art, history, and memory.

CHAPTER 6

PHOTOS DIE, UNLESS WE TALK ABOUT THEM: THE FUTURE OF LOST-AND-FOUND PHOTOS

"I'm just looking for a way to get these back, I just don't know where to turn to."
-Caller from voicemail entitled "20 Photos and 20 Years"

<u>Introduction: Revisiting Research Questions</u>

At the time I began exploring lost-and-found personal photographs, I had a modest collection of snapshots purchased in antique stores and on *eBay*. As a scholar, my knowledge of snapshots came primarily from readings about personal photography, concentrating mostly on photographs as part of everyday life. I had spent a lot of time considering the sociological inspections of Richard Chalfen and the writings of Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, which acknowledge the piercing emotional appeal of personal photographs while contributing a critical edge that questions the photograph's place in culture. Also running through some of my early readings—whether in newspaper articles, websites, or introductions to photo books—was the quandary of what to do with photographs that had once belonged to someone else. This is a question that is asked in different ways, by different people, for different reasons. I thought at the time that I knew the answer to this question, for though I was aware of the undeniable artistry of "found" snapshots that had (at times) the look of a Walker Evans or even a Diane Arbus photograph, I had also just reunited Rufus and Herndon Elliot with their lost family photo album. As a result of this "reuniter" event, I leaned towards the idea that the definitive activity one could perform with lost photographs was to find their owners.

Viewing "found" photos through this perspective, and using my prior exposure to and study of the field of lost-and-found photos as backdrop, I gathered a diverse collection of materials and interviews with the following questions to guide my research, divided into categories of "practices" and "perceptions":

Practices

- Are there common types of lost-and-found events?

- Are there common types of circumstances in which loss occurs?

- In what ways do people try to recover what is lost?

- Are there common kinds of discovery?

- Do digital technologies play a role in lost-and-found events?

Many questions regarding lost-and-found photo practices were explored throughout this project, though some questions were less instrumental in leading me to a deep exploration of lost-and-found photos than others. For example, the question of *Are there common types of circumstances in which loss occurs?* was answered fairly quickly by scanning newspaper human interest stories which announced circumstances surrounding the loss of photos in weekly headlines. I found stories of theft, divorce, death, moving, natural disaster, and war, tinged with descriptions of heartbreak and sometimes serendipitous discovery. The unsolicited comments on the *Lostandfoundphotos.org* blog also provided a glimpse of modern "loss" events, as repeated stories about memory cards (the modern equivalent to a roll of film) lost while on vacation, left in taxi cabs, on planes, and at tourist locations were posted by visitors.

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The visitors to the blog offered stories with pleas for the return of not their expensive cameras, but the memory cards containing their photographs. What became clear over the course of writing this dissertation was the frequency with which these circumstances occur, as well as the similarity of the events and descriptions concerning the loss of photographs, but this discovery did not yield much that deepened my study.

However, the questions *In what ways do people try to recover what is lost?* and *Do digital technologies play a role in lost-and-found events?* led me down a much more interesting path, providing a richer inspection of the lost-and-found photo world than I had initially intended to pursue.

In exploring the ways in which people try to recover lost photo objects, I was immediately struck by the activities of "reuniters" who try to get photographs into the hands of previous owners. This seemed in line with my initial contention that the highest aim of lost-and-found photo practitioners is to retrace a photo's path back to the person who lost it. Yet, I also encountered "reuniters" who attempt to place photographs in new, caring custodians' hands, which offers a different spin on the theme of recovery. Then there are the "reuniters" who go to great lengths to place photographs in the public eye, in the hopes that people in the photographs will be recognized: they set up galleries for these images and select formats (e.g., social networks) with the goal of maximum exposure, which ultimately lends to their efforts the air of a curator or archivist creating an exhibition. So, even within those lost-and-found photo practices that would seem to offer the most basic understanding of recovery activity, I found variations of the theme.

The question of how people try to recover lost-and-found photos changed substantially as I explored the topic further and as I came to understand "recovery" not

only as recovering the physical photographic object, but also as attempting to harness and direct the myriad meanings attached to photos as well as the way viewers should look upon them. Photos are "recovered" by practitioners who view them as art, as history, as novelties, as genealogical markers. As they collect photographs from thrift stores, flea markets, *eBay* auctions, estate sales, and garbage piles, they are, in a sense, "rescuing" photographs from an unknown future. Photo book authors are also "recovering" the tactile nature of photographs by offering tangible publications, and they are "recovering" the meaning of photography in general through their essays about amateur photography, memory, previous owners of photographs, the anonymous nature of photographs and digital photography. The practice of recovery made itself clear through my examination of online projects as well. Websites, blogs, and social networks featuring museum curators, archivists, essayists, reuniters, and dealers worked to present, organize, and contextualize the lost photo to an online audience. Throughout the field of lost-and-found photography, I found evidence of recovery efforts within the diversity of projects designed to impress on an audience the vital importance of lost-and-found photographs.

The question of whether digital technologies play a role in lost-and-found events likewise led me in a direction I had not anticipated. When I began to look into how the move from the printed to the digital world was affecting the practices surrounding lost-and-found photographs, I had assumed that such discussions would be framed by pitting the paper photograph against the digital photograph. I had thought that within various lost-and-found photo projects, I would find treatises on the superiority of the paper photograph, detailing the losses incurred by the rising dominance of digital images. While I did find that many appraisements conveyed a sense of nostalgia towards paper

photographs and appreciation for paper's dogged endurance to stay in circulation, the conversations provided more important revelations about the use of digital technologies.

To the collector, images that are born digital are of no real interest—not as subjects of study nor as objects of scorn; rather, it is the process by which images are made to function in the digital world that is most meaningful. What I came to understand is that digital technologies are essential in building the online archives which, as described above, are essential to the field. The paper photograph is still valued, but it is now being digitized, and the digital world is now supporting the preservation of these paper objects. The digitization process is making it easier for dealers, artists, authors, and historians to promote their projects, making paper photographs available to a wider audience. And viewers can now find these objects more easily, aided by the algorithms of search engines and through the use of hashtags and keywords assigned by project creators. Digital technologies supporting photographs are moving the conversation far beyond questions of what lost-and-found photographs are (i.e., Must they be paper objects?) into an exploration of the ways in which they can be shared, displayed, and identified.

While the questions I designed to explore common practices seemed as if they would reveal the techniques and habits of buying, sorting, and presenting photographs, these activities were mentioned only anecdotally in interviews with practitioners. Perhaps I could have followed this line of inquiry had I been looking at one specific group of practitioners, such as the collectors. Yet, though the interviews did not yield many "behind-the-scenes" details regarding the creation of lost-and-found photo projects, after examining multiple projects, I determined that archive-building stands out as the

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most important and most common practice throughout the field. What I found within

practices across categories (e.g., dealers, reuniters, curators) was the building of

archives—big and small, organized and disorganized—packed with photos. This allows

for access to a wide range of images that may have never been available to the public

offering visual evidence with an unknown reach. The wide use of online galleries, in

particular, makes photographs available to the larger public, allowing for potential

archive activation, as explored by Michael Shank and Jeffrey Schnapp.

On the surface, the answers to the questions may seem obvious regarding

practices: people scan, organize, post, curate. Yet, these activities are not simple. They

are tangled up in such cultural forces as digitization, visual reception, and notions of

recovery. These activities emerge from distinct perceptions that shape all lost-and-found

photo projects as I discuss below.

Perceptions

- Are there common perceptions of lost-and-found photographs?
- How do people identify and describe their relationships to personal photographs in the stories they tell about lost and found personal photographs and events?
- What kinds of meanings do people attribute to photographs that are lost and found?
- Do people believe meanings of personal photographs change after lost-and-found events?
- What perceptions of loss and discovery do people express when talking about lost and found personal photographs and events?

- How do people feel about the public display of lost photographs?

Though I didn't know it at the time, the questions I developed regarding perceptions of lost-and-found photographs were really seeking answers from two different groups. One set of questions sought information from audiences of lost-and-found photographs. The other looked to explore perceptions from those who "own" these photographs: those who make lost-and-found photo projects as well as those who have lost or found photographs. In terms of those who experience lost-and-found photo projects as audience members, while I encountered readers' reviews of lost-and-found photo books on *Amazon.com* and occasional discussion threads on *Flickr* created by those who were simply viewers of vernacular photos, this was not an area I was able to explore fully. Thus the question *How do people feel about the public display of lost photographs?* was not answered. The question that provided the best prompt for exploring perceptions was the following: *Are there common perceptions of lost-and-found photographs?*

Though there are different goals attributed to lost-and-found photo projects, the most important perception held by everyone within the field is that old photographs are important. This importance is beyond the nostalgia or mystery that is often attached to old personal photographs by those who find them. Such sentiments are certainly widely used to describe old snapshots, yet this could be an audience-friendly construct intended to prompt viewers to connect what they are looking at with their own photographs Though I found elements of these feelings within the lost-and-found photo projects I examined, I do not believe these are as relevant to some of the practitioners.

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The most common perception found throughout all of the presentations and interviews was that the anonymous nature of lost-and-found photographs allows for what some might consider a "blank slate." It is this impression that creates an opening for multiple meanings, allowing for new narratives, interpretations, conversations, and even a voyeuristic fascination. The meanings which emerge from lost-and-found photographs after they come into the hands of those who find them are revealed in the projects that are constructed around them. Consider the genres of lost-and-found books examined in chapter 4: the art book, the scholarly book, the museum exhibition catalogue, the visual history book, and the novelty book. In each, the authors' notions of just what lost-and-found photographs mean to them (and what they feel such objects should mean to their readers) are reinforced by presentation style, publication house, and introductory essays. Consider the blogs, websites, and social media sites that direct visitors to find their own meanings in the photographs they present. The pervasive presentations of lost-and-found photos which imply that these images are open-ended carry with them a complexity that goes beyond mere nostalgia. With Nancy Martha West, I, too, ask, "[W]hy does this flirtation with other people's lives make me slightly uneasy?" (80). Yet, the uneasiness is tempered by the frame of nostalgia, an audience-friendly construct. It is as if they are saying, "Look at these photos. They are old, like your old photos. You can make up anything you want about them."

At the same time that I was examining these questions by collecting photography books, online projects, and news stories, I designed a project to collect stories about lost-and-found photographs via a Skype voicemail system: people could call a number and tell their stories after the beep. Because I did not interview or survey the general public

during this dissertation, the voicemails and the blog offered an additional vantage point, supplementing the research, interviews, and other materials I had gathered. This project assisted in answering the following questions:

- What perceptions of loss and discovery do people express when talking about lost and found personal photographs and events?
- How do people identify and describe their relationships to personal photographs in the stories they tell about lost and found personal photographs and events?
- What kinds of meanings do people attribute to photographs that are lost and found?
- Do people believe meanings of personal photographs change after lost-and-found events?

Callers left short vignettes, pleas, discovery narratives, and musings on the site. Through them, I discovered that the attitudes of callers who were "finders" aligned with many of the dominant themes manifested within the contributions of scholars and collectors. Finders, for the most part, shared the perceptions, sentiments, and practices of the online practitioners described in chapter 4. While not as precise in their fit, they exhibited the hallmarks of reuniters, archivists, and museum curators.

For example, two callers were seeking to reunite people with lost photographs. In a story I titled "Found in Hawaii," a man living in Hawaii tells of how he believed the camera he purchased on *eBay* to be stolen after developing rolls of film he found in the camera and in the camera bag:

> What was on there were really personal photos. I mean, there was a

couple snapshots from someone's wedding and somebody's Valentines date...And the woman in the picture looked like she was pregnant…And then later photos showed the same woman in the hospital giving birth and then pictures of the baby, pictures of the proud parents with the baby immediately after the baby was born. So when I saw all these, whoever took these photos wants these photos back, and I figured the camera had probably been stolen, so what to do?

He contacted the seller and got nowhere. He contacted the police and got nowhere. In classic "reuniter" fashion, he viewed these photos as important and he was trying to do whatever possible to reconnect the couple with their photos. He offered this hopeful conclusion to his voicemail:

> I'm hoping to reunite the rightful owner with the photos and the camera. And I also put up a lost-and-found notice on *Craigslist*. So far I haven't had any responses. One person did write in and say, "Hey, neat thing you're doing, good luck with it." But so far nothing. I keep hoping. It doesn't cost me anything to keep the *Myspace* up or the listing on *Craigslist* . . . so maybe one of these days I might get an email from someone saying, "I think these are my photos."

Another participant was a man from North Carolina who, for twenty years, has held on to photographs that he received instead of his own in a mail-order film developing mix-up. He called after he searched the Internet to find out how to return the photos. He tells this story in a call I titled "20 Photos and 20 Years":

> I received some pictures by accident probably over twenty years ago, and I never got them back to the rightful owner. It's a family gathering at Christmas and small children who would probably be in their twenties or thirties, they were small grandkids at the time. Sure would be something the older people would cherish . . . the family. I'm just looking for a way to get these back, I just don't know where to turn to. Been looking all day for a place on the web to try to find out what to do and how to do it.

There is earnestness in both these callers' voices as they detail the contents of the photos and their desire to return them.

Callers were also "archivists," compiling collections based on themes or locales. A caller who appears to be both an archivist and reuniter bought a collection of photographs which he surmises to be from World War II-era Eastern Europe at a Santa Rosa flea market in the 1970s. In 2005 he dug them out to examine them more closely and to offer a short historical analysis of their content. He ends his call, which I titled "And I Said How Much for All of Them," by noting his intent to put them online: "To really do anything with the materials I'm going to have to give them much more time than I have presently, and I intend to scan them and probably put them up on a website and use that in some way to see if I can find some of the people." Another caller who described an archivist intent as well as a reuniter's heart purchased a large collection of Vietnam-era slides. He tells the story in "Vietnam Slides": "I immediately took a day off of work and spent the whole day—probably ten or twelve hours scanning. And I just couldn't stop looking at them." His mission is to sort and archive them for an online audience. He goes on to talk about the large amount of views from the public the images received and how he eventually found the man who took the photos.

There were two "museum curator" calls. One woman had purchased a cardboard suitcase of old family photos at a yard sale and mused that it was "strange to have an entire family's history," as she described her plans to create an online presentation of the photos:

> [I]t was also really cool to be able to go through this and see all these perfect little pieces of Americana…It's a very cool thing to have, probably have about six hundred pictures, all of the same family. . .I've scanned the loose ones; I figure they should probably be preserved since some of them weren't in great shape, and ended up putting them on a *Flickr* account.

This caller is on her way. An initial fascination with finding old photos led to her urge to

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preserve "these perfect little pieces of Americana" and to the intention of putting them online for people to see. She offers categories the images might be assigned as she describes some of the details from the photos, such as dates, vacations, holidays, and a birthday party. Another caller left a lengthy two-part voicemail about his extensive collecting habits. Within his story is a theme that emerged often within photo books, online projects, and my interviews with practitioners: the unique "eye" possessed by the curator:

> I was looking through their donations in the back, not intending to steal anything, but I came across a package of photos. Now I know they are not going to sell them, so you know, fair game. They are going to throw them away. So I'm flipping through, and it was a big wad of photos that were all basically party photos. And I knew I had to have this package when I came across one photo three-quarters of the way through the stack of a woman flashing her breasts, and there's three guys off to her left all looking at a Gameboy or something, completely paying no attention to her.

Much like the men in the image, those who donated this package of photographs didn't recognize what was right in front of them. The caller, however, described himself as seeing what they could not. What others had discarded, this man recognized as unique and valuable.

In a call entitled "The Photo that Really Struck Me," a finder tells of an online discovery made as a result of a digital archive. The caller's story is reminiscent of Jo-Anne Driessens' experience of finding ancestral photos within a museum collection. The caller recalled discovering family photos online while doing research for her doctorate:

> A photo that really struck me was a picture of my grandmother when she would have been a fairly young woman. . .This picture just totally intrigued me. I'd never seen it before. Here I was looking at it on the web. This, of course, sparked thoughts for me about my grandmother, what her life was like before she moved as a young woman to Brooklyn.

This participant's comments reflect the role of the photograph as a memory prompt as well as evidence of activation of an archive, as the placement of a photo by someone else is the catalyst for retrospection and a hunt to find out more information.

Overall, the experiences and contributions of "finder" participants within this project echoed those I encountered within the literature and activities surrounding the world of lost-and-found photography. Though here through voicemail, the sounds of earnestness and excitement and persistence can he heard. Their perceptions of the lost photos are clearly aligned through their voice with the idea that they should either be returned, presented, or interpreted.

Finding the Project's Meaning

What I hope has been made clear throughout this dissertation is that the voice of the "finders" is strong—in scholarship, photo books, websites, and museum exhibitions. As I've collected data and interviewed people about their projects, I, too, have been a "finder," practicing many of the same activities as those working on lost-and-found photo projects. I've bought and sold photographs on *eBay*. I've reunited people with their lost photos. I've created online galleries, delivered conference presentations, and curated unique collections. In most of the chapters of this dissertation, I have offered small personal narratives which I have used to frame the data and critical statements incorporated throughout this project. In chapter 1, I described the anonymous British woman's photo album I had reassembled from scattered photos for sale at a used bookshop, along with my attempt to create an experimental documentary out of it. In

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chapter 2, I told of the last photos of my father before and after his death, images I cannot now look at but may one day be able to view, may one day "find." Chapter 3 began with the story of reuniting a father and son in Lookout Mountain, Tennessee with an old family photo album that had been accidentally sold at an estate sale. Chapter 5 recounted the travels of a photo album that featured Depression-era photos from an orphanage, how the album made its way to a research participant, then to me, and then back to her.

In most of these activities, I have played the role of the "finder," and the meanings I have drawn from the experiences have much in common with many of the projects presented in this study. However, it is when I consider myself in the role of the "loser" that the true significance of this project reveals itself. For it is the voice of the "loser" that is largely absent within the field of lost-and-found photography. It is in giving this voice an audience that this dissertation project has something unique to offer.

The experience that called my attention to the need to consider the perspective of the "losers" (even above that of the "finders") was helping my mother move when she was no longer able to live in her house. I worked to clean out my childhood room and, most importantly, the photo albums. There were boxes of photographs, over thirty slide trays and two massive plastic bins of photo albums which had been sent to my mother after my grandmother's death. There were boxes of slides and some photographs which had belonged to my grandfather that I had retrieved from my grandmother after he died. There was also a box of high-quality compact discs onto which my grandfather had scanned his old slides. Boxes, bins, piles of family photographs, all of which had been saved, and all of which needed to be moved out and on.

I wondered how I would ever get them all out of the house. Beyond that, I wondered how I would be able to preserve them all, generations of family images that would need to be added to the large collection of photos of my own branch of the family tree—my wife and my children—a collection which continues to grow by the year. To make the task more manageable, I decided to throw some photographs away while cleaning out the house.

It was difficult. I started the procedure like a crime scene investigator. I got a big black trash bag in which to put the photos. As I went through boxes and boxes of photographs, I came across packs of double prints and threw away the duplicates. I threw out lots of photos of trees, fields, sunsets, most likely taken in the 1980s by my father.

But then came the photos of people from high school I did not know or remember. It was one thing to throw out duplicate photos and images of trees, but it's quite a different feeling to toss representations of people. Yet, as the collector Marvin Heiferman notes,

> After we die, as the contents of our closets, drawers, paper bags, shoeboxes, and homes are emptied, so is the information in the snapshots that were once kept in them. Only vestiges of symbolic meaning cling to snapshots. Snapshots passed to survivors are the photographic equivalent of ancestral remains, which explains the guilt people feel when they abandon or dispose of them. And yet, they do. (51)

I, indeed, felt guilty, but for many of the photos, the true meaning was gone. They were of places I had never visited and people I didn't remember. I threw one away and then it got easier.

After a short time, I had a pretty full bag of photos. I left it sitting there like a body in the corner of the living room, not yet willing to let them go completely. I thought

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several times of dumping the photos on the floor and sorting back through them. Maybe I hadn't looked closely enough at a photo. What if my dad was in the background of one of the images? What if I found out that someone I went to high school with had died and her family was looking for photographs of her? I eventually threw the black bag full of discarded photographs away.

As difficult as the process was, I am glad that I made the decision to painstakingly comb through the masses of old photos, saving the ones which still held meaning for me. What if I had never returned to my parents' house and had, instead, hired a service to just clear it all out, to get rid of everything? The elementary school work, the clothes nobody wore anymore, the tools for fixing things I don't know how to fix, the handmade dishtowels sewn by a great-great aunt, the vases, dishes, glasses, books, furniture, and endless amount of cords, remotes, and kitchen magnets. What if the boxes crammed full of photo albums of my mother and her mother, my father and his father, had been left on the curb? What if someone had found them? What if I had lost them?

What if a photo of my grandmother had ended up in a book devoted to humorous images of people's rear ends? What if photos of my ancestors had been added to an online archive of Norwegian immigrant imagery, without any mention of my family's history? What if a Polaroid of my father had turned up in a lot of vintage photographs being sold by a dealer on *eBay*? What would these cherished snapshots have become in the hands of a lost-and-found photo practitioner?

Losers Tell Their Stories

What cleaning out my mother's house reinforced for me is the importance of a

photograph's original context, author, and associates? Throughout this dissertation, what

stands out is that the losers are under-represented in the lost-and-found photo world.

Although supported by the "reuniters" and their stories told in journalistic human-interest

stories, they are seldom mentioned in the photo books or many of the projects that feature

"found" photos.

This question of authorship haunts lost-and-found photographs. Missing

authorship allows the control of the images to pass to others. They are ready-made for

publishing, blogging, or exhibition. The people who originally made them are silent. It

is easy to get caught up in the language of the "finders"—to call the photos

"anonymous," "orphan," "found," in need of being "adopted," in need of collectors and

curators to provide them with a context. But, these photos already have a context and a

place where they belong, as noted in a story from one of the callers, a woman from

Guatemala who spoke of photos that moved across the ocean to the United States:

> I realized that some of the pictures were missing and basically I was
> disappointed and upset because I find out from my sister that mom had
> taken these pictures and she brought them to the U.S. I was really sad
> because, you know, every time that I will go back to Guatemala *I wanted*
> *to see those things there, the things that belong there*, just to reminisce
> about those moments. . . just having the feeling, talking with people,
> *seeing the things that belong there, not in the U.S.* I actually took one of
> those pictures I have in my house, but it's not being displayed because I
> always have the mind that I want to bring back the picture and put it in the
> red album *where it belongs*. (Emphasis added)

Though the lost-and-found world I've explored exists primarily within many public

manifestations, there are occurrences like that described above which concern personal

archives and which show that images are not divorced from their original contexts and authors. In order to view lost-and-found authentically, the original contexts, authors, and stories that are so often missing or set aside, must be considered.

These original contexts or back-stories reinforce the importance of photographs in everyday life. In a story I've titled, "She Says It is Her Past," a Cuban caller told of her grandmother and mother's flight from Cuba prior to the Revolution. Photographs were among the few possessions they could bring with them. The photos were of their family life in Cuba, and the caller noted how the photographs give her grandmother "a lot of happiness because they transport her to the past and the happy times they had as well." She described a specific photo that was especially meaningful to the family: "One in particular is of the entire family seated at really long table and it shows everybody. It's one of the things I really like to look at. It reminds me of my family. And I know my mom calls it one of her prized possessions."

As the caller's story points out, photos are important to those who have personal associations with them, and they are imbued with even more importance by their original owners when they are lost. Contradicting Fred the snapshot collector's contention that "People normally get rid of things because they want to get rid of them" (as qtd. in chapter 5) and Babette Hines' supposition that photos are "eventually discarded when, I imagine, the subjects of the photographs [are] no longer valued" (as qtd. in chapter 4), almost all the commenters on *Lostandfoundphotos.org* describe the loss of photographs as devastating. To the "losers," these images (and the photos' subjects) are vitally important in some way. Most of the comments included details about the missing

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images: first haircuts, a visit with a dying relative, a once-in-a-lifetime vacation. The two

comments below illustrate a typical message left under posts on the project's blog:

> Dear Sir/Madam, I had a flight from Paris CDG to Ankara via Munich.
> Unfortunately I have has lost my camera (Panasonic FX70 Grey color,
> with a black cloth cover) during her flight. It can be dropped either in the
> plane or at Munich Airport. The camera itself is not important but the
> memory card was full of memories of our Wedding Ceremony held in
> Paris and my son's Disneyland Photographs. That photographs are very
> very important for me.
>
> ———————————————————————————————————
>
> I lost my camera in Budapest-HUNGARY in 21 June 2010. I think Keleti
> Metro Station while going to bus terminal. It's Fujıfilm Fine pix J10, grey
> colour and has a black bag. Please help me I had a euro trip in that time
> and all my travel pictures are in it. I just want only my pictures (memory
> card) they are very important and valuable for me. if anyone find it please
> share on internet and contact me. please help me =(

People posting comments on the project's website created a thread of conversation that

describe lost cameras and photos and illustrate why the photographs are important to

them. In this way, my website became much like what Sam, the self-defined curator, and

Sue, the retired schoolteacher, described their sites to be in chapter 5: a space for

facilitating conversations. However, unlike the posts on Sam's and Sue's sites, the

conversations created on *Lostandfoundphotos.org* were not about what lost photos *might*

mean, as hypothesized by stranger-viewers; rather, they were conversations about what

the photos *do* mean, as demonstrated by the owner-authors.

The voicemails and comments of "the losers" are richer and more complex than

the stories contributed by the finders. Within them is a more nuanced commentary on the

nature and meaning of lost-and-found photographs as well as the emotional weight of

loss.

Losing Photos Erases Memories

There were a number of voicemails that offered sentiments expressing the idea that photographs help preserve, create, and even alter memory. Photos are important to the original owners because they are vehicles for evoking personal and specific memories. When they are lost, memories are erased. The caller who left the very first voicemail I received for this project, titled, "I've Been Collecting Found Photographs for 20 Years," offered this poignant observation of a group of old photographs he had purchased: "Where do our memories go when we're gone? Do they last our lifetime? Or is there some way of passing them on? The only tangible way that I know of, besides telling someone these stories, is by taking pictures." The caller acknowledges the role storytelling plays in protecting memories, but he indicates that photographs are one of the most important ways to preserve our memories. No photographs, no memories.

One woman called in her story of returning from a trip to her ancestral home in Ireland. She described how she had wrapped her memory cards in a paper towel and put them in a small Ziploc bag to guard against moisture. Somewhere along the way she lost the bag, and she relayed a request for its return: "If anybody happened to pick up the Ziploc bag with a little wadded up paper towel in it and found out there were SD cards in it, I sure would love to hear from them." At the end of the call she added this observation: "I feel like I went to Ireland, I had this wonderful experience, came home, and it's like it never happened. I don't even feel like I was there because I don't have any of the photographs I took."

One caller told of staging a fake civil union in Vermont after he left a roll of film with photos of the real ceremony in the rental car before the honeymoon:

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> In October, we went back to Vermont and recreated our civil union. Of course this time we had fall leaves, but what I hope is that when we look at those photos someday, we will believe that was the civil union instead of the recreated or fake civil union that we did the next year. A lost photo takes on great significance because it can be whatever you wish it to be instead of the two dimensional object.

The caller wanted to remember a staged photo for the real thing, creating an alternative memory from the "fake" photo because the real photo, connected to the memory of the real ceremony, was gone from his possession.

What losers experience in the loss of their photos is a loss of moments of their lives. Many collectors, scholars, curators speak of "found" photos as taking on new lives when they are placed in new contexts, but the stories of "lost" photos that were contributed to this project belie this optimistic interpretation. It is not that new lives are given; it is, rather, that portions of lives are taken away when photos are lost and found.

Losing Photos Erases Family Legacies

Photos are also important to their original authors and associates because they are the keepers and conveyors of family heritage. Losing them breaks this continuance. While I sometimes wonder if my children will have any interest in the collection of family photos I have amassed or whether they will feel burdened by them, contributors to the project often described the inability to share a visual legacy as being the most distressing part of losing their family photos.

Some callers expressed grief particularly over the loss of opportunity to pass photos on to their children. In a call I titled "Everything I Held Close to Me: Maplewood, New Jersey," a woman told the story of how a safe in which she kept all of

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her family photos, negatives, and audio tapes was stolen. She mourned the loss of autobiographical material to pass on to her daughter. With a trembling voice she said, "My photography was really all I had to give to my daughter. It was my only legacy to her. I put my whole heart into it. I'm totally devastated. And really hoping for a miracle so that some, if not all of these can be returned to me." In a call entitled "A Photo Album of Me," the emotion is also clear in the voice of the caller who speaks in a slow, sad cadence: "I had a red photo album that I put together for my children because when I was younger, I was interested in what my parents looked like when they were younger, so I put together a photo album of me. It used to have gold letters on it and it said 'Album.'" Like other callers, she reflected on the importance of photographs in saying, "I just really miss those pictures. And I really want my kids to see them. I can't recover them. I have no negatives. Pictures of my daughter in there. I don't know. Pictures are priceless, I've learned."

These stories reinforce what Mihaley Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton write regarding personal photographs in *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, that they leave a "tenuous immorality to beloved persons…by providing an identity, a context of belongingness, to one's descendants" (69). I wonder if there is an unknown evolutionary instinct or gene that encourages one to preserve through photography a semblance of the family or existence of self to pass on to someone else, a genetic disposition to say, "I was here. We were here." In the absence of these photos, can we say that our families, can we say that *we*, ever existed? Without them, will the memory of us continue to exist in the future?

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Losing Photos Erases the Lost

Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, photographs are objects of incredible meaning when they are viewed as preserving the dead. Callers alluded to the loss of photos of people who have died as being almost like losing those people all over again. In a call entitled "The Only Photo of My Mother," a woman begins her call with this wish: "I've been looking through our picture albums with hundreds of pictures in them, and how happy I would be to see a picture of my parents who died when I was very young and of my little brother who was killed by a drunk driver." Another caller, in "Memories of My Father," offers a similar desire: "[I'm searching for] a few pictures of my father and I who I lost when I was five years old, and they were the only pictures that I really have of my father. I'd really like to find this album because it means really a lot to me. And only memories I have of my father and anyone who could help, I'd appreciate very much." While old photographs always seem to be inherently connected to death in some way, stories of the loss of photos of a deceased family member or friend are laced with a particular kind of finality, as if the subjects of the lost photos are more completely "gone" than they were before. When those lost photographs are the only copies one has of a loved one, the grief experienced and expressed is piercing.

The stories of those who have lost photos are relegated to the classified sections of newspapers and *Craigslist*. Here the details of lost memory cards and photographs can be found, complete with information for the hopeful return of these cherished objects. What I hope my study illustrates is the need to hear more from these "losers," the need to acknowledge that those who lose photos have rights of ownership to the photographs and the stories being told about them. In hearing the stories of the losers, what we come to

understand is that lost-and-found photographs are not empty of meaning, waiting for practitioners and viewers to fill them with new significance. For the losers, these photo objects are personal, they are their memories, they are their family histories, and they are precious connections to loved ones who have passed away. The search for the lost is a recovery effort that plays out across generations. Here, within the stories contributed to this project, were unexpected revelations regarding questions related to perception. What I discovered is that the voices of those who have lost photos teach us the meaning of lost-and-found photographs more than a historian, museum curator, or scholar can.

The Importance of Adding Sound

While my belief that the stories of photograph "losers" are in need of an audience was shaped from both the calls and textual comments contributed to *Lostandfoundphotos.org,* it was through the calls more than through the comments that I began to see the project's true significance. Audio demands a different kind of attention than text, photos, or video. The voicemail stories contributed to this project are unproduced, recorded on phones in people's homes and not in studios, making their sound low-fi and familiar. They may be the audio equivalent of photographic snapshots, carrying the likeness of the everyday human voice. These voicemail narratives of lost-and-found photographs infused the content I was collecting with humor, wistfulness, delight, grief, and ultimately, empathy. They are reflections of the deeply personal sentiments and feelings which photographs elicit.

Adding audio to my examination of texts and visuals created a multi-dimensional study that illuminated aspects of the field which any single approach would have missed.

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At a 2010 MIT Digital Humanities Conference, I presented "What Does Research Sound Like?" in which I argued the following:

> By adopting (and combining) techniques and tools of broadcast journalism and qualitative interviewing, researchers can use participatory audio as a rich source for re-exploration of research data. Utilizing field recordings, telephone voicemail, podcast interviews, and audio diaries, informants (human subjects) may become producers and participants in the presentation of an online research project.

The use of audio, a powerful medium for storytelling and eliciting emotion, increased the potency of stories told by photo "losers," beyond the details they supplied in textual (silent) emails. This, in turn, increased my desire to get their voices heard in a field so dominated by collectors, archivists, curators, and historians who are all implying that these voices don't matter. Who can hear the slight wavering of Minnie's voice in describing the only photo of her mother, or the bleak longing of the woman whose photos were removed from a defaulted storage unit, or the breaking voice describing how a safe full of precious negatives was stolen in the story entitled "Everything I Held Close," without being moved, without wanting to be an advocate? Indeed, a selection of these calls played at a conference produced many tears in a room full of seasoned independent audio producers that included NPR and BBC journalists.

Listeners of the audio stories can hear the eagerness of discovery, the hope for reuniting, the grief of loss, and maybe most importantly, a diversity of voices. By diverse, I do not just mean global voices or nonwhite narratives about photographs, but the variety of stories of *the lost* in comparison to the overabundance of stories of *the*

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found that populate the lost-and-found photo world. The use of voicemail allowed the losers, in their own voices, to express themselves in a digital landscape populated with photographs and text which seeks at every turn to contextualize and author the story of a lost photograph. The voice of the "loser" may not erase the contextual frames which many lost-and-found photo projects attempt to impose upon the snapshot, but it may diminish the predominance of these "finder" perspectives as we discover that behind every "anonymous" photograph is the heartbreaking sound of a "loser."

These voicemails about lost photographs become something akin to narrative surrogates for the missing images themselves. For those who lost photographs and recorded stories, the stories can become a semblance of the recovered image for the caller and his or her associates. Audio stories and photographs can share similar meanings, can serve as similar memory-building catalysts, and can carry similar cultural import. I think of Herndon and Rufus and the story they told of their album that was returned as an example of a story that can be shared in much the same way that someone might share a family photo album. What if they had never gotten the album back, but instead recorded what they remembered of the photographs and passed that recording on to children and grandchildren? Would this have served a similar function? A number of times when I have heard that someone has lost photos, I have asked them to audio record what they remember about the photos to keep as a substitute for what was lost.

As these stories become stand-ins for the missing images, it is my hope that they also, in some measure, take on a photograph's ability to continue a family's legacy and to integrate new members into a family unit as the audio files are shared with others. In viewing the listener statistics for the audio files, I can't help but wonder if this is already

happening. What I noticed initially is what was to be expected: the audio stories listed

towards the top of the site had the most "hits," with the number of listeners decreasing for

stories placed further down the list (Figure 16). For example, the first story listed on the

website, "The Only Photo of My Mother" had 83 listeners, the second story had 52

listeners, the third story had 34 listeners, and so on. However, the pattern breaks at the

story entitled "A Photo Album of Me," which had 75 listeners, though it was the seventh

story listed. Could the caller who contributed this story have shared her voicemail with

the children with whom she wanted to share her lost photos? I will never know the

answer to that question, but my wish is that these short voicemails become surrogates, not

only to a public that may happen upon them, but to the people who made calls to talk
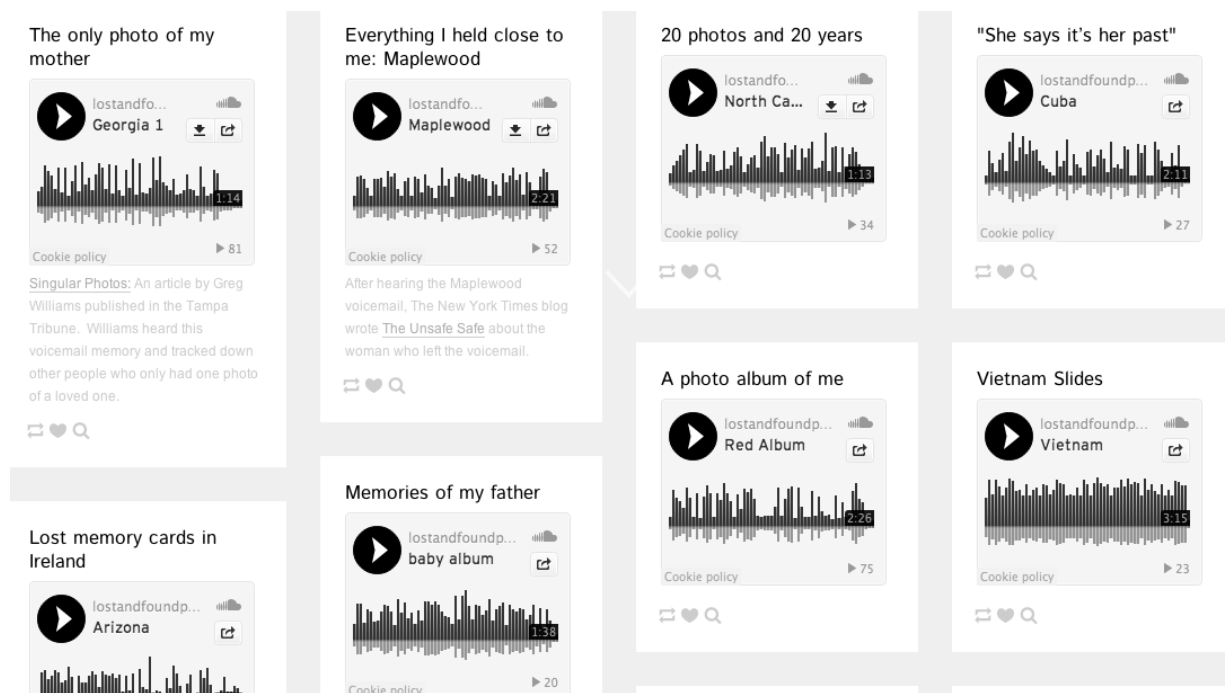
about the photos they miss so much.

Figure 18: Screenshot of listener statistics for the audio call-in stories.

The voicemails I collected are a starting place for filling the visual world of lost-and-found photographs with an aural landscape by gathering stories and voices that respond to personal photographs. These voicemails carry the many sentiments regarding lost-and-found photos that have been examined in this dissertation. But they demand the ear, not the eye, and within them the visitor encounters a human voice. This is what makes *Lostandfoundphotos.org* a unique lost-and-found photo project, offering a new medium for the examination of the visual.

Limitations of the Project

As I progressed through this project, there were a number of issues that could be interpreted as limitations. This dissertation was written at a very exciting time in the world of photographs and digital technology, due to the quick pace of change in the media landscape, especially in blog and social media platforms. While I tried to include new works along the way, my findings are locked in a moment in time. As I put final touches on this write-up, new websites, new blogs, new online lost-and-found photo groups are being created while others are being dismantled. It is impossible to keep up. Additionally, though my sample size for some materials was sufficient, more interviews and online projects could have been collected, though I am confident that this project nevertheless presents an exhaustive analysis of the lost-and-found photography field.

Within chapter 5, I propose a cycle that positions the personal photograph on a trajectory that starts with the creation of the photo, moving it toward a moment of loss, after which it lands in the hands of a practitioner who presents it to a public audience, whose photographic constructive practices are influenced as a result. It is this latter

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portion of the cycle that poses an interesting question—*What are people doing with their photos after experiencing lost-and-found photo projects?*—which needs to be explored further. However, this project was not designed to explore that question in any great depth.

There may have also been some limitations related to me as someone who is a researcher and also a practitioner within the field of lost-and-found photography. While my personal activities as a photographer, as a collector, and as someone who has been creating a number of online projects were an advantage in understanding the materials I gathered and the practices of my interviewees, undetected researcher bias may have influenced my summaries and analysis. While I feel that accounts of my own experiences with photographs have contributed greatly to my exploration of this topic, these ideas have shaped the way I've understood my data.

Lastly, there were a few uncontrollable factors related to the call-in stories which affected the outcomes of this project. For one, the blog and phone number did not go viral, as I optimistically thought they might in the few days after the first Skype ring chimed in my office. The calls for this project did not pour in. They were sporadic, leading me to wonder if there were any weaknesses in my recruitment methods. Secondly, I have no way to evaluate why some of the audio stories posted on the website were listened to more than others (and how these stories might have been shared by listeners), which ultimately results in a weakness of this project. Furthermore, I realized that in a digital storytelling project in a community in which one was soliciting stories about sensitive subjects, the promise of anonymity would be vital. Because of this, I collected only limited data on the callers. The data I was able to collect required

obtaining consent using a lengthy form which used daunting terms like "risk," which may have prevented people from calling. I think if this project had not been tied to an academic research project, with attendant required procedures and paperwork, it may have received more participation. Despite these limitations, I feel that this dissertation has brought together a vast amount of diverse data and presented it in a dynamic manner. In some cases, I have already begun to address these limitations in new projects I have initiated within the lost-and-found photography world.

The Future of Lost-and-Found Photography

The camera obscura begat the daguerreotype and the daguerreotype begat the Polaroid and the Polaroid begat Instagram, with decades of machines and a slew of processes in between. And as a photographic industry works hard at selling each new device and manner in which to look at and keep our photos, the way people express their loss of photographs and the way found photos are exhibited will no doubt continue to expand. The two projects I have been working on, *Lostandfoundphotos.org* and *Withcameras.com*, take the field in a new direction by adding voices that create a deeply human connection and by providing an audience with real stories to narrate lost-and-found photos' visual anonymity. What I hope these projects encourage is the use of audio to record stories about photographs. While people take lots and lots of photographs, particularly of relatives and family events, I find that few use audio as a method of recording the family. Audio *is* trickier to record, save, and edit than photographic objects, but the audio recordings that are part of these two projects provide a rich, emotional landscape which enhances a personal image archive. Such digital

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stories are valuable additions to examinations of the vernacular, as Jean Burgess contends

in "Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital

Storytelling": "Digital storytelling as a 'movement' is explicitly designed to amplify the

ordinary voice. It aims not only to remediate vernacular creativity but also to legitimate

it as a relatively autonomous and worthwhile contribution to public culture" (207).

There are emerging incarnations of lost-and-found photograph projects which

defy boundaries that have traditionally existed among visual, text, and audio; between

author and audience; between anonymous and named; between lost and found. Projects

such as these are quickly popping up on *Instagram*, blurring the line between lost-and-

found photo projects compiled of other people's photographs and those created by people

"finding" their own photographs and telling stories about them. To cite one example,

"Savefamilyphotos" invites people to tell stories about their personal photographs. Their

Instagram account claims they are "On a mission to save & share family stories, one

photo at a time," and the public is invited to tag their photos with #savefamilyphotos.

Their *Instagram* account includes over six hundred photographs and related stories, like

the one shown in Figure 19:

Figure 19: Screenshot of "Savefamilyphotos" *Instagram* stream.

This project brings together photographs that are often described as "anonymous" and "found" with family photos that are still in the possession of their owners, bridging the divide with the use of their tag. Thus, when a search is conducted for the hashtag #savefamilyphotos, one might see a photo and story about a contributor's named grandmother alongside a photo of an unnamed someone who looks like a grandmother, which a collector or a dealer may have posted with no accompanying information. What is communicated through such juxtapositions is the importance of saving old family photos.

Fledgling projects within the field of lost-and-found photography shows promise for greater diversity as well. For instance, the "Caribbean Memory Project" utilizes a website, *Facebook* group, *YouTube* channel, *Instagram* account, and *Twitter* handle in

collecting photos, video, audio, and textual memoirs in order to, as they write on their

"About" page, "engage and understand Caribbean expressive culture in productive

ways." Creators of the project quote Stuart Hall at the top of the project's website in

identifying their mission as one of giving voice to those who have been historically

denied a public presence: "Those who do not see themselves reflected in national heritage

are excluded from it." Likewise, "Black.Archive," a collection of black vernacular

photographs, is described as, "Archiving regular people one vintage photo at a time."

The "Black.Archive" administrator offers this description of his/her work, erasing the

lines outlining unique practitioner roles: "Collector. Buyer. Seller. Preserver" (Figure
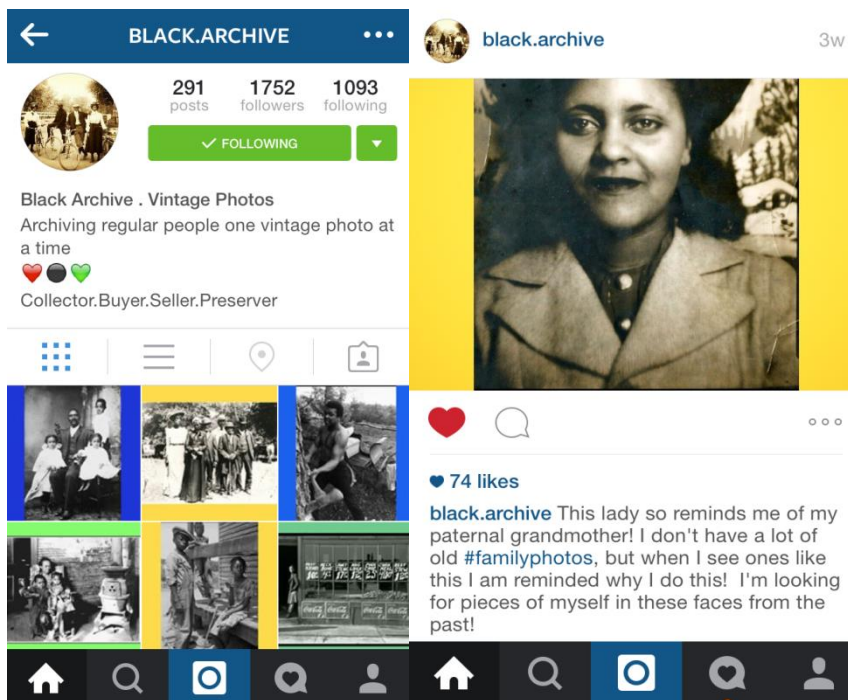
20).

Figure 20: Screenshot of "Black.Archive."

The work of these *Instagram* projects demonstrates valuable efforts made by

diverse groups with curatorial skills and a desire for preservation. According to

Instagram's "Press" page, over 70% of the network's users live outside the U.S., over 30

billion photos have been shared to date, and there are over 2.5 billion "likes" daily.

While this certainly does not guarantee that all lost photos will be found, it does point to

the massive amount of global users populating the digital landscape and the incredible

amount of activity within an online space devoted to the sharing of images. Linking

these users and their activities through the use of hashtag identifiers enables the public to

display their "found" photographs to new audiences, new collectors, rescuers, identifiers,

contributors, and everyday historians.

Despite the amount of activity within these emerging spaces, the entire lost-and-

found photo endeavor may appear to be a luxury arising out of comfortable lifestyles that

can accommodate non-essentials like extra space for storing collections, technology for

creating digital repositories, leisure time for scanning and posting and writing, and

disposable income to spend on other people's photographs. However, though digital

photography has been tied to the expense of owning a computer, which in turn

contributed to a digital divide, the proliferation of smart phones has been putting a digital

camera in a growing number of hands. To cite just one data point, in the U.S., while

computer use by Latinos is not on par with that of Caucasians, their use of "mobile and

social networking technologies [are] at rates similar to other groups" (Lopez, Gonzalez-

Barrera, and Patten). There is also evidence of heavy cell phone use in Africa and Haiti.

A February 2014 Pew Research study showed cell phone use is ubiquitous in "emerging

and developing" countries, and the use of smart phones connected to the Internet has also

increased with the increased use of social networking ("Emerging Nations"). The

personal photos taken and shared back and forth from these phones across the world must be in the trillions.

What might presentations of lost-and-found photos from these locations look like? Are they already in the *Instagram* feed? If so, how can we find them? The future of lost-and-found photos may very well involve telling global stories that do not make it into books, museum exhibitions, or government reports. As Nicholas Mirzoeff points out, "Visual culture, every day, has to claim the right to look, to see the migrant, to visualize the war, to recognize climate change. In reclaiming that look, it refuses to do the commoditized labor of looking, of paying attention. It claims the right to be seen by the common as a counter to the possibility of being disappeared by governments" (15). The practices of preserving, scanning, uploading, and tagging demonstrated in the many lost-and-found photo projects examined in this dissertation, particularly those surfacing in recent months, may assist in creating a global online archive that might hold clues for finding, preserving, and understanding the lives of the hidden and the disappeared.

The Future of My Research

While I worked on this dissertation, it was difficult not to get caught up in many of the activities I was observing. Thus, a few years ago, I began work on a project titled *Withcameras.com* (Figure 21). It started with a photo I bought of two women in a close embrace, one of whom is pulling a string to trigger a camera shutter for a self-portrait (Figure 22). There is a certain self-reliance, an early "selfie" with a string, that made me pause and purchase it. I had read about the use of string to fire a shutter, but I had never seen it before in a snapshot. Here was early evidence of camera culture, with the gaze

hijacked by the do-it-yourself shutter release visually representing the desire for a photographic object.
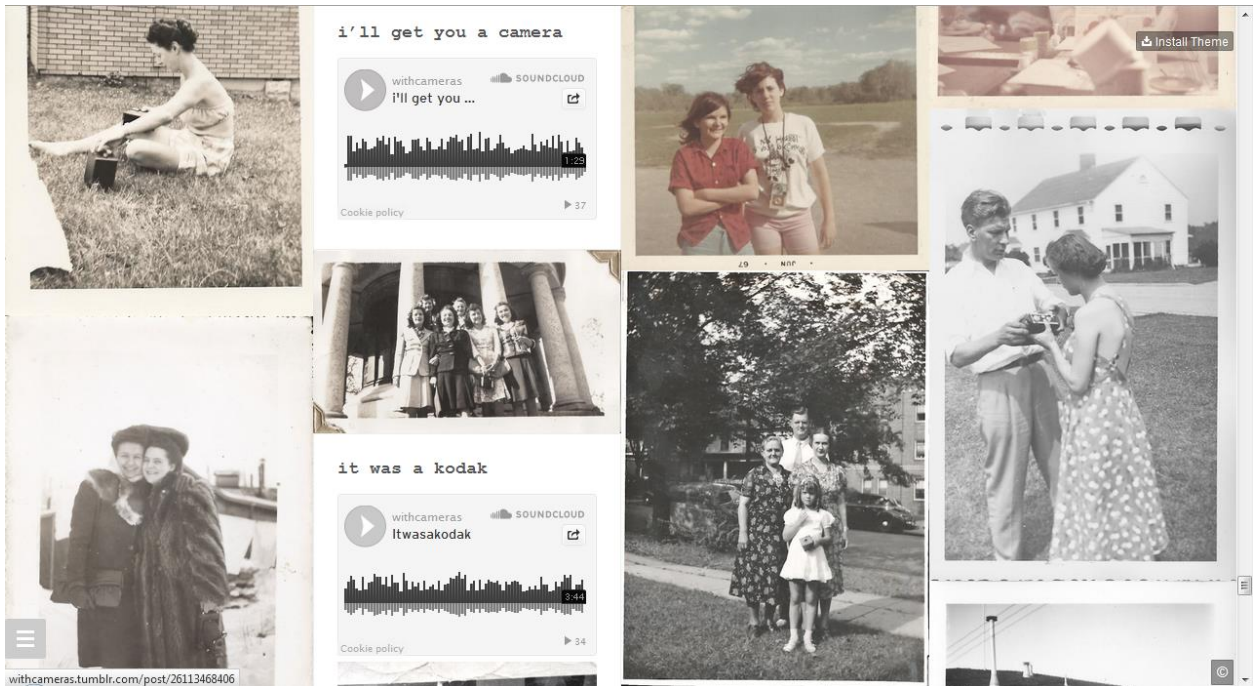
Figure 21: Screenshot of *Withcameras.com.*

As my fascination with this photo object grew, I started looking for more images of women holding cameras. I no doubt experienced what many collectors experience when hunting down images. I had the feeling of success when I beat an opposing bidder in the last few seconds on *eBay* or the feeling that I had found an image that went overlooked by other collectors when I won an auction unopposed. I have been outbid many times as certain images attract bidders willing to offer hundreds over my highest bid of fifty dollars. I have spent a weekend thumbing through images packed into disorganized boxes by dealers at Chelsea Market in New York City.

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Figure 22: Photo of two women, one of whom is triggering a shutter with a string.

But in doing so, I found myself working to explore and expand the conversation and stories surrounding lost-and-found photographs, informed by the empathy I feel for the losers, which I have been attempting to champion indirectly and directly throughout this project. Over the course of five years, I put together a collection of over three hundred images of women using cameras, which I have been posting to the project's online site. While it looks like countless other projects featuring lost-and-found photographs, it doesn't sound like them. In an effort to create a lost-and-found project that combines audio and images, I have included audio memories of camera use from the eras depicted in the photos on the site, as relayed by storytellers and interviewees.

In the short time I (and those I have recruited to assist with the project) have been collecting stories, I have been able to capture audio stories on the following topics:

- How women acquired their first cameras

- The desire to have one's own camera

- What it means to not have a camera

- Photographic habits of women, now and then

I have also been able to gather interviews conducted by people speaking with their grandmothers and mothers as well as audio stories from other countries and in other languages. These contributions show the early promise of an interactive project that could globally document early camera culture among women through visual and aural methods.

This is an exciting area of future research for me since it is an extension of my current academic pursuits, and it positions me within the worlds of the collectors, archivists, curators, and perhaps most importantly, audio journalists and ethnographers. *Withcameras.com* is a project which I hope represents the important contribution audio stories can make to a lost-and-found photo project, both as a rich aural accompaniment and as a vocal-visual argument for diminishing the sometimes overbearing role of the finder/author. What I hope visitors to the website begin to see is that a lost-and-found photograph should not be a focal point for competing perspectives from practitioners with vested interests, but a springboard for a multitude of perspectives arising from a vast web of stories told by many public viewers.

Conclusion

I began work on this dissertation with a real empathy for photo losers and a desire to be a reuniter, and I end here by stressing the importance which the voices of those who have lost photos contribute to discussions of the interplay between people and personal photographs that come as a result of lost-and-found photo events. Though "found" is a popular and useful word to describe many of the photographs I have written about, the use of the term is much fuller than the pedestrian (sometimes novelty) implication it carries. The same can be said for the use of the word "lost" in describing photo objects. Loss of personal photographs takes many forms, and explorations of how we perceive these losses weave in and out of cultural notions of family, death, how we picture ourselves, and the stories we use photographs to tell. Though I take pride in steering the conversation to include stronger "loser" voices, I find that, ultimately, there is no one way to handle lost-and-found photographs.

The many practices of "losers," "finders," creators, and viewers reveal a complex lost-and-found photo world revolving around a single axis: the personal photograph. As Susan Sontag writes in the seminal *On Photography*, "Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness. It hardly matters what activities are photographed so long as photographs get taken and are cherished. . ." (8). It is evident throughout this study that all of the projects and narratives I examined within the lost-and-found photo world are ultimately connected by the idea that personal photos are cherished, by the people who lost them and by the people who found them.

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Together, the projects and stories comprise a "portable kit" that "bears witness" to the overall importance of the photographs we make as well as expanding notions of "connectedness." So, the question that begs asking again is, *Where will our photos go when we die?* After exploring the use of lost-and-found photos in photography books, on websites, blogs, in human-interest stories, after hearing the thoughts of practitioners in the field and listening to lost-and-found photo stories from those who called in to the project, the answer to this question should be clear: unless they are purposefully obliterated, our photographs, when lost, will most certainly be found.

RECRUITMENT LETTER

This recruitment message was posted on public Internet message boards. The message

boards were related to personal photography (genealogy, photo blogs, collector

discussion boards, photo dealers, online newspaper classifieds). I also used the text below

to invite individuals such a photography dealers via email to take part in this study.

Todd J Wemmer

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Lost and Found Photos Dissertation Project

Lost and Found Photo Dissertation Project
www.lostandfoundphotos.org / todd@lostandfoundphotos.org

Hello. My name is Todd Wemmer and I'm a doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. I'm working on a dissertation project that examines lost and found personal photographs. People lose and find personal photographs everyday. I believe the stories they tell about this event are important. Part of my research involves asking people to tell stories about lost and found photographs. I will also be interviewing people who have lost and / or found personal photographs. Some of my past work has examined photo blogs, podcasts about photography, and the uses of "found" photographs. I also produced a DVD project titled "Where will your photos go when you die?" that featured audio and visual stories about lost & found photos. For part of that project I returned a lost photo album to a family in Tennessee.

Through your participation I hope to better understand perceptions of lost and found personal photos. I'm using the Internet to contact the largest selection of people possible. The results of this study and multi-media project that will be created from your stories could be useful to people interested in understanding, preserving, and collecting personal photos.

Do you have a story to tell about lost and found photographs? I want to hear it.

It's easy to participate. Read the instructions and consent information on the Lostandfoundphotos.org, pick up the phone and tell your story.

If you are interested in my project please visit: http://www.lostandfoundphotos.org
There you will find more details about this project and instructions on how you can
participate.

Thank-you
Todd Wemmer -- todd@lostandfoundphotos.org

DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION, POSTED TO

LOSTANDFOUNDPHOTOS.ORG

Hello. My name is Todd Wemmer and I'm a doctoral student in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

My research involves collecting stories and interviewing people who have lost and / or found personal photographs. "Lost" personal photographs (snapshots, non professional) may include a single photograph or a large collection (family albums, boxes under the bed) of photographs that may have been destroyed in a natural disaster, stolen, lost, misplaced. It may also include digital photographs that were wiped out in a hard drive crash or lost on a memory card along with a digital camera. It may include photos that you never possessed, but know exist. These are just a few examples. It's up to you how you interpret lost photos. "Found" personal photos may include (your own or others) personal photographs purchased on eBay, at an auction, or at an art show. It may also refer to photographs found in the trash, in an attic of a recently purchased house, or on the street. It may also include photographs found on the Internet. These are just a few examples. It's up to you how you interpret found photos.

Some of my past work has examined photo blogs, podcasts about photography, and the uses of "found" photographs. I also produced a DVD project titled "Where will your photos go when you die?" that featured audio and visual stories about lost & found photos. For part of that project I returned a lost photo album to a family in Tennessee.

Through your participation I hope to better understand perceptions of lost and found personal photos. The results of this study and DVD project that will be created from your stories could be useful to people interested in understanding, preserving, and collecting personal photos. You can participate by calling in your story about lost and found photos to a voice mail I've set up using Skype (an Internet phone service). You can also email your story (todd@lostandfoundphotos.org)

Do you want to tell your story? I want to hear it.

Should you decide to call or email in your story, you will also have the opportunity to take part in a follow up interview. Before you call in your story please read the information on CONSENT, INSTRUCTIONS FOR CALLING IN YOUR STORY, AND FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS. You may also want to listen to some of the audio examples I've provided. They should give you a good sense of what this project is about.

It is unknown how many people will respond to this study. This study is expected to last three to four months, but your participation is limited to the length of the story you call in over the phone. Those taking part in an interview will be involved in a forty-five minute to an hour interview over the telephone or online audio chat program. All participants may be contacted for confirmation of consent and brief follow-up questions. I will not bombard you with junk mail or surveys.

If you have any questions or concerns about calling in your story or about being in this study, you may contact me at Todd@Lostandfoundphotos.org.

This project has been approved by the Local Review Board of the Department of Communication at The University of Massachusetts - Amherst.

Todd J Wemmer
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Lost and Found Photos Dissertation Project

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

Conducting research that requires the participation of people requires consent from those willing to participate in a research study. My research project involves collecting stories and interviewing people who have either lost personal photographs or found personal photographs. I believe the stories people tell and the information they provide in interviews about lost and found personal photographs offers important insight into people's relationships to personal photographs. While your stories and interviews will contribute to the scholarly work I'm pursuing I feel they will also contribute something to the larger community of people who've lost and found personal photographs. The results of this study could be useful to people who are interested in understanding, preserving, and collecting personal photos.

PROCEDURES:

I'm asking your permission to record the story you leave on the voicemail. The stories will be audio recorded and transcribed into text form to be quoted in the written component of this project. With your consent, your voicemail may appear on the project website. If you do not consent to your recorded story appearing on the project website, your recording will be kept secure on a password protected hard drive.

By calling in your story you are giving consent for your story be used as material for this dissertation project. Please indicate that you are giving consent at the end of your recorded story by saying "I consent for the use of this story in this research project."

If you consent to having your story put on the project website, please say at the end of your recording, "I consent for the use of this story on this website."

If you decide to call in your story, you will be asked to email me to confirm your call was received. There are a few questions I ask you to answer as well. Please see the "After You've Called" category for a list of these questions.
You will also let me know at this time if you are willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview.

Follow-up Interview
If you agree to be take part in a follow-up interview, I may contact you via email to set up a conversation. Our conversation would last about 45 minutes to an hour and would be conducted over an audio chat program like iChat or Skype or over the telephone. While

these interviews will not appear on the project website, parts of them may appear on the DVD project with your consent.

Protection of Identity
I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with you personally unless you want them to be. If you participate in a follow-up interview, your name will not be linked to the recording or transcript unless you consent to this identification. All biographical information that links you to your recording will be kept confidential. You may withdraw from the project at any time. If you consent to having your story appear on the project website and later decide you would like it taken down, I will immediately remove it.

DVD Project
I'm also interested in using stories and information gathered from interviews in a DVD project. This DVD project (tentatively titled, Lost and Found Photographs) will consist of edited audio from your stories and / or interviews. All participants who have stories and/or interviews included on the DVD project will be sent a copy of the DVD project along with a consent letter to be signed and returned that indicates you've seen and heard the DVD project and agree to allow your audio recordings and / or interviews to be used for the project.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Personal photographs are personal. Talking about lost photos could be more emotional than anticipated. It could make you mourn the loss of your personal photos all over again. Those telling stories about "found" photos may feel strong emotions towards those who have lost personal photos.

BENEFITS

Those telling stories about lost & found photos are joining and contributing to a community of people who are interested in personal photographs. You may also be creating a new story for the photographs that you've lost or discovered. Your recordings will be short oral histories that document the loss and discovery of personal photos.

COSTS & COMPENSATION

As a small thanks, you will receive a final copy of the DVD.

The University of Massachusetts does not have a program for compensating subjects for injury or complications related to human subjects research but the study personnel will assist you in getting treatment.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

N/A

SUBJECT ENROLLMENT/LENGTH OF STUDY

It is unknown how many people will respond to this study. This study is expected to last three to four months, but your participation is limited to the length of the story you call in over the phone. Those taking part in an interview will be involved in a forty-five minute to an hour interview over the telephone or online audio chat program. All participants may be contacted for confirmation of consent and brief follow-up questions. I will not bombard you with junk mail or surveys.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with you personally unless you want them to be. If you participate in a follow-up interview, your name will not be linked to the recording or transcript unless you consent to this identification. All biographical information that links you to your recording will be kept confidential. You may withdraw from the project at any time. If you consent to having your story appear on the project website and later decide you would like it taken down, I will immediately remove it.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

You are under no obligation to participate in this project. You may withdraw your participation at any time without prejudice.

REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Should you have any questions about your treatment or any other matter relative to your participation in this project, you may call: Todd Wemmer at 978-633-3513. If you would like to speak with someone not directly involved in the research study, you may contact the Human Research Protection Office at the University of Massachusetts via email at humansubjects@ora.umass.edu; telephone (413) 545-3428; or mail at the Human Research Protection Office, Research Administration Building, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 70 Butterfield Terrace, Amherst, MA 01003-9242.

SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT

When calling in my story and contacting Todd Wemmer via email I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I understand that, by calling in my story and volunteering to be contacted for a follow-up, I do not waive any of my legal rights. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SKYPE CALLERS, POSTED ON

LOSTANDFOUNDPHOTOS.ORG

The phone number you will dial to record your message is: (978) 633-7045. This is a Skype voice mail account. Skype is a service that allows users to make and receive phone calls with their computer. You do not need a Skype account to participate. You can also use a regular phone to call.

Before you call in your story please read the following instructions.

Here is what I'd say to you if were sitting face to face. I'd say something like, "So tell me the story of your lost or found photographs. Try to be as detailed as possible. Don't worry if you forget something because I can ask you follow-up questions after you are done. Don't worry about pauses, those can be edited out."

1. Try to use a regular phone. I have found that cell phones connections can interfere with a good sound recording.

2. Take your time telling your story. No need to rush it. The voice mail recording allows for 10 minute recordings. If you need longer than that, you can call back and finish your story.

3. Be conversational. Pretend like you are telling this story to a person face to face. I sometimes tell people to look at a photograph of someone while they are telling their story.

4. You might want to jot down a few details to prompt you while you tell the story. If we were sitting face to face I'd ask you a few initial questions and then ask you to tell me the whole story all the way through. During that time I would do my best not to interrupt you. I'd nod my head and give you a few "uh-huhs."

5. Sometimes people don't think people are interested in their stories. I am interested in your story. I also believe you might be interested in other people's stories. Listen to the examples on this webpage. . . Aren't they interesting?

6.   Please indicate that you are giving consent at the end of your recorded story by saying "I consent for the use of this story in this research project."

If you consent to having your story put on the project website, please say at the end of your recording, "I consent for the use of this story on this website."

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS, POSTED TO

LOSTANDFOUNDPHOTOS.ORG

Can I just call in and tell my story? Is it that easy?

Yes. Just dial the number (978) 633-7045 and start telling your story. Don't worry about long pauses, coughs, or interruptions. Those can be edited out. Please read the consent form before you call in your story.

Is there a certain kind of story you are looking for?

No. I have defined lost and found broadly. I hope that, through your stories, we might discover what the experience of losing or finding photographs means to people.

What if I mess up while recording my story?

If you think you are "messing" up, you can hang-up and call back. It will not be a problem. Other projects I've worked on like this frequently have a number of hang-ups and call backs.

Can I just write my story down and read it or email it?

You could, but telling your story is more natural. Another way to think about this is wouldn't you rather have someone tell you a good story, rather than read it to you?

Who will hear my recording?

I plan to edit the stories and incorporate them into a DVD to be played on this website and to be shown in educational settings.

Aren't you just making a movie?

No. I will be transcribing all the stories and interviews. I will then analyze those texts for my dissertation (a giant research paper). I will also organize the material on a computer-- cut it up, look for themes, similarities, differences in the stories people tell -- for the eventual DVD production.

Will I get to see results of the study?

Yes. I will give you a summary of the results and a copy of the DVD project that is produced from your stories.

Do I have to be over 18 to participate?

Yes. If you are not 18, I can not use your story in this project.

How do you record the interviews?

I can either record telephone interviews or use Skype / Apple iChat for communicating and recording.

How long will interviews last?

From 45 minutes to an hour. You may stop the interview at any time.

What kinds of questions will be asked during the interview?

<u>Lost questions</u>

What were your initial feelings when you first found your photographs were missing?

What do you believe you lost when the photos disappeared?

What ways have you tried to recover your lost photographs?

Could you tell me the history of the photographs that were lost? Did you inherit them?

How often were they looked at?

<u>Found questions</u>

How did you find / purchase the photographs?

How long have you had the photographs?

Have you made any efforts to find the original owners of the photographs?

Can I call in a story, but not be interviewed?

Yes. Even if everybody who participates agreed to be interviewed, I wouldn't be able to interview everybody.

Will my recorded story or interview appear on this website?

Only with your consent.

Why don't you just interview people in your town or state?

I did consider this. Almost everybody who hears about my project has a story about a lost and found photos. But (as my dissertation advisor suggested) it would only tell me about the people who lived in this area. The Internet offers access to people from all over the world.

Are you collecting other materials for this project?

Yes. I've been collecting information from websites, coffee table books, newspaper articles, eBay auctions, etc. If you see a story about lost and found photos please drop me an email. I'm always looking for these kinds of materials.

Why are you interested in lost and found personal photos?

I've collected "found" photos for about 10 years. My academic interest during my doctoral work has focused on snapshot photography. My hobbies (luckily) have become part of my academic studies. I teach a variety of courses on interviewing, broadcasting, and autobiographical media. This spring my students have been working on a similar project in which people call in stories about movie-going in the 1950s, Vietnam in the 60s, and toys in the 70s. I also do portrait photography.

EMAIL CONFIRMATION AFTER CALLS

Todd J Wemmer
Lost and Found Photos Dissertation Project

Below are a few basic questions I have for you that will help with my study. (Do not answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.)   Please cut and paste the text below into an email addressed to todd@lostandfoundphotos.org.   I will keep the content of your emails and your email address private. I am using a separate email program and account for this project so that your email address will not be mixed up or lost in my personal and professional email database. It is also an online email account (Google's Gmail) so your addresses will not exist on a computer or in an office.

CUT AND PASTE THE TEXT BELOW INTO AN EMAIL TO
Todd@lostandfoundphoto.org

Please provide a few details from your call so I can identify your story for a return confirmation email.

Would you be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview? Please type (yes or no)

I'd like to keep a map that represents the general location of my callers. I do not need your address or city. Just general area (state or part of the state. For example, I'm from North Georgia. I now live on Boston's North Shore.) I will not put your name or email address on this map. Just a marker of some sort.

 Because this is rather a new way of gathering stories from people, I'd like to know what made you interested in calling in your story. If you would like to tell me why you called in, I'd like to hear it. If you'd like to add any information about your interest in personal photography or your use of photographic equipment or materials please feel free to do so below.

I, [please insert your full name here]   , consent to the inclusion of my story recorded on the Skype voicemail for this research study to be used in a DVD project that could have public viewing in educational settings. I understand that I will be able to view a preview copy of the DVD and make a decision as to the inclusion of my story and/or interview.

TOPIC GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS

Below are journalistic questions (who, what, when, where) that address both losing and finding events. These will be used during interviews to probe deeper into lost-and-found events expressed in the stories people tell online. It is also important to note that the same person may experience both losing and finding of the same images.

Lost Photos
Tell me about your photographic habits? How often do you take photographs? What kind of camera(s) do you use? What do you generally do with your personal photographs? Albums? Frames? Wallet? Computer?

Could you describe the history of the photograph or photographs that were lost? Subject? Date? Location? How often were they looked at? Who took the photographs? Were they passed down?

What meaning did these photographs have for you before they were lost? Why were they important? How do the photographs that were lost differ than the other photographs in your possession?

What were your initial feelings when you discovered the photographs were missing?

Have you tried to recover or replace the photos? If so, could you describe ways you've tried to recover the photos? Help from others? Internet? Newspaper? If not, have you considered efforts to recover or replace the missing photographs?

Since this experience of losing photographs, have your feelings about personal photography changed? And your habits? Protecting? Preserving?

Are there other people involved with this story? What are their feelings about the lost photos?

What do you believe you have lost beyond the photograph itself? History? Memories? New stories?

Have you ever told the story of lost photos to anyone else? How often has the story been told?

Do you use digital technologies? How has digital technology played a role in your photography habits?

What would you want someone to do if they found your photographs? Would you have any problems with people putting the photographs on the Internet? Coffee table book? Greeting card?

Have you talked about things during this interview that you have not thought of before?

Would you like to ask me any questions?

Found Photos (These would vary according to the story and types of photographs found)

Tell me about your photographic habits? How often do you take photographs? What kind of camera(s) do you use? What do you generally do with your personal photographs? Albums? Frames? Wallet? Computer?

Could you describe the history of the photograph or photographs that you found? Subject? Date? Location?

[If yours] How often were they looked at? Who took the photographs? Were they passed down?

What meanings do these found photographs have for you? Why are they important? How do the photographs that were found differ from other photographs in your possession?

What were your initial feelings when you discovered these photographs?

Have you tried to reunite the found photos with their owners? If so, could you describe ways you've tried to reunite these photos with their owners? How have you tried to reunite people with the found photos? Help from others? Internet? Newspaper? If you haven't tried, have you or would you consider attempts to reunite the photos with their owners?

Since this experience of finding these photographs, have your feelings about personal photography changed? And your habits? Protecting? Preserving?

Are there other people involved with this story? What are their feelings about the lost photos?

What do you believe you have found beyond the photograph itself? History? Memories? New stories?

Have you ever told the story of found photos to anyone else? How often has the story been told?

Do you use digital technologies? How has digital technology played a role in your photography habits?

Have you talked about things during this interview that you have not thought of before?

Would you like to ask me any questions?

End on positive note Thank them. Ask them if they'd like to see *Where will your photos go when you die?* Tell them if they have any thing else that they think about feel free to email me. Remind them about printed consent form.

AUDIO RELEASE FORM

Todd J Wemmer
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Lost and Found Photos Dissertation Project

Audio Recording Release Form for Lost and Found Photographs, a DVD project by Todd Wemmer.

Lost and Found Photographs is an audio / video project created from the audio recorded from stories called in to an Internet voicemail and interviews conducted over the Internet, phone, or face-to-face interaction. The resulting product will be a DVD and website project used in educational settings.

I, the undersigned participant, hereby give Todd Wemmer specific permission to publish, distribute and/or display audio from my story and/or interview.

By signing below, I acknowledge that 1) I have read this agreement carefully; 2) any questions I have about the use of my audio have been answered satisfactorily; 3) any additional assurances or verbal qualifications that have been made to me have been added in writing to this document; 4) I have been given a copy of this form, including any changes or restrictions, initialed by Todd Wemmer.

I understand and agree to the conditions outlined in this audio release form. I hereby allow Todd Wemmer to use this recording, and I give up any and all of my own future claims and rights to the use of this recording.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Participant contact information (optional): _____

Todd Wemmer's Contact Info: 978.232.2076

LOST-AND-FOUND PHOTO BOOKS AND THEIR CATEGORIES

Titles are organized chronologically by publication year

Title	Publisher	Author / Collector	Content Description	Physical Description	Category
Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life 1888 to the Present (1998)	San Francisco Museum of Modern Art	Douglas Nickel	Forward and Essay	94 pgs. 9.8 x 8.3 x 0.1 inches 1.1 pounds	Museum Exhibition Catalogue
Found Lives (1998)	Gibbs Smith Publishers	James Nocito	Short introduction, chapters with categories like "Men," "Children," "Love," with literary quotes accompanying the photographs	112 pgs. 7.3 x 7.4 inches 13.4 ounces	Novelty Gift Book
Other Pictures: Anonymous Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection (2000)	Twin Palms Publishers	Mia Fineman / Thomas Walther	One essay	142 pgs. 10.3 x 8 inches 2.3 pounds	Art Book
Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America (2000)	Twin Palms Publishers	James Allen / John Lewis / Leon Litwack	Four essays	209 pgs. 10.4 x 7.8 x 1.3 inches 2.8 pounds	Scholarly Book

Summer Vacation / Found Photographs (2000)	Harry N. Abrams	Sharon Delano / Roger Handy	Short introduction and "found" photos.	126 pgs. 8.3 x 8.3 inches 1.5 pounds	Novelty Gift Book
Dear Friends: American Photographs of Men Together, 1840 - 1918	Abrams	David Deitcher	Academic writing throughout	160 pgs. 10.5 x 7.6 x 0.9 inches 2 pounds	Scholarly Book
Floh (2002)	Steidl	Tacita Dean	No essay, slipcase, signed and numbered	176 pgs. 12.4 x 10.2 inches 3.6 pounds	Art Book
Photobooth (2002)	Princeton Architectural Press	Babbette Hines	Introductory essay by collector	224 pgs. 8.6 x 6.3 inches 1.1 pounds	Visual History Book
Close to Home: An American Album (2004)	J. Paul Getty Museum	D.J. Waldie / Getty Museum	Forward, Preface, Essay	118 pgs. 8.6 x 8.5 inches 1.1 pounds	Museum Exhibition Catalogue
Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance (2004)	Princeton Architectural Press	Geoffrey Batchen	Extensive writing throughout, photographs illustrate writing	128 pgs. 9.3 x 7.9 inches 1 pound	Scholarly Book
Snapshots: The Eye of the Century (2004)	Hatje Cantz Publishers	Christian Skrein	Four essays, seventeen categories like "War," "Nudes," "Sports," "Travels"	544 pgs. 9.2 x 6.9 x 2 inches 4.1 pounds	Art Book

Accidental Mysteries: Extraordinary Vernacular Photographs from the Collection of John and Teenuh Foster (2005)	Sheldon Art Galleries	John Foster & Teenuh Foster	Introductory essay, a short critical essay, and one essay by collector	36 pgs. 7 x 7 inches	Museum Exhibition Catalogue
Anonymous: Enigmatic Images from Unknown Photographers (2005)	Thames & Hudson	Robert Flynn Johnson	Two essays, photographs are assigned to category chapters like "bizarre and beautiful," "creatures," "endings and infamy," "eros"	208 pgs. 10 x 9.7 inches 2.3 pounds	Art Book
Found Polaroids (2006) *P*	Quack!Media	Jason Bitner	One-page essay	192 pgs. 6.8 x 7.2 inches 15.2 ounces	Novelty Gift Book
Photo Trouvée (2006)	Phaidon Press	Michael Frizot & Cedric de Veigy	Short introduction (in French & English)	320 pgs. 8.9 x 6.8 inches 1.8 pounds	Art Book
Snapshot Chronicles: Inventing the American Photo Album (2006)	Princeton Architectural Press and Reed College	Barbara Levine & Stephanie Snyder	Preface, five essays	200 pgs. 10.3 x 10.3 inches 2.7 pounds	Museum Exhibition Catalogue

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Around the World: The Grand Tour in Photo albums (2007)	Princeton Architectural Press	Barbara Levine & Kirsten M. Jensen	Introduction and postscript essay, description of the travel albums throughout	208 pgs. 9.3 x 12.2 inches 3 pounds	Museum Exhibition Catalogue
Couples: Found photos (2007)	Harry N. Abrams	Roger Handy & Karin Elsener	Short introduction	108 pgs. 6.2 x 8.2 inches 13.6 ounces	Novelty Gift Book
Now is Then: Snapshots from the Maresca Collection (2007)	Princeton Architectural Press	Marvin Heiferman & Frank Maresca	Forward, two essays, interview with collector	192 pgs. 9.4 x 8.2 inches 1.8 pounds	Scholarly Book
Rear Ends: Found Photos (2007)	Harry N. Abrams	Roger Handy / Karin Elsener	Short introduction	108 pgs. 6.5 x 8.2 inches 12.8 ounces	Novelty Gift Book
The Art of the American Snapshot: 1888-1978 (2007)	Princeton University Press	Sara Greenwood & Robert Jackson	Forward, Introduction, Note to the reader, four essays, Afterward, Timeline of camera snapshot photograph "milestones"	288 pgs. 11.7 x 8.8 inches 4 pounds	Museum Exhibition Catalogue
Dogs (2007)	PhaidonSho	Catherine Johnson / William Wegman	Two short essays	240 pgs. 7 x 1.5 x 10 inches 2.3 pounds	Novelty Gift Book
American Photobooth (2008)	W.W. Norton & Company	Nakki Goranin	Forward, lengthy essay by collector about history of the photo booth	224 pgs. 9.5 x 8.4 inches 2.2 pounds	Visual History Book

Who We Were: A Snapshot History of America (2008)	CityFiles Press	Michael Williams & Richard Cahan & Nicholas Osborn	Two essays, seventeen descriptive vignettes that discuss history, photo collecting, and photo taking culture.	240 pgs. 9.7 x 9.9 inches 3 pounds	Visual History Book
In the Vernacular: Photography of the Everyday (2008)	Boston University Art Gallery	Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw and Ross Barrett	Museum exhibit catalogue with five essays	96 pgs. 9.7 x 9.8 inches 12.8 ounces	Museum Exhibition Catalogue
The Face in the Lens: Anonymous Photographs (2009)	University of California Press	Robert Flynn Johnson	Two essays, essay by collector, categories like "Celebrity," "Masculinity," "Inevitability"	208 pgs. 10.1 x 10.2 inches 3.2 pounds	Art Book
Photobooth Dogs (2010)	Chronicle Books	Cameron Woo	Short introduction	108 pgs. 8.3 x 5.3 inches 11.2 ounces	Novelty Gift Book
Talking Pictures (2012)	It Books	Ransom Riggs	Short introduction	384 pgs. 7.9 x 7 inches 1.8 pounds Also available on Kindle.	Novelty Gift Book
Camera Era (2014)	Self-published	Barbara Levine & Martin Venezky	Short introduction	96 pgs. 5 3/4 x 4 inches	Art Book

LOST-AND-FOUND PHOTOGRAPHY ONLINE SITES

Sites are organized alphabetically by title

Title	Description	Format	Gallery?	Practitioner Role
Abandoned Photo Museum	Collection of photos found on sidewalks, primarily in Philadelphia.	Website	Y	Museum Curator
Accidental Mysteries	Photographs from the collection of John and Teenuh Foster – accompaniment to traveling brick-and-mortar museum exhibition.	Website *(also a book)*	Y	Museum Curator
Adopt a Photo	Historical photos of people whose identities are unknown; photos are offered for "adoption" to those (like descendants) who may have an interest in them.	Website	Y	Reuniter
Alaska in the 1950s: A Soldier's View	A set of slides of mid-twentieth-century Alaska taken by a soldier.	Social Network *(Flickr)*	Y	Archivist
Ausgang / Found Photos	An online art "web project" which solicited contributions quarterly according to themes – one such theme was "Found Photos."	Website	Y	Museum Curator
Baltimore City Nineteenth-Century Photos	Collection of photos identified as being from or about Baltimore in the nineteenth century – contributions welcome.	Website	N	Archivist / Reuniter

Big Happy Funhouse	"Vernacular photos" from the personal archive of collector Ron Slattery – updated almost daily with a new photo.	Blog	N	Dealer
Everyday Ago	Vintage snapshots from the collection of Sarah Bryan; photos are posted without any accompanying text.	Blog	Y	Museum Curator
Found in a Thrift Store: 35mm Slides	Scans of old slides found in thrift stores, posted by group members.	Social Network *(Flickr)*	Y	Archivist
Found Cameras and Orphan Pictures	Stories and images related to found cameras and SD cards, posted by group members.	Social Network *(Facebook)*	Y	Reuniter
Found Photo	Assorted "found" photos, some accompanied by captions or short blog posts.	Blog	N	Museum Curator
Found Photos	Contributions of photos found in a variety of locations, posted by group members.	Social Network *(Flickr)*	Y	Museum Curator
Foundphotos.net	Digital photos discovered on public peer-to-peer file-sharing networks.	Website	Y	Museum Curator
Found Photo Room	Vintage photos offered for sale by a variety of collectors, most of whom have websites of their own; the site also includes links to exhibition listings, book reviews, blog postings.	Social Network *(Facebook)*	N	Dealer
Gargantua Photos	Quirky vernacular photos from the collection of dealer Steve Bannos; photos are organized into twelve categories.	Website	Y	Dealer

House of Mirth	Vintage photos and ephemera offered for sale, from the collection of collector/dealer Stacy Waldman.	Website *(also a blog and Facebook page)*	N	Dealer
I Found Your Photo	Blog accompanying a traveling exhibition of thirty "found" photographs.	Blog	N	Museum Curator
J. Comas Vintage Photography	Vintage photos highlighting various photographic forms and processes (e.g., tintypes, cabinet cards, gelatin silver prints).	Blog *(also a commercial website)*	N	Dealer
Joplin's Found Photos	Photos found around the area of Joplin, MO, posted by group members.	Social Network *(Facebook)*	Y	Reuniter
Kitty62Ville -- Found Photos	Personal website devoted to the host's interests, including images she found on sidewalks and in the trash.	Website	Y	Museum Curator
Last Photos of Natalie	Scans of photos of a woman named Natalie, discovered in photo albums purchased at a Brooklyn thrift store.	Social Network *(Fotolog.net)*	Y	Museum Curator
Look at Me	A collection of "found photos" started by Frederic Bonn and Zoe Deleu which now incorporates submissions from the public; photographs all feature people engaging in everyday activities – no studio photographs.	Blog	N	Museum Curator
Lost and Found	Photographs from the collection of Richard Overy – posts accompanying the images contain info on location/date of find, back-of-the-photo captions, and reflections on the subjects.	Blog	N	Archivist

Lost and Found Photos	Photostream of "found" images that includes vintage images and photos group members found within their own family collections.	Social Network *(Flickr)*	Y	Museum Curator
Lost and Found Project	Website accompanying traveling exhibition of damaged photographs found after Japan's March 2011 tsunami.	Website	N	Museum Curator
Lost Photos of Joplin, MO Tornado	Photos recovered after the May 2011 tornado that hit Joplin, MO – includes postings of "Reunification Events."	Social Network *(Facebook)*	Y	Reuniter
Lost Photos of Joplin	Website of the National Disaster Photo Rescue initiative; photos recovered after the May 2011 tornado in Joplin, MO – includes a name database and online claim form.	Website	Y	Reuniter
Object Not Found: Found Photos	Started as an accompaniment to a radio show, the site now posts photographs found in public spaces or on the street, loosely organized by subject or collector.	Website	Y	Museum Curator
Old Photos with Dogs	Collection of pre-digital images, all having a dog somewhere within the scene; many photos highlight the relationship between humans and dogs.	Social Network *(Flickr)*	Y	Archivist
Ookpik's Negativity	Vernacular photos from the 1920s to the 1970s, printed and scanned from collection of negatives acquired by site owner; photos often posted in response to visitor requests (e.g. "holiday photos," "photos of couples holding hands," etc.).	Blog	N	Museum Curator

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Phoundfotographs	Online exhibitions of vernacular photographs, curated by the site's owner (the current exhibition, "The Photographer's Shadow" has been featured since at least 2008); also offers select photos for sale.	Website *(also on Instagram)*	Y	Museum Curator / Dealer
The Boat Lullabies	Collection of peculiar photos posted without captions; many have been turned into gifs by the blogger, Nicholas Osborn.	Blog	N	Museum Curator
The Kodak Girl Collection	Photos, ephemera, novelties, and essays devoted to women as either subjects or creators of photographs.	Website	N	Archivist
Time Tales	Photographs "found" either in the marketplace (thrift stores, flea markets) or on the street, organized by decade. Captions include details location/date of find and back-of-the-photo text.	Website	Y	Museum Curator
Unidentified Old Pictures	Vintage photographs, mostly b&w, bought by a hobbyist collector; posts accompanying each photo ask visitors to share identification info if known.	Blog	N	Reuniter
Vernacular Photography	Dealer specializing in a number of photo types.	Website	Y	Dealer

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