The misconception of knowing, the invention of time; curiosities & introspections of vernacular photography

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The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time;
Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography
Patricia Drummond

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY
In
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the degree of
Masters of Fine Arts

School of Art, Design, and Art History

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to those who have helped me on my journey. To those friends and colleagues who challenged and supported me. The professors who inspired me throughout my academic career, and pushed me to continually expand my studio practice. And to my family for their continued support and willingness to be repeatedly photographed.
Acknowledgments

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Abstract

*The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography* is a body of work that combines photography, artist books, and alternative processes in a series of pieces that explore the synergy between the act of creating vernacular or common photography, the photograph in its many forms, and the interaction with the photographic image at all the stages of its existence. It also exists in conjunction with this written monograph, which supports and gives insight into the work. Through the use of poems, sketchbook musings, the history of photography, critical theory and social norms within photography, I examine the messages embedded in and the possible interactions that we may have with a photograph.
The often left uncreated afterthought

Those we remember become shadows, mists of meaning floating through our thoughts and casting shape and shadow on what we know and recognize.

Forever gone from the physical, corporeal world of touch and sight, placed in our minds, thought, remembrance, left to be seen through reflections of light, recordings of impressions, second hand etchings of energy, life, light, snuffed out and cast to sea. Ashes to ashes and dust-to-dust; what remains unseen creates the sea, the void of understanding, a network of illegible threads.

The evaporating light, the essence of energies carried by current and thought, musings. Diluted as the recipe of the forgotten combines seconds of days and layers of illusion casting those that walk by shadow to the eerie and forgotten realms.

Figments, shapes, illusion and rumination, the smoke and mirrors of the reflection’s reflection. Of time, negative and positive, known and unknown, that which is given no meaning, cast to the margins, void of relevance, worth, dedication, left with the indignation of ill-use, no use, un-used existence.

Spectral, unsettling, the forms behind the veil reveal little of what was and is. Caught between a permanence of what could be, an existence of should be, dripping, flowing, falling through space and time, woven into the blankness, abstract endings of substance, a space of its own reality.

Lost to the truth, or the truth that is known to be. The reality that is gripped upon, spun upon, embraced and cast off, to and from.

The spindles of line and word, story and memory bring into existence the threads of connotation that are twisted, twined, contorted and mangled into the tangle of self-created myth and mirror, woven with the common ideas, webs of intricacy and confinement.

What is lost in the ease of form and function can be found in the compulsion of thought and fantasy.

Mingled smoke, essence of meditation and denotation combine and flow. Waves of known, an old companion permeating the air, chemical tactility seeks to give reaction, corroding the fable, giving way to the unintended, an aleatory deliberation unheeding of convention, the often left uncreated after thought.

Shucking the film of report, losing the mantle of chronicle, undone are the narratives of self and time, tidings of shadow left to tell the tale.¹

¹The often left uncreated afterthought is a poem that I wrote in connection to a series of photographs I made that shares the same title. It offers the viewer another avenue into the work and my interactions with the work (fig. 1).
Not tangled, but intricately woven

*The basis for all photography is the reflection of what is or was as recorded by some light sensitive material and directed in some manner by a human presence.* (Sketchbook 6, 2/2015)

Faded and creased, stained with time, a portrait of a young woman stares out into the world. The carefree nature of the day, or maybe youth, shines through in her smiling face and open easy posture. The year, as stated under the carefully written “Love Issy” in the bottom right corner, is 1934. This portrait (fig. 2) can be seen as an object that at some point in time had a certain level of importance and value assigned to it. It was an object, a token, made and intended to be given. A level of intimacy and associations with memory and feeling are placed within the context of the photograph. A meaning and a story exists within visual distance, yet remains outside of comprehension for those who do not know the documented or documenter.

From the beginning of photography people have been fascinated with the act of taking pictures. Everyone “. . . will make a view of his castle or country-house: people will form collections of all kinds, which will be the more precious because art cannot imitate their accuracy and perfection of detail; besides, they are unaltered by light,” stated Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre in the infancy of photography.\(^2\) Daguerre was correct in his thinking; photographs now permeate our daily lives. “The photographic portrait

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democratized visual imagery” in such a way that photography has become a norm, as well as a visual language with which to communicate. A norm so constant and ever-present that more people than not have a way of creating photographs, countless photographs are taken, posted, texted and shared daily. Our relationship with photography continues to change; thereby changing the interpretation and identification we give an image, as well as our interaction with it.

The interpretations assigned to a single photograph could be many. With each individual, their minds create many connotations that can be placed upon the meaning of a photograph. A single photographic image contains the mystery of its creation, as well as each conversation it holds with its viewers. It reflects a mutual story, in its own time, while living multiple lives. Each story and reading we give the photograph breathes new life into the obvious imagery yet unattainable story of the photograph’s inception. It is this synergy between the act of creating vernacular or common photography, the photograph in its many forms, and the human interaction in all the stages of the photograph’s existence that I explore in my work.

A multiplicity of acts—the journey

The moments that hold such importance in their occurrence become a multiplicity of specks, creating a blanket of dust that fades and eventually hides the document, the archive, from sight and with sight, existence is also lost. If all is lost then what can be found? What can be found in the faded photograph with its creases and wrinkles; what can be seen through the dust and scratches that have become the shield of protection against being known? Can the people, the scenery, lend any information or knowledge to

its viewer or does it become a silent victim to what was and now is not. (Sketchbook 4, Spring 2014)

My work is a journey. It is my own active response to the universal act of personal archiving in photography and life. I understand that everything is temporary yet nothing is unimportant. I apply process and repetition to go beyond the surface of the everyday and to expand upon my own relationship with the work. Ultimately, the images reflect my own story and those stories I choose to create and collect, an archive of created self and myth. My studio practice combines the history of photography, conceptual frameworks, and an attention to process that coalesces in my research. These can often be found in my own personal archive of my work and sketchbooks. All the various aspects form a whole. It is all raveled up together, not tangled, but intricately woven.

As my work has progressed through the last three years, it has shifted from the documentation of places that have had a substantial pull for me (Yesterday’s Favorites) (fig. 3). This led me to document the places in a manner where I did not simply record them as they existed, but as constructed realities of my interactions with these places (Memory’s Edge) (fig. 4). From there I pushed the subject matter further through physical manipulations and abstractions (Selected Realities and Other Contingencies) (fig. 5) and embraced the idea of creating a space or reality. This journey through my work has produced a desire to understand my own connection with photography and its integral part in forming our understanding of documentation and memory (As They Exist – 2013) (fig. 6). As I have continued to work and push the boundaries of my conceptual realization, it has led me to a more abstract depiction of interactions within my photography rather than a photograph of documented recognizable subject matter.
Recordings of reflections: sketchbooks

Forever gone from the physical substance, corporeal world of touch and see, placed in our minds, thoughts, memories left to be seen through reflections of light, recordings of reflections. (Sketchbook 5, Fall 2014)

One of the most significant shifts in my work came during my first semester of grad school when I altered my perspective of a sketchbook through the application of hand bound books. I find that this process of fabricating a personalized sketchbook provides me with an avenue for unrestricted self-expression. I use a single book made for each semester. Once that time period is complete, I stop my documentation within that sketchbook, whether it is full or not, and construct the next one. This action of following a time frame allows me the freedom of having an ending, but not needing to complete an entire sketchbook. This has provided me with an avenue for a form of documentation that is less linear or prescriptive, and more about the passing of ideas, growth of projects and reoccurring thoughts.

This collection of handmade sketchbooks has currently become a series of six artist books (fig. 7) that archive the past three years and catalog the progression of my work. Each book was created in a related fashion, including Coptic binding, similar size and the inclusion of various papers and photographs that provided content, as well as a surface for further ideas. For my studio practice and research, the sketchbooks have embodied the concepts of my work before I even realized where I was going. They

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4 Being in academia, graduate school specifically, provided me with an already allocated time period in the form of a semester.

5Coptic bindings generally have five or signatures, each individual signature being made up of one or more folios, that are sew together on the spine with a chain like stitch. The Coptic binding is generally used as an exposed spine binding.
became the documentation of the documenter and became a place to form my interactions with those interactions I observed and generated.

I have included excerpts from the six sketchbooks in this document (located at the beginning of each section) that illustrate my thought processes during my journey with the work— with the intention that they give further insight into both my work and my studio practice.

If no one ever knows, then nothing is really lost: the physical photograph

_The loss becomes unknown, as new tales are told, if no one ever knows, then nothings really lost._ (Sketchbook 5, Fall 2014)

A viewer can only approach a photograph with the information found in its contents.

“The unmarked photograph is literally and historically unframed, now an image disconnected from the physical, social, and symbolic structures that set its meaning for its original viewers,” explains Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw and Ross Barrett in their book _In The Vernacular, Photography of the Everyday_. A photograph removed from its subject and/or creator, is a photograph disconnected. A disconnected photograph, and/or document, may be read (interpreted) in many different ways.

The interaction with a photograph does not end with its making. Whether through a three second glimpse or a ten-minute study the image evokes various reactions. The original interaction of a photograph exists only during its creation, or one could say the original

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6 Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw, and Ross Barrett, _In The Vernacular, Photography of the Everyday_ (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2008), 11.
definition with the most knowledge and explanation is only fully understood by the
image’s creator. I find this to be true of my own work; only I will ever have the complete
understanding of why my photographs were taken. The image-maker being the creator
and the storyteller, they are the ones that imbue the original meaning to the photograph.
As Alan Trachtenberg, a well-known figure in contemporary photographic history and
culture studies, explains:

“The photographer’s solution is in the viewfinder: where to place the edge of the
picture, what to exclude, and from what point of view to show the relations
among the included details. Both seek a balance between reproduction and
construction, between passive surrender to the facts and active reshaping of them
into a coherent picture or story.”

As the image continues through its life it will be viewed often on its own merits and
outside of the context of its creation, providing it the opportunity to live many different
“stories” or lives. It will also be interacted with on a physical level, through corporeal
methods or digital. It is this synergy between the acts of creating an image, interacting
with it and reading meaning into it that my work examines.

It is a common thread through out life: 28

Time can hide and unearth, help and hinder. It can provide the objective distance needed and
create the void of age. We enact history and time presses it into place, in a constant
motion that progresses it to a memory and if we let it, an unknown. (Sketchbook 1, Fall 2012)

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7 Alan Trachtenberg, Reading American Photographs Images as History, Mathew Brady
To Walker Evans (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), XIV.
In 1972, Historian John Kouwenhoven announced during a lecture that we were “living in a snapshot world.” Since then, snapshots have become progressively more prevalent in our lives, providing us with a visual language with which to communicate. It also affords us, as viewers, an opportunity to create something new and unique to ourselves. While endeavoring to unravel the meaning within how we interact with photographs, I have created a piece that compiles 28 individual experiences had with a single photograph. 28 (fig. 8) is a collective piece that is comprised of twenty-eight individual, 4” x 5” tintype, self portraits.

I took a “selfie” to begin 28 (fig. 9). Today, one of the most common photographic approaches seen in everyday photography is the “selfie.” In the current culture we tend to take more photographs of ourselves than other people take of us, allowing each of us to control the documentation of how we are represented. With that said, we are limited, ultimately, when it comes to how those images are received by others.

A photograph offers an individualized experience to the viewer, no matter the time spent looking or “reading” the image. I find this “individualized definition” or “created story” imposed upon images to be one of the most universal interactions occurring with photographs, specifically portraits. This quote by author and historian Alan Trachtenberg has been highly influential to my work and thinking over the past three years: “ . . . while the camera has undeniably altered our sense of the past by showing us the actual look of things and persons (with the limits, of course, of adjustments of lens, light and

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8 Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw and Ross Barrett, In The Vernacular, Photography of the Everyday (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2008), 11-12.
perspective imposed by the photographer), there is still the question of how we make sense of what we see.” It is this question of “how we make sense of what we see,” that spurred the piece \(28\) (fig. 10).

I used the same negative to expose all twenty-eight photographs. Expired emulsion and rejected plates,\(^9\) combined with the process of making a tintype, further individualized each image. The choice to use the expired emulsion and rejected plates was intentional and necessary to the success of the piece. By using the degraded materials I was able to utilize the “flaws” of the process and employ the “negative” characteristics of the expired emulsion to achieve twenty-eight diverse images created with the same negative. It is within those flaws that the abstraction of interaction can be found. Because of those factors all 28 images appear, in varying degrees, differently.

In \(28\), each photograph attempts to make sense out of a single negative or original image. When we look at a photograph each person who views it perceives it differently. We instinctually read our own individualized story into each image, based on personal life experiences and connotations.

An archive of self and created myth—vernacular photography

The images reflect my own story and those stories I choose to create and collect, an archive of self and created myth, of a journey through explorations of place and time.

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\(^9\) Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), XIV.

\(^{10}\) Plates that had imperfections that you would not normally use when trying to get a technically successful photograph.
Recognizable imagery can be found within each photograph, lending meaning to the story unfolding; while hidden information and the absurdity of repetition, obscure and inhibit the viewer’s complete understanding. Light and season create a color and mood for each photograph; the silent song felt through the brush of wind and winter. Yet layers of form and exposure meld and morph into one another, combining to form a narrative landscape of my own imagining. (Sketchbook 4, Spring 2014)

The work in the thesis exhibition is about the interaction between creating a photo, interacting with that photo, and how multiple meanings can be read into the same photograph. There is a mental interaction happening, a tangible interaction happening, and then the interaction that only the person who creates it has. When looking at these interactions I am specifically talking about vernacular photography: I am interested in how the everyday person interacts with common photographs. Through my creative research, vernacular photography has come into play, due to this I have chosen to use specific processes that relate to this genre and the significant photographic processes in its history. I am also very interested in the genuine sense of intimacy, or an emotional connection, that is found in the free expression of human interactions within the vernacular.

Vernacular photography consists of photographs that reflect the common events of the time: the ordinary, functional photos, and snapshots that people use in their daily lives. It encompasses the photo albums, archives, Facebook and individual cell phones. And it is a form of photography that nearly all people who photograph, at any point in their lives, participate in: “vernacular photography is the shared picture language of ordinary people.”11 As vernacular photography has progressed from its beginning with the tintype,

11 Stacey McCarroll Cutshaw and Ross Barrett, In The Vernacular, Photography of the Everyday (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 2008), 12.
so too did the manner in which people interacted with photographs. Kodak and their slogan of “you push the button, we do the rest,” made it possible for the common person to not only have a photograph made of themselves but also to be the one taking the pictures.

**The often left uncreated afterthought**

*May we walk through the distance, may we press through the film. As far becomes near, and less is unknown. May we enter the realm of perfect abeyance. (Sketchbook 5, Fall 2104)*

*The often left uncreated afterthought* series is a set of eighteen photographs (fig. 11) that exist in conjunction with the poem I wrote (located at the beginning of this document). Each photograph was taken through a creative process beginning with digital photography, progressing to alternative photography with the tintype and Fuji instant film; and then concluding the journey in the digital realm once again through scanning and digital output. Through these photographic processes the work spans the timeline of vernacular photography. This elaborate set of processes functioned as a deliberate veiling; they hide the original truths of the image and reveal the dynamic interactions had with them. This gave the work breadth and depth in the content of each image, as well as, the concept.

This earliest form of the project began out of my own desire to document and record in ways that left the viewer invited into the imagery yet also separated them from the subjects. With these photographs, I specifically wanted to show the visual interaction one has with photographs. To achieve this, I found the need to remove the viewer from
recognizable content through the use of several photographic processes. In addition, the processes used were deliberately chosen because of their significance to the history of vernacular photography, in particular.

To access the visual information I was after, I needed to take a journey with the work through a series of interactions. I took the most prevalent form of vernacular photography currently being used, a digital camera, and created the beginning of the progression: a portrait. The subjects of the document, the people I photographed in the often left uncreated after thought (fig. 12), were my own form of personal documentation.

I took a moment—the motions, voices, characters and laughter—and pressed them into my viewfinder. For me, when shooting, I am pulling in all my senses. I am capturing an atmosphere that is only ever fully available to me once photographed. It is my own form of interaction with the work, specifically the image. From these digital photographs I made digital negatives, a technique used to create a negative through digital processes.

The next progression in the process embraced the historical beginnings of common photography: the tintype. I took the digital negatives into the darkroom to create the plates, into the red light of sensitivity and mystery. In the tintype process a light sensitive emulsion is applied to a metal plate, that metal plate is then exposed with a negative. The tintype process gave the image a physical component. The resulting photograph is on a piece of metal, producing a photograph with a physical presence. The photograph
becomes an object that is not only intended to be experienced on a mental and visual level, but also as a tactile object.

**My memory is your relic**

*Photo paper and other light sensitive objects record the history of light, the interaction of light with a corporeal thing, even when no recognizable “image” is made, it still represents the act of recording, a physical manifestation of the light that the object is exposed to. The documentation of an interaction, as the photograph also becomes our documentation of interaction. (Sketchbook 1, Fall 2012/(Adaptation) Spring 2015)*

For me, the information forming in *the often left uncreated after thought* (fig. 13) were still not enough; the imagery was still too available, too present on the surface of the physical object. The information layered into a photograph is at times inaccessible to the visual observation; often a viewer may not comprehend the many layers that make up an image. That is in part what I wanted to comment on in this work.

At this point, the photographs only held some of the more literal interactions to be had with the imagery. The digital photograph provided the image capture, the digital negative a bridge to the tintype, which began the visual layering process and expanded the definition of the photograph. It had become a photo, a negative and an object. The next step in the journey was to pull the viewer back from the actual object. At times when a piece of work is viewed in its original format, it gives too much information or gives unnecessary information to the viewer.

With this in mind I took the tintypes individually and placed them on a Day Lab scanner. A Day Lab is a small machine, approximately the size of a coffee maker. Original Day Labs were used to expose Polaroid 669 peel-apart film with a slide (a positive image on
35mm film). This specific machine uses a scanner to expose Fuji peel-apart film, the Fuji film being a replacement for the Polaroid 669 film that is no longer made. I placed my tintype plates on the scanner, one by one, and projected them onto the Fuji film. The Fuji film produces a physical positive photograph and a negative of sorts. The negative does not look like or function as a common film negative does. It generally appears as a dark brownish black piece of paper with a faded residue of the photograph made. This residue is what remains of the chemical reaction, and reveals what happened with the positive while the development was occurring. In most instances this negative is discarded. I find this action of discarding the remains of the photograph—the document—an interesting interaction. It is the physical residue of documenting—the physical document of the photographic document, the document of the documentation.

As I studied and lived with the work, it was not the recognizable imagery that seemed most significant, but the negatives. I looked at the negatives: there was a chemical residue, some slight imagery that could still be connected to what the positive photos revealed, and there were also ghostly or ephemeral-looking white lines. Those white lines for me best visually illustrated how we interact with photographs. That interaction that we have with the photograph, whether it is in creating it, touching it, or looking at a photograph—and reading meaning into it. That interaction is not a physical object. It is not something that can necessarily be drawn in a concrete way. So these ephemeral lines, which are abstract in nature, perfectly revealed what I was trying to show with the interaction of photographs. In their abstract way, the ghostly lines and black recesses
created the perfect synergy of interaction. They depict the unseen energy of those interactions we have between a photograph and ourselves, traces of light and animation.

Due to the small size of the chemical negatives (four by five inches), I scanned the negatives. The imagery was obscured by its own size. I wanted something that would pull the viewer into the work and push the imagery in how it related to its own contents. I then printed digitally; I took imagery back to the beginning, back to the present, back to digital photography.

So much information, meaning and story are placed upon images. The original intention, the connotations that already exist, the many readings each person places upon the image: all of this is coded into the photograph, left to be witnessed, perhaps only discovered by a few and probably never fully understood. This idea of hidden layers, coded information woven into the image itself, led me to create the often left uncreated after thought.

As one of the graduate faculty, Kenneth Szmagaj, stated to me during a review, “It is as if there is a quiet but persistent war going on between the animation of energy and the stasis of void.” The photographs encapsulate an ever-changing reaction between imagery and us—the animation of energy being our interaction with photographs and the void, in one of its forms, being the vast amounts of photographs present in the world.

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12 Kenneth Szmagaj, Graduate End of Semester Review, James Madison University, December 5, 2014.
Just because it’s in your head doesn’t mean it isn’t real: photo as document

*It is a morphing mass of color, shape, texture and light; with shifting winds and shining strings connecting small pieces of information and imagery. Small explosions of form and function, reason and concept expel and create new connections while disregarding others.* (Sketchbook 4, Spring 2014)

Whether we are removed from a photograph or invited in by its physical presence, an interaction of some sort occurs. *Photo as Document* (fig. 14) is all about the paraphernalia or remnants left from taking a photograph; it is about the documentation of the thing doing the document. As well as the quandary: what does a photograph actually document?

*Photo as Document* (fig. 15) is an artist book where I use the remnants from Polaroid peel-apart film. When you peel it apart you have the negative and the positive, but you also have this other piece that connects the negative and the positive—a white frame with chemical residue on it. Generally this is a discarded item. I have a fascination with those objects that are a record only of themselves and their cause, which led me to re-examine and save this commonly discarded item.

The continued repetitive empty frame became a visual reminder to both photographs taken and those left in the moment. A photograph when taken is framing a scene; literally the camera acts as a framing device to document. With these white frames the image is lost, we can no longer see what they were framing, just as we can never see the scene outside the frame.
In my mind it is a simply complex piece begging a question to be answered: what is a photograph as a document?

Photos tell no lies, photos tell no truths

My reality becomes my truth; a truth that I both live by and live in. Though that reality is not the same for everyone, it is the only one I know. Ever changing, ever growing, my reality becomes my grandest construction of all. (Sketchbook 2, Spring 2013)

Much of my work examines the idea that photographs are documents and the incorrect association of thinking that a document is always fact in the strictest way. In Photos Tell no Lies, Photos Tell no Truths (fig. 16), a piece that includes five photographs presented side by side, I used the same negative to create five individual, and visually varied, photographs. In the images it is obvious that the same subject is present, yet each image elicits a different connotation.

When someone takes a photo, the subject represented in that photo is generally what was actually photographed. However, I also know as a photographer, there are many ways to manipulate a photograph both within the camera and outside of it. Even when looking at photographs that are presented as historical documentation, there exists a subjectivity placed upon the photograph by the photographer’s choices.

In Photos Tell No Lies, Photos Tell No Truths (fig. 17) I wanted to explore that manipulative quality of photography and the idea that the photograph is only the documentation of the photographer’s intent. The five photographs are a self-portrait, created from a single negative. It is the only self-portrait I have composed that feels true
to myself, in part because of its evolution from a single likeness to the multifaceted representation of a complicated person.

I took this “selfie” with my iPad, and printed it as a digital negative along with several other self-portraits. I spent some time trying to decide which image to use; I wanted it to feel true to myself, since it was a self-portrait. Interestingly, in looking at the works with a colleague, it was discovered that one negative read more accurately as an uninhibited self-portrait. This discussion inspired me to reconsider the actions related to self-portraiture, or the defining of self through photography.

I again used a tintype process for this piece, but varied its process through the use of wet-plate collodian and further manipulated the outcome by spray-painting the plate blue to begin. In the end, I had five photographs made with the same negative, but containing five different images of myself. It made me think about that idea of a photograph expressing “this is who I am” versus a photograph conveying, “this is who I want you to see.” Another consideration is the act of photographing someone else, resulting in his or her definition of “this is who you are.”

Historically, when individuals had their photos taken, there was a great deal that went into the process. Tintypes revolutionized this, making the process cheaper and therefore more accessible. While the pomp and circumstance of the original practices abated, people would still come dressed in their best clothes, but others would come dressed
more in a comical fashion or they would bring props with them. It was their own way of declaring, “this is who I am” in their photograph.

Photographs were also used in the past to study people of different cultures and/or those outside of the excepted norms of the time. There were tintypes made of slaves, criminals and those placed in asylums in the 1800’s. In those images, the subjects did not get to choose how they were photographed. A person who had a definitive mindset photographed them in a specific way; a message was being conveyed of “this is who you are” or “this is who I see you to be.” Today, when we take photos of ourselves, we are controlling how we are portrayed to others. We present ourselves in a manner of our own choosing, which goes back to that idea of saying, “this is who I want you to see,” instead of “this is who I am” or “this is who you are.”

In creating Photos tell no Lies, Photos Tell no Truths (fig. 18) I found that the truest representation or documentation of myself rested in a balance between “this is who I am,” “this is who I want you to see,” and “this is who you are”—a communication between each interaction to be had with the creation of a portrait. The images hold a weight and presence that supersedes the individual declarations of the process and method of capturing the image. They go beyond a superficial declaration of self, which in essence challenges their beginnings as a selfie, and quantify the qualities that we place on portraits.
Lethe$^{13}$ (lee-thee): abstraction

*Secrets come and secrets go, as photos lose their mortal soul. The loss becomes unknown, as new tales are told, if no one ever knows, then nothing is really lost.*

*(Sketchbook 5, Fall 2104)*

I approach my work as a journey, during which time I create art that I form a relationship with. In that journey I push the work to see how far I can take it, at which point does the piece tip the scale into obscurity? What can I find through the continued exploration of the materials? Why is the potential for risk and failure necessary to the success of the content? How far do I obscure the origin in order to reach the destination? At what point does a piece become too easy? These are all questions or even rules to my making. My own guidelines that often obscure the unnecessary information and direct me to finding that crystallization of my intended idea (fig. 19).

In my work I find the use of abstraction—achieved through the process of technique and medium—to be both relevant in its occurrence and crucial in the visualization of the concept. Recognizable imagery may be found within my photographs, lending meaning to the story unfolding; while hidden information and the absurdity of repetition, obscure and inhibit while inciting questions and insight. So much is hidden in my work, with a conscious knowing on my part. Small markers of my journey are hidden within the photographs, but they are not necessary in the reading of the work. The hidden information is a part of my own conversation with the work. It is the remnants left from our conversations, the vestiges of the synergies. I invite the viewer to take their own journey with the work, and follow the visual cues given.

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$^{13}$ (Greek: Oblivion)
The heart of the matter: conclusion

It is the interactions between photography and us that holds the magnetism of the photograph. My work examines the allure of being able to declare whom we are through the act of photography and the appeal associated with solidifying a point in time. While delving into our own interactions we can find an understanding not only of our perceived reciprocal actions, but also gain insight into the form and function of the everyday photograph as it continues to evolve with us. It is this continued interdependency between the captured image and our need to preserve that I observe in my work. It is a commentary on the exchange of energies, an inquiry into synergy between photography and people.

It is within the space of a moment that an energy is seen. It is within the glimpse of an edge that a moment is lost.

It is within that time with which we seek, seek to find the cryptic language, mementos of a story eaten away.

Riddled with holes that form roots to new understanding. A system forms pathways, complex in their transitive formulations. A dense dew upon which the structure is built. Melding in sparks of information, currents of meaning building to infernos of tales told.

It goes forth as air to breath, flight is held as distillation occurs. It is within the space of a moment that energy is seen. (Sketchbook 6, Spring 2015)
Appendix A: Figures

Figure 1, *Untitled (from the often left uncreated afterthought)*, 2014. Archival print from scanned Fuji negative created with dry-plate tintype from digital negative.
Figure 2, Found Vernacular Photograph, from the collection of Patricia Drummond, 1934
Figure 3, *Yesterday’s Favorites*, 2011, Photographic Transfer and Assemblage
Figure 4, *Shadows & Reflections*, 2012, Archival Print from scanned expired color film
Figure 5, *Untitled* (the series *Selected Realities and Other Contingencies*), 2013, Archival Print from scanned color film
Figure 6, *Kenneth*, 2013, Archival Print from scanned Large Format Negative
Figure 7, *Sketchbooks 1-5*, 2012-2015, Artist Books
Figure 8, 28, 2014, 4” x 5” Dry-Plate Tintypes
Figure 9, Single Image from 28, 2014, 4”x 5” Dry-Plate Tintype
Figure 10, Single Image from 28, 2014, 4”x 5” Dry-Plate Tintype
Figure 11, *Untitled (from the often left uncreated afterthought)*, 2014, Archival print from scanned Fuji negative created with dry-plate tintype from digital negative
Figure 12, *Untitled (from the often left uncreated afterthought)*, 2014, Archival print from scanned Fuji negative created with dry-plate tintype from digital negative.
Figure 13, *Untitled* (from the often left uncreated afterthought), 2014, Archival print from scanned Fuji negative created with dry-plate tintype from digital negative.
Figure 14, *Photo as Document*, 2015, Artist Book: Polaroid remnants, wood panel, spray paint and dental floss
Figure 15, *Photo as Document* (detail), 2015, Artist Book: Polaroid remnants, wood panel, spray paint and dental floss
Figure 16, *Photos Tell no Lies, Photos Tell no Truths*, 2014, Archival print on acrylic from wet-plate tintype
Figure 17, *Photos Tell no Lies, Photos Tell no Truths* (detail), 2014, Archival print on acrylic from wet-plate tintype
Figure 18, *Photos Tell no Lies, Photos Tell no Truths* (detail), 2014, Archival print on acrylic from wet-plate tintype
Figure 19. *Just Because It’s in Your Head*, 2014, Archival print from scanned dry-plate tintype
Appendix B: Thesis Exhibition Documentation

*Archive of Actions*, 2015, Artist book made from Fuji instant peel a-part film remnants
MFA Thesis Exhibition Documentation, April-May 2015,
Duke Gallery of Fine Art,
James Madison University
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MFA Thesis Exhibition Documentation, April-May 2015,
Duke Gallery of Fine Art,
James Madison University
Red Light Remnants, 2015,
Archival print from scanned 120 film
28, installation shot, 2015,
4 x 5” dry-plate tintypes
28, installation shot, 2015,
4 x 5” dry-plate tintypes
Photos Simply Depict (Diptych), 2015,
Archival photograph on acrylic from wet-plate collodion
MFA Thesis Exhibition Documentation, April-May 2015,
Duke Gallery of Fine Art,
James Madison University
The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography, 2015, Artist Book: Archival Prints, thesis monograph, leather, wood, handmade paper, waxed linen thread
The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography, (detail) 2015, Artist Book: Archival Prints, thesis monograph, leather, wood, handmade paper, waxed linen thread
The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography, (detail) 2015, Artist Book: Archival Prints, thesis monograph, leather, wood, handmade paper, waxed linen thread
The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography, (detail) 2015, Artist Book: Archival Prints, thesis monograph, leather, wood, handmade paper, waxed linen thread
The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography, (detail) 2015, Artist Book: Archival Prints, thesis monograph, leather, wood, handmade paper, waxed linen thread
The Misconception of Knowing, the Invention of Time; Curiosities & Introspections of Vernacular Photography, (detail) 2015, Artist Book: Archival Prints, thesis monograph, leather, wood, handmade paper, waxed linen thread
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