Beyond the shutter's *click*: exploring time and place through photographic studio practices

Amanda Shopa

University of Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Photography is inherently linked to time, yet discussions of photography's relationship to time focus almost exclusively on how photographs as objects convey, represent and encode time. In this essay, I use arts-based research, narrative inquiry, lived experiences and collected artefacts to a/r/tographically explore how photographic studio practice also conveys, represents, and encodes time. In four stories that span three decades, I show how my own practice shifted from being about photographs (objects) to photography (process). These four stories also caused new questions to arise, including: why use a film camera in 2020? I conclude with a brief discussion about how the materiality of film makes for an embodied experience.

KEYWORDS

arts-based research, a/r/tography, narrative inquiry, photography, COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

Photography is technologically and philosophically linked to notions of time. In the two hundred years of photography's existence, it has moved from a slow speed, manual-mandatory practice requiring long sitting times and a darkroom to a near-instantaneous practice where a photograph can be taken and viewed in a fraction of a second (Van Gelder & Westgeest, 2011). Yet whether manual or automated processes are used, photography conveys, represents and encodes time (Battye, 2014).

Narrowing the focus to film photography, technical aspects of time—film speed, aperture, and exposure time—can be manipulated in-camera (e.g. Adams, 1980); the relationship with time is further shaped by a photographer's hands during film processing (e.g. Adams, 1981; Anchell & Troop, 1998) and while creating prints (e.g. Adams, 1983; Anchell, 2016).

Photography is often described as capturing a moment—the moment of exposure time. Inventor and photographer Harold Edgerton (1946-1952) used very short exposure times to show the first moments of a nuclear explosion. Teacher and artist Nicole Croy (2017) uses pinhole cameras to expose photographic paper for months at a time, making the changing path of the sun evident. Exposure time alone does not capture the work that goes into creating a photograph, however. Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson's (1999) discussion about "the decisive moment," or the compositional eye that a photographer uses when choosing to take a photo, speaks to this; and

artist David Hockney has layered photos together to create a sense of the time that goes into creating a photo (Hockney & Joyce, 1988).

Photography challenges traditional understandings of time. Barthes (1981) argues that the essence of photography is “that-has-been” and says photos represent the absolute past and tell of death in the future. De Duve (1978) says a photo can be “live evidence” that suspends time or a “deadening artifact [sic]” that draws attention to the flow of time around the moment a photo depicts. Still, capturing time is impossible, and “all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt,” Sontag says (1979, p. 15).

“Time is the most often discussed aspect of photography,” say Van Gelder and Westgeest (2011, p. 64). Yet this discussion often centres around photographs (as objects) rather than photography (as a process). Instead of examining photos as images of time, in this essay I explore how photographic studio practice and sites can serve as another way to understand time.

METHODOLOGY

In this essay, I use arts-based research methods (Barone & Eisner, 2011; Leavy, 2020) and an a/r/tography lens (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) to examine my history as a photographer and better understand myself as an artist-researcher-teacher (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). A/r/tography sees the three roles of artist-researcher-teacher as intertwined and wants to “create circumstances where knowledge and understanding can be produced through inquiry-laden processes” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. 111). A/r/tographers merge knowing, doing, and making as they work among and between their artist-researcher-teacher identity (Leavy, 2020).

One of my artistic/inquiry practices is storytelling. We live our lives in stories (Clandinin, 2015; Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013) and the stories I tell about myself influence my art, research, and teaching practices. In this paper, I have used narrative inquiry’s three-dimensional research space made of time, place and relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to explore turning points in my lifelong journey as a photographer. Each story highlights relationships that helped me develop as a photographer and details the places (sites) of my studio practices. Time is embedded in several ways. While each story occurs at a specific time period, and the focus is on how time relates to my studio practices, the stories as a whole also show how my understanding of photography changed over time.

These four memories span approximately thirty years, and to jog and check my memory, I examined old photos and negatives, personal diaries, school yearbooks, photography class portfolios and sales receipts. I also spoke with family members and former classmates about these time periods. Even with this sort of “triangulation,” these stories are my own, filtered through my own lens. In what follows, I share these four memories, weaving in photos and other artefacts, to show how my studio practice and sites have changed over time and how studio practice and sites *themselves* serve as markers of time.

Finally, I want to make note of three of the philosophical underpinnings of arts-based research (ABR) because they affect how this piece is written and how you, Reader, are asked to approach it. First, aesthetic choices matter. The arts (including storytelling) tap into different ways of knowing and understanding, and aesthetic decisions influence how people react to and interact with art (Leavy, 2020). Thus, the following stories do not adhere to traditional academic writing

standards but are instead written in a more natural storytelling register. Second, ABR often seeks to promote dialogue and generate further questions among and with the audience and researcher (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Leavy, 2020). I invite you to make your own interpretations and ask new questions. Lastly, unlike many other forms of research, in ABR the researcher alone is not responsible for interpretation. It is recognised that audience members will interpret a piece in different ways depending on their own experiences and viewpoints (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Leavy, 2020). I do not explain every interpretation I have about my own studio practices of photographer history, leaving some things implied, unstated or even ambiguous. Part of good storytelling is trusting readers to pick up breadcrumbs woven into stories (Cron, 2012), and I trust that you will bring your own experience and knowledge to this piece. Ultimately, I hope you will consider how your own creative and artistic practices have changed through time and may themselves act as markers of time.

SHUTTER CLICK

1/125th of a second; the maximum length of time a hand-held camera's shutter can be open without introducing camera shake.

When I was eight years old my dad dated a woman named Louise. Louise was very interested in photography and horses, and because of her, I was curious about both. My dad wanted to send my younger brother and me to a YMCA day camp, and we spent weekends selling candy bars to raise the money to attend. I lobbied for Horse Camp and I brought my 110-cartridge camera—it was the late-Eighties, after all—with me daily.

Shortly after the week-long camp ended, Dad handed me a 35 mm single-lens reflex (SLR) camera and said it was mine. It was a *real* camera, the kind people like Louise used. It was large in my small hands, heavy, and mostly made of metal. Dad said, "If you want to learn photography, you're going to learn 35 mm photography, the real stuff."

After getting help loading the film, I rushed outside. Louise acted as my technical assistant, helping me change the camera settings as I took photos of my own shadow or my little brother drinking a can of Coke.

FIGURE 1: PHOTO OF MY SHADOW ON THE SIDEWALK. Caption: This photo of my shadow is from my first roll of film. The top half of the photo has some residue on it, either from glue or from being pressed against other photos in wet conditions.

Photography became a normal part of our visits. One weekend I spent a lot of time pointing my camera at tree trunks in a local park. I was learning how to focus, making the split circle in the centre of the image become a smooth, round ring. Since the camera's internal light meter was broken, Dad taught me how to meter outdoor scenes using the Sunny Sixteen rule[1]. I was still confused by how the shutter speed and aperture related to each other, so Dad and Louise checked my settings.

Good photography posture was the hardest thing to learn. I could hold my breath, keep my elbows pressed against my body and *squeeze* the shutter button instead of *pushing* it. But the moment I heard the *click*—the mirror moving inside the camera's body—I'd excitedly yank the camera down to my waist yelling, "I took a picture!"

A shutter speed of 1/125th of a second is usually fast enough to overcome natural handshake, but it wasn't fast enough to overcome my excitement, leaving me with squiggly images. It took several rolls of film before I learned how to wait for the mirror to return to its original position.

In his discussion about photography and time, Battye (2014) explores what it means to take a photo. He says that in some cases, such as "elaborate studio photographs" that require a lot of preparation and decision making, "the release of the shutter button is the culminating, summative act in a sequence, not the act of making the photograph" (2014, p. 74). Yet if a camera's automatic settings are used, which might happen when creating an "everyday snapshot," the "summative task of clicking the shutter button is likely to be perceived as the act of taking the photograph" (2014, p. 74).

[1] On sunny days, set the aperture to f/16 and the shutter speed to the nearest reciprocal of film speed (such as 1/60th or 1/125th if using 100 ISO film). From there, the aperture or shutter speed can be adjusted to account for weather conditions or additional light being reflected off of water or snow.

George Eastman used automation and ease of use as the main selling point of the Kodak #1 when he invented it in 1888. The box camera was loaded with a 100-frame roll of film, and when the user was finished with the roll, they mailed the camera back to the factory for film processing and film reloading. The ease of using the Kodak #1 camera made photography accessible to the public. To highlight how amateur-friendly his camera was, Eastman featured images of women and children using it and coined the slogan "You press the button, we do the rest!" (Fineman, 2004).

I wasn't aware of this slogan when I learned how to use an SLR camera, but it aligned with my understanding of photography. Focusing and changing my camera's settings were not part of taking a photo, but instead were necessary steps I had to take before the most important part: snapping the shutter. After I finished a roll of film, my dad took it and a few weekends later I'd get an envelope with my photos and negatives inside.

As a new photographer, my studio practice was limited to what I could hold in my hands (my camera and film) and where I could go with my feet. The time investment was minimal: I pressed the button and other people did the rest.

CLASS PERIOD

49 minutes; the length of my physical education class in eighth grade.

Two facts about my life as an eighth grader: First, I was exempted from some outdoor physical education units for medical reasons and was sent to the school library to write reports. Second, the library had a two-book checkout limit. If either of these hadn't been true, perhaps I wouldn't have become a book thief.

While some of my classmates occasionally brought their point-and-shoot cameras to class, my SLR could always be found in my backpack or hanging from a woven strap around my neck. I took photos most days, during lunch and recess but also in class. I don't remember asking my classmates or teachers for explicit permission. Some teachers were supportive; my homeroom teacher let me use class time to take double exposures of my friend John near the lockers, and the art teacher let me turn some painting assignments into photography assignments. Other teachers simply ignored me, and I took their silence as tacit approval and universal permission. In a school of approximately 700 students, I saw myself as—and felt seen by my peers and teachers as—a photographer.

FIGURE 2: PHOTO OF BOY DOUBLE EXPOSED BY THE LOCKERS. Caption: This in-camera double exposure shows my friend John Wheeler near our lockers. On the back, I wrote that I took the photo "Because it's John, that's why!"

One snowy day, I had to write a report about ice hockey. I read a single encyclopedia article[2] and then started browsing the stacks. There, I discovered the library's dusty cache of photography books from the 1960s and 1970s, books that hadn't been checked out since at least 1983 according to the due dates stamped inside the back covers. I'd reached my checkout limit, but I knew nobody else in the school would want those books.

One of the boys in my homeroom class had once told me he didn't think the library's back exit—the one tucked between two tall bookshelves—had sensors on it. I studied that exit, trying to figure out if the librarian could see it from her desk. We weren't *supposed* to use that door, but we'd never been told we *couldn't*. And it didn't have a red fire alarm bar on it …

I decided to steal the books.

The next physical education period, I greeted the librarian with a nod. I headed to the photography section, chose two books and shoved them in my backpack. I sat down at a table with my back to the librarian and pretended to do my maths homework.

When the bell rang, I walked to the back exit, my heart pounding.

No alarms went off, and the librarian didn't stop me.

[2] The only fact I remember from the encyclopedia article was that there was no 1918-1919 Stanley Cup winner due to the 1918 Flu Pandemic. I thought it was incredible that the flu made them cancel such a large event.

For months, I stole library books, returning them when I was finished reading them. I learned how to make pinhole cameras out of coffee cans and tennis balls. I read that kitchen twine and an eyebolt could make a decent substitute for a tripod and that overexposing film was better than underexposing it. I also discovered ways I could manipulate images by smearing Vaseline on a filter or stretching a piece of nylon mesh over the lens.

I was most interested in the instructions for building and using a darkroom. The family I babysat for had an abandoned darkroom in their basement, and they said I was welcome to take it apart, but my mom and stepdad wouldn't let me. They argued that I'd have access to one in high school.

In between rounds of being a book thief, I dropped off rolls of film at the local photo lab, paying for the one-day processing with my babysitting money. One book said short negative strips could make loading the negative carrier difficult and suggested leaving them uncut, so I started writing "please do not cut negatives" on the drop-off forms.

It felt good to be seen as a photographer by my classmates, but it could also be lonely. Taking and sharing photos can strengthen relationships and create individual and group identity (Gye, 2007); certainly, the act of taking photos helped form my socially constructed identity (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) as a photographer. Yet although my personal identity was strong, I lacked a community of photographers to talk with and learn from. In retrospect, those books became part of a self-created community that reached through the decades to show me what was possible through photography.

Discovering those books broadened my studio practice to include some historical perspectives. More importantly, I discovered a whole field of photographic possibilities. I was limited by my lack of a darkroom, and I found that out one book at a time.

ONE SCHOOL WEEK

Monday–Thursday & Friday; the days I was allowed to work in the high school darkroom alone and the one day I wasn't.

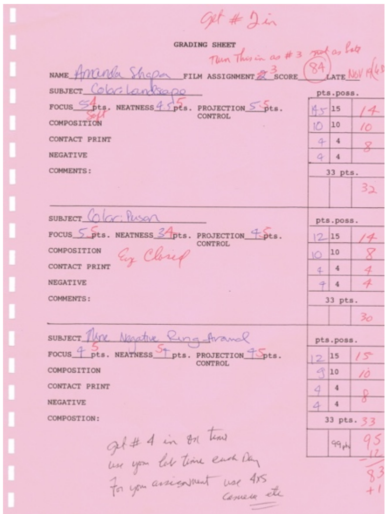
I was fifteen when I finally gained access to a darkroom. The only problem was that my teacher, Mr Nelson, wanted us to learn the basics of photography—how to pan to freeze action and how changing the aperture affects depth of field changes—and I thought I already understood how my camera worked. In fact, I was saving my babysitting and birthday money to purchase a used SLR with a working light meter.

He also wanted us to learn the basics of darkroom work. We learned how to make contact prints and test strips to choose the best exposure time and how to dodge and burn to bring out an image's highlights and shadows. Mr Nelson wanted us to learn how to make stellar prints.

Art critic Clement Greenberg (1964) says that compared to painting, photography can achieve realism with greater speed and ease. But photographs are not neutral representations (Holm, 2014; Sontag, 1979) and photo manipulation has long been of interest to photographers (e.g. Fraprie & Woodbury, 1896/1931). Besides, I wasn't taking photographs as a replacement for painting, and if I wanted the ease, speed and realism a photograph could afford me, there was no reason for me to be in the darkroom. I could never turn around a roll of film as quickly, inexpensively, or accurately as the automated Kodak and Fuji machines did.

I wanted to play. And there was no play in automation.

Mr Nelson kept after-school darkroom hours, and I took advantage of those worktimes, making prints from the film I'd developed that day or the day before, or experimenting with ideas I'd read about.


Get # 2 in

GRADING SHEET

NAME Amanda Shapa FILM ASSIGNMENT 3 SCORE 84 LATE

SUBJECT Color: Landscape

FOCUS 4 pts. NEATNESS 5 pts. PROJECTION CONTROL 5 pts.

	pts.poss.	
COMPOSITION	15	14
CONTACT PRINT	10	10
NEGATIVE	4	8
COMMENTS:	4	
	33 pts.	32

SUBJECT Color: Person

FOCUS 5 pts. NEATNESS 4 pts. PROJECTION CONTROL 5 pts.

	pts.poss.	
COMPOSITION	15	14
CONTACT PRINT	10	8
NEGATIVE	4	4
COMMENTS:	4	4
	33 pts.	30

SUBJECT

FOCUS 5 pts. NEATNESS 5 pts. PROJECTION CONTROL 5 pts.

	pts.poss.	
COMPOSITION	15	15
CONTACT PRINT	10	10
NEGATIVE	4	8
COMPOSTION:	4	
	33 pts.	33
	99 pts	95

Get #4 in on time

use your lab time each day

for your assignment use 4x5

camera etc

FIGURE 3: SCAN OF PINK GRADING SHEET. Caption: This is one of my grading sheets from Advanced Photography. I turned in my second and third assignments late because I was too busy experimenting in the darkroom. Mr Nelson wrote: "Get #4 in on time. Use your lab time each day for your assignment. Use 4x5 camera, etc." (Punctuation added for clarity.)

Eventually, Mr Nelson showed me how to close up the darkroom and told me I could work by myself, as long as everything was cleaned up and put away properly. The only day I couldn't stay was Friday, because if I made a mistake in closing up, he wouldn't find out until Monday morning. When Mr Nelson later showed me how to read the laminated charts so I could mix together the photographic chemistry in the large quantities he needed, I knew I'd reached a new level of his trust.

With the freedom that granted me, I found a greater sense of creative risk taking and independence. During class, I finished assignments; I learned how to develop slides and colour film and use a large-format camera. But when I was alone after class, I played. I cranked the radio up and double exposed prints using two negatives. I especially liked to solarise prints. Exposing partially developed prints to a white light resulted in a silvery glow between the highlights and shadows. The results were always unpredictable.

My t-shirts became stained brown with developer and my brother complained I smelled like vinegar. The smell of stop bath didn't bother me; I was finally experiencing the part of photography that had been hidden from me in the name of ease. When I watched an image slowly appear in a bath of Dektol, I felt connected to my (stolen) community of book-photographers, knowing that they'd experienced the same feelings of awe. As my studio practice expanded to include a darkroom, my school weeks became measured in the four days I could stay after school—and the one day I couldn't.

Late in the spring, Mr Nelson called me over to his desk. He handed me the bulk rolls of film I'd purchased from him and dropped his voice. "Don't tell anyone, but you know … you have my

permission to start staying late on Fridays—as long as you keep closing everything up the right way."

ROLL OF FILM
Indefinite time period; in this story, specifically COVID-19 #stayathomeMN orders

On the second Monday in March 2020, I sat in a ballroom with my mom, stepdad and best friend. We were watching my husband, Kisu—and over eight hundred other people—become a naturalised citizen. I did some quick maths and figured there had to be at least three thousand people in the room.

While we waited, my stepdad talked about the flu cases he'd been dealing with during his overnight shift as a nurse. A second case of COVID-19 had been confirmed in the state the day before, but there wasn't evidence of community spread.

After the ceremony, everyone spilled into the common space of the conference hall. We took photos of strangers, and they took ours in turn. The grin on my husband's face hid hours of studying for his exam; after eleven years of living in America, he would finally be able to vote.

Four days later, with fourteen cases confirmed in the state, our governor declared a state of emergency and ordered us to start social distancing. One week after sitting in the ballroom, both of our work sites were shut down and Kisu and I started working from home.

I was still in fairly high spirits when I took my weekly grocery shopping trip on day 16 of the stay at home order. On the drive home, I passed the Minnesota State Fairgrounds. I knew the Fair had last been cancelled in 1946 due to a polio epidemic (Hawley, 2020) and wondered if COVID-19 would lead to its cancellation again when I spotted a sign near one of the entrances.

HANG IN THERE, MINNESOTA.

FIGURE 4: PHOTO OF SIGN READING HANG IN THERE, MINNESOTA. Caption: The Minnesota State Fair put this sign up shortly after our state of emergency took effect.]

"Oh shit," I muttered, grinding my palm into the steering wheel and tearing up.

At home, I told Kisu we were going for a walk, "and I'm picking where"

In university I'd worked in a photo processing lab, a few years before they started to close en masse. Like most photographers, I eventually shifted exclusively to digital photography, but I held on to my old film cameras. After teaching for over a decade, I started graduate school, where I quickly realised I needed a break from sitting in front of computer screens and reading academic articles. I asked my brother to build a darkroom in the basement—I couldn't do academic work under a safelight, I reasoned. Although the darkroom had been finished for a year, I hadn't used it very often. But now I needed it.

While Kisu pulled on his sneakers, I dug out my Canon AE-1[3] and found a roll of film in a drawer.

For the last twelve days of summer, the Minnesota State Fair brings over two million people together for agriculture, music, fun and food. Kisu and I love the Fair and attend it multiple times during its yearly run with local and out-of-state friends. It ushers in the autumn and is something to look forward to before Minnesota's winter chill starts to settle in.

The rest of the year, the fairgrounds are used for smaller events such as car shows, plant sales and snow sculpting competitions. The grounds are open daily, and bicyclists use the empty roads as training spaces. That spring day, we found a few other couples walking hand in hand. Nobody wore masks. We hadn't been encouraged to—yet.

As we wandered around the grounds, I photographed the familiar, such as the 'Greetings from Minnesota!' mosaic that people crowd in front of to take selfies. But I also photographed things I'd never noticed before. "Has this statue always been here?" I muttered. It must have been; time and fairgoers had chipped away at the clown's wooden feet.

Over the next six weeks, I returned to the fairgrounds a few times. Although the grounds were desolate, memories flooded over me. I remembered peeking at newborn calves at the Miracle of Birth barn and going to the Dairy Building; every year, sculptor Linda Christensen carves the Minnesota Dairy Princess's likeness out of a 40 kg brick of butter while working in a rotating refrigerated booth (Pahmeier, 2019). I could almost smell grease and salt in the air and taste warm chocolate chip cookies.

I also wondered about the future and what I would miss if the Fair were cancelled. There would be no talking to artists in residence at the Fine Arts Center, no seeing the (surprisingly political) seed art in the Agriculture Horticulture Building and no Creative Activities competitions.

Nearly two months into our stay-at-home orders, and three visits later, I finished the roll of film I'd begun at the fairgrounds. During that time, grocery store shelves became emptier, public anger over business closures grew, and neighbours and family friends died of COVID-19. After I finished the first roll of film, I kept returning to the fairgrounds. I shot several more rolls of film over the next few weeks. During one visit I might shoot two rolls of film, while I might only take a half dozen frames on another visit.

[3] The camera I bought with a working light meter in high school.

I was reminded of Thomas Sauvin's work. Sauvin purchases photographic negatives from a silver recycler in Beijing and gathers the discarded images in new collections (Beijing Silvermine, n.d.). In an interview with CNN (Holland, 2019), Sauvin says he can see how people's relationship with photography changed as cameras became cheaper. For example, one roll of film shows the same person celebrating three consecutive birthdays. "You can imagine, on very important occasions, the parents would bring out this analog [sic] camera, take one photo and then wait six months before taking another one," Sauvin says (as quoted by Holland, 2019). In the same article, Sauvin says another roll of film was taken over thirty minutes while visiting a palace.

I realised that I had considered *individual* photos as capturing specific moments in time, while a series of photos taken in succession could represent a duration of time such as a water balloon hitting the ground or the events at a wedding[4]. But a roll of film as a material itself (Sassoon, 2007; Watkins, 2013)—the uncut strip of negatives—could represent any length of time. While COVID stretched on indefinitely, each strip of 36 frames served as its own indefinite timeline of my photographic practice—and my need for photography as a form of comfort.

> Writing about travel photography, Sontag (1979) says:
> As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure. […] A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. […] The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel (p. 9).

When COVID-19 made a short trip to the grocery store feel unsafe, I used photography to make myself feel secure. I crouched down to take photos of horses stencilled in the asphalt and found boxes of unused forks piled on a table inside a restaurant. I photographed the expansive lot where the ring toss games, and funhouse would normally be and the on-site grocery store most fairgoers didn't know existed. I couldn't make coronavirus itself, or my discomfort, photogenic. But I could search for the photogenic in the emptiness of the fairgrounds. I also photographed permanent fixtures such as statues and buildings as a form of reassurance. The Fair didn't exist now—and might not in August—but it had existed before, and it would again. The buildings proved it.

[4] People have long curated and ordered photos in personal photo albums (see Sontag, 1979); this has continued in online albums such as Instagram (Abidin, 2018). Artists have created thematic or temporal collections of their own or other people's photographs (e.g. Sauvin's Beijing Silvermine project). And in social science research, photographs have been used as individual illustrations or clustered together in a photo series or photo essay (see Marín & Roldán, 2010). Although these collections can represent a period of time, those ways of collecting, organising, and sharing photos present photos as individual, possibly related objects. The argument I'm making here is that each roll of *film* acts as its own undefined unit of time.

FIGURE 5: CONTACT SHEET OF FAIRGROUND PHOTOS. Caption: This is the contact sheet from the first roll of film I shot at the fairgrounds. Four frames have been removed for privacy reasons. In the middle of the roll is evidence of a late-season snowstorm.

DISCUSSION

Using photography and writing as "inquiry-laden practices" (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), these stories individually and collectively show how my studio practice is relational, spatial and temporal. Louise was the catalyst for my interest in photography, which was maintained and encouraged by family, friends and teachers. Relationships and time became intertwined when I stole books from my school library; my one-sided, book-based relationship with photographers of the past added a historical and community aspect to my practice[5]. Perhaps unsurprisingly since I received my first SLR at such a young age, I notice that my photography practice grew with me. As I became more independent, so did my practice, until finally the site of my studio practice shifted from being centred around pressing my camera's shutter and *taking* photographs to being more broadly about the holistic, emotional process of *making* photographs.

These artistic-inquiry practices also cause new questions to bubble to the surface (Riddett-Moore & Siegesmund, 2012). Knowing that the first three stories took place before the digital revolution, the most striking question for me is: why, in 2020, did I turn to a film camera instead of a digital camera?

MATERIALITY AND EMBODIMENT

I chose film because even while reminiscing about the past and wondering about the future, the materiality of film—the very sensation of it—required me to be in the present. Because I can instantly see the result of shooting digital, and because I can take an almost unlimited number of digital photos, I can get stuck trying to take the "perfect photo." The inherent uncertainty that comes with shooting 35 mm film is welcome. The inability to know if I have taken a perfect photo makes for an easier shift to photography as a process and an action.

The physicality of sensation (Jones, 2010; Wegenstein, 2010) that comes with film is also stronger. I have to press the camera to my face, and my glasses and nose form a makeshift tripod. I hold my breath and keep my elbows against my torso. I feel and hear the mirror move, *click*; the

[5] Although my teaching practice is not the focus of this essay, I can also see how the agency, self-directed learning and independence that was afforded to me by my teachers impacted my own teaching philosophy.

sound changes as the shutter speed does. I have no zoom lens, so I must move my body to fill the frame. “Overexpose, don’t underexpose,” I remind myself. I feel the tension on the film when I advance it. At the end of the roll, I crank the film back into its canister and hear it spin inside the camera when the film leader whips free from the uptake spool.

The embodied (Brown, 2010; Jones, 2010; Shapiro & Stolz, 2019), material experience continues when I get into the darkroom. Loading film onto the reels, measuring the temperature of the chemistry, tapping the canister against the edge of the sink to release any air bubbles clinging to the film—while I go through the repetitive action of turning the canister upside down and watch the timer tick down, there is nowhere else to be and nothing else to do.

We know the world as it is mediated by our senses (Brown, 2010) and the senses are always embodied (Jones, 2010). The actions of *making a photograph* leave marks on the film material (Sassoon, 2007; Watkins, 2013); these actions are also known and felt by my body (Jones, 2010; Wegenstein, 2010).

In the midst of COVID-19, I returned to an SLR camera because the materiality of it required me to be present while also providing me with a way to process how abnormal the world felt. The photographic practice grounded me, but the materials produced in the darkroom—the processed film, contact sheets and photographs—also acted as an anchor. The photographs were a tangible reminder that what once was, will be again—in some form or another.

CONCLUSION

Photography is a time-based medium, but discussions about time’s relationship to photography have been centred almost solely around photographs as markers of time. In this essay, I used an a/r/tographic lens (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) and narrative inquiry methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to explore how my photography studio sites and practice have changed over time. I decentred photographs, instead examining how photography practice itself can be used to better understand time.

Taken individually, these stories show how photography practice encodes times. When I first learned the technical aspects of using a camera, the shutter click encompassed my understanding of photography. In junior high, a self-created book community helped me understand the possibilities—and limits—of my practice; I later acquired darkroom access, and I started viewing my photography practice as art in addition to craft. Finally, I used photography to make sense of my emotions during the COVID-19 pandemic. That prompted a new question: why choose analogue photography methods in 2020? The materiality of film allowed me to recognise that for me, the process (practice) of photography is more important than the product (photographs) of photography.

Before using narrative inquiry to examine my history with photography, I knew photography was important to me; but I had never systematically considered how my studio practice was relational, temporal and spatial. Traditionally photographs as objects are said to represent time, but I have examined how my studio practice itself can also represent time. I invite readers to consider how their own creative and artistic practices are temporal.

AFTERNOTE

At the time of writing, we are still under a state of emergency order and gatherings are limited to no more than ten people. The State Fair has been cancelled.

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