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Decolonizing Family Photographs: Ecological Imaginaries and Nonrepresentational Ethnographies

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Abstract

This article lays out my process of developing an ecological and nonrepresentational approach for conducting an ethnography of family photos as objects of investigation, practices, and sites for the making and remaking of decolonizing stories and histories. It is rooted in a three-part project on family photographs: first, an ongoing project with a three-generation Indigenous family who has a history with Canada's residential school system; second, revisiting my own family photo albums that include photos of missionary nuns in my family who had worked in Indigenous schools and communities in the 1950s–60s; and third, the development of a politico-ethico-onto-epistemological approach for viewing and analyzing family photos and narratives from and about photographs. The article focuses on the latter two parts of this project. Informed by my reading of Lorraine Code's "ecological thinking" approach to knowledge making, I bring Code into conversation with Phillip Vannini's "nonrepresentational ethnographies" combined with new materialist writing on performativity and vitality; selected Indigenous scholars' writing on ontological multiplicity, knowledge making as relationship, and the making of life worlds; Margaret Somers's approach to nonrepresentational narratives and ontological narrativity; and Annette Kuhn's work on analyzing family photographs and

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cultural memory. I demonstrate this approach through the analysis of one of my family photos. I also reflect on the ethical challenges of attempting to analyze a different kind of family photo, such as photos of residential schooling that are increasingly on display in media, online, and in public venues. I argue for the need to address representational issues of social injustice in nonrepresentational approaches and a recognition that there are sites and times—especially in cases of human rights abuses, violence, or trauma—when nonrepresentational ethnographies and narratives call for strategic negotiation with representation.

Keywords
nonrepresentational ethnography, ecological imaginaries, narratives, family photos, performativity

Introduction

Between 2008 and 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) gathered testimonies from over 6,000 Indigenous Canadians "who had been taken from their families as children, forcibly if necessary, and placed for much of their childhoods in residential schools" (TRC 2015a, 2). The Commission's four-volume report, released in December 2015, is a harrowing account of the physical and sexual abuses experienced for more than a century by many Indigenous children (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) in church- and state-run schools. It also exposes the devastating cross-generational impacts of this colonial history on Indigenous communities and families. When the report was released, it received significant media coverage and strong public and political attention. It was also accompanied by a partly ceremonial, partly political event that included apologies to Indigenous communities by Canadian leaders on behalf of the country. Exhibits, reconciliation events, and media sites related to the TRC were infused with photos of children in residential schools.

My thinking for this paper begins with my observations as a Canadian of settler descent about this significant moment in Canadian history when the TRC report was released; it is also informed by my participation in a conference hosted by the TRC in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in June 2016, which brought together academics, researchers, activists, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians with the aim of beginning to think about how to respond to at least some of the report's ninety-four recommendations on reconciliation. The conference included a viewing of archival residential school photos exhibited at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights with some residential

school survivors and Indigenous Elders. The conference led me to start a slow and respectful process of viewing more photos of residential schools and reading TRC survivor testimonies (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2012; TRC 2015b) and to begin a three-part project on family photographs. First, during and after the TRC Conference, I established a relationship with a three-generation Indigenous family that includes an Elder who attended a residential school and who provided testimony to the TRC. Second, I revisited my own family photo albums (which included snippets of letters written a half century ago between family members) and long-told cherished stories about the missionary nuns in my family who had worked in Indigenous schools and communities in the 1950s–60s. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, my own family photographs, stories, histories, and "memoryscapes" (McAllister 2011) were recast with colonial meanings. New thought threads wove together the stories from my family photo albums and those of the "family" photographs that I had viewed at the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. Finally, I began to develop a methodological and epistemological approach to viewing and analyzing family photos and narratives from and about those photographs.

In this article, I reflect on the latter two parts of this project. Specifically, I develop an approach to family photos that I use to analyze one of my own family photos. I then reflect on how to adapt this approach for viewing and analyzing family photos with my Indigenous colleagues. Viewing data as a *relationship* (Kovach 2010) rather than an object to be mined, I decided not to analyze or write about archival photos of residential schooling or the family photos and narratives of my Indigenous collaborators. I was guided in this choice by Canada's Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research on First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada (Government of Canada 2010) and my recognition of the "ethical complexity" of engaging in Indigenous research, which must be built on relationality and trust and must honor "philosophically distinctive worldviews . . . showing guardianship over sacred knowledges, standing by cultural validity of knowledge, and giving back" (Kovach 2010, 215). In this paper, I thus focus on the most critical aspects of establishing an approach for the larger project.

To undertake these first two dimensions of the project, I turn to nonrepresentational methods and ethnographies (Vannini 2015a, 2015b), and I explore the potential of these methodological resources for conducting an ethnography of family photos as practices and sites for the making and remaking of colonized histories. I develop my approach within a larger framework, guided by Lorraine Code's (2006) ecological imaginaries, which she also calls "ecological thinking," as a politico-ethico-onto-epistemological approach to knowledge making. I also build on indigenous writers' emphases on ontological

multiplicity, knowledge making as a relationship, and the making of life worlds as well as Philip Vannini's (2015a, 318) related argument that nonrepresentational ethnographies emphasize "the fleeting, viscous, lively, embodied, material, more-than-human, precognitive, non-discursive dimensions of spatially and temporally complex lifeworlds." I engage with some of the qualities that loosely underpin nonrepresentational approaches while appreciating his point that they are not fixed, "exhaustive," or "mutually exclusive" (Vannini 2015a, 318). Finally, I work mainly with Margaret Somers and her approach to nonrepresentational narratives and Annette Kuhn's work on analyzing family photographs and cultural memory.

This paper is organized into five sections. First, I briefly lay out family photos as a field of study, highlighting the need for greater attention to epistemological and ontological issues and complexities that arise in working with family photos both as an *ethnographic method* and *objects of investigation*. Second, I detail the theoretical and epistemological resources that inform my terrain of thought, building especially on Code's forty-year trajectory of developing ecological imaginaries of knowledge making. I ask: What does it mean to work with ecological imaginaries in practice, and how could it guide an ethnography of and with family photos? Third, I build on two of Vannini's qualities of nonrepresentational approaches (performativity and vitality), and I explicate how these connect to family photos and narratives about those photos. Fourth, I lay out a nonrepresentational and ecological approach to narratives and photos; I do this by bringing together Code, the nonrepresentational narrative analysis approach of Margaret Somers (1992, 1994, 1995), and Annette Kuhn's (2002, 2007) work on family photographs and cultural memory. In the fifth and final section of the paper, I reflect on how I will need to adapt and widen this approach for research on family photos with my Indigenous counterparts. Drawing from Code, I explore how to straddle nonrepresentational approaches while negotiating issues of representation, especially in cases of human rights abuses, various forms of violence, and cultural genocide. Here, Code's ecological thinking, as a framing device, allows me to explore Vannini's (2015a, 324) concern that nonrepresentational theory and methods are viewed as "not sufficiently concerned with power, injustice, and politics."

Family Photos as a Field: Working toward an Ecological and Nonrepresentational Approach

Family photographs and family photographic practices occupy a small but increasingly widening corner of both visual sociology and family sociologies (see Chalfen 1987, 2002; Kuhn 2002, 2007; Langford 2001; McAllister

2006; Pauwels 2008; Rose 2010). Although still small, it is a tremendously rich field of research that brings together visual sociology, visuality, family, memory, trauma, culture, time, narratives, stories, and testimonies.

Some of the most well-known studies of family photographs (Hirsch 1997, 2012; Kuhn 1991, 2002, 2007; Kuhn and McAllister 2006; McAllister 2006, 2011; Radstone and Hodgkin 2003; Spence and Holland 1991), which focus on the role that family photographs play in "memory work," the making and remaking of cross-generational trauma, and cultural and social memory, have relied on interviews, autobiographical work, or archival research. They approach family photographs as gendered, classed, racialized, and sexualized representations or enactments of identities and subjectivities—as well as ideologies, discourses, and structural conditions. In various ways, these studies address personal and cultural memory, "family secrets" (Kuhn 2002), and the shaping of families by "ideological pressures deployed by the familial gaze" (Hirsch 1997, 10). In recent years, there has been a steady growth of interest, both in scholarship and in exhibitions, in family photos and culturally diverse family forms, with particular attention given to queering family photos and the family album (Brown and Davidmann 2015; Eng 2014) and the connections between family photographs, diaspora, and race (Mannik 2014; Matthew 2015; Phu 2014).

Less attention has been given, however, to epistemological and ontological issues in the study of family photos. I concur with Gillian Rose (2016), who argues that although there has been a great deal of cross-disciplinary theoretical study of visuals, visuality, visual economies, and affective, embodied, and structured dimensions of visuals, it remains the case that the field of visual research methods has not yet fully engaged with some key methodological, epistemological, and ontological debates. This is also the case in research on family photos.

Developing an Ecological and Nonrepresentational Approach to Family Photos

This research on family photographs is informed by my larger program of work (see Doucet in press 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) which is rooted in my reading of a wide set of performative, ecological, nonrepresentational, and relational epistemological and ontological resources that have infused theories and practices of knowledge making (e.g., Barad 2007; Code 2006; Ingold 2011, 2013; Verran 2001). While these are extraordinarily diverse fields and there has been much debate and disagreement within and between them (Lykke 2010; Vannini 2015a), there is some consensus that these approaches share or attend to one or more of the following foci: ontologies (e.g., Blaser

2010, 2014; Ingold 2011, 2013; Mol 2002; Verran 2001), relational ontologies (Barad 2007; Code 2006; Somers 2008), performativity and nonrepresentationalism (Barad 2007; Law 2004; Thrift 2008; Vannini 2015a, 2015b), and the vitality of matter (Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Barad 2007; Code 2006; Coole and Frost 2010; Haraway 2008).

As my own work has moved across this terrain, I have been influenced by key contributions of many of these thinkers. Yet, my most sustained engagement has been with the work of feminist philosopher Lorraine Code and her forty-year trajectory of writing about the political, ethical, epistemological, and ontological dimensions of and multiple entanglements between knowledge making, subjectivities, and our epistemic responsibilities as knowers as well as her recent iterations on "ecological thinking" or ecological imaginaries (e.g., Code 1987, 1991, 1995, 2006, 2010). As I argue in this paper, Code discusses nonrepresentational knowing practices as well as the strategic, pragmatic, and political imperative to be "committed to a negotiated empiricism" (Code 2006, 111) whereby "knowledge is collaboratively negotiated" (Code 2006, 178). Specifically, I draw on her position that "*negotiated empiricism* is an empirically based, evidence-respecting position that takes empirical evidence seriously while contending that evidence rarely speaks for itself in its claim to count *as* evidence or in its meanings and implications" (Code 2006, 23; emphasis in original). I argue that Code's ecological thinking approach provides a loose frame that can inform ecological and nonrepresentational ethnographies that attend to politico-ethico-onto-epistemological entanglements.

My engagement with Code in this article begins with a brief explication of her approach to *instituted* and *instituting social* imaginaries of knowledge making. I detail how her ecological thinking approach, as an instituting imaginary, reconceives knowledge making, subjectivities, and epistemic responsibilities while also lending itself as a frame for nonrepresentational ethnographies and narratives.

Social Imaginaries of Knowledge Making

Instituted social imaginaries: "Spectator epistemologies." Code's approach to knowledge making is guided by a larger discussion of social imaginaries (see Castoriadis 1998) and the continued governance of knowledge making by a hegemonic social imaginary that envisions researcher scientists as witnesses who "let the facts speak for themselves" (Law 2004, 120). Code argues that much research, both in the natural and social sciences, is aligned with an instituted social imaginary inherited from the seventeenth century whereby "experimentally produced matters of fact were made into the foundations of what counted as proper scientific knowledge" (Shapin and Schaffer 2011, 3;

see also Hacking 2002; Haraway 1988, 1997; Latour 1993; Law 2004). In terms of knowledge making, Code argues that the instituted social imaginary harbors "epistemologies of mastery" (2006, 4) and "spectator epistemologies" (1995, 125; 2006, 41). As Rouse (2009, 204) puts it, there is "a separation between knowers and known, a spectatorial conception of knowing, a contrast of the unity of the object to the multiplicity of standpoints, and a static and perhaps mostly retrospective understanding of epistemic normativity" (see also Verran 2001).

In terms of research subjectivities and consonant with two decades of feminist, qualitative, and decolonizing critiques, Code (2006, 41) argues that these spectator-knowers are thought to "bring no affective, personal, historical, or idiosyncratic baggage to 'the epistemological project' . . . neither deriving from nor serving particular interests or motivations nor allowing enthusiasms or aversions to divert its rational course." In short, this knower "stands as a shadow figure invisibly and indifferently apart from discrete objects of knowledge" (Code 2006, 41).

As for the objects, subjects, or worlds beings studied, Code (2006, 41) maintains that the dominant instituted imaginary presents them as "inert in and unaffected by the knowing process." She argues that it puts forth "representations of scientific knowledge as disinterestedly, apolitically neutral" and defines "the central aim of social life [as] the unlimited expansion of rational mastery" (Code 2006, 34).

Instituting social imaginaries: Ecological imaginaries. In spite of the weight, hegemony, and longevity of the dominant social imaginary of knowledge making, Code (2006, 32) argues that other imaginaries of knowledge making are possible and indeed are continually emerging as forms of "radical social critique." As she puts it, instituting imaginaries provide "a cluster of subversive and productive practices, metaphors, images—capable, with persistent effort, of shaking epistemology free from the monocultural/monological hold of the imaginary that has kept standard theories of knowledge isolated from the very knowledge they have sought to explicate" (Code 2006, 33). Instituting imaginaries can include, for example, new materialist feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman 2008), agential realism (Barad 2007), decolonizing epistemologies (Kovach 2010; Simpson 2011; Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 2014), ecological anthropology (Ingold 2007, 2011, 2013, 2015), and ecological thinking and imaginaries (Code 2006, 2010).

Code explains that as an instituting imaginary, an ecological imaginary of knowledge making calls for alternative understandings of method and of *what* we are doing as researchers as well as a different articulation of our epistemic responsibilities as researchers. Following Code and others, knowledge making

is thus less about information, findings, data, and representation and more about engagement, intervention, knowing/being/doing, and participating in the making of just and cohabitable lives. In other words, the researcher's role shifts from collecting "data" and producing and representing "findings" to "intervening" (Hacking 2002; Verran 2001) as participant story-teller(s) (Verran 2001; Winthereik and Verran 2012). This signals a move away from "spectator epistemologies" (Code 2006, 2015) toward a view that "knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from *a direct material engagement with the world*" (Barad 2007, p. 49). Ecological imaginaries offer "a conceptual frame within which to construct a responsive-responsible theory of knowledge and subjectivity" (Code 2006, 21) wherein researchers are responsive to and responsible for their participation in and accounting of unfolding worlds and dialogically constituted narratives.

Within an ecological imaginary, Code's redefinition of a researcher as an epistemic subject resonates with Haraway's (1997) concept of a knower who is engaged, partial, political, and humble. As Rouse (2009, 205) puts it: "Knowers do not occupy a standpoint, but instead participate in phenomena." This kind of engagement and commitment—where one puts their "subjectivity . . . on the line, and [assumes] responsibility for what and how he/she claims to know" (Code 2006, 275)—provides for a distinctly ethico-political way of doing nonrepresentational ethnography.

How do these ideas get translated into practice and more specifically in relation to ethnographies of family photos? I would argue that they do so through methodological innovations that can include, for example, post-qualitative (Lather and St. Pierre 2013; St. Pierre 2016), performative (Law 2004; Mol 2002), diffractive (Mazzei 2014; Taguchi 2012), performative posthuman (Mauthner 2015), and Indigenous and tribal (Kovach 2010; Simpson 2011; Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 2014) methodologies. They can also be applied through nonrepresentational methodologies and ethnographies (Vannini 2015a, 2015b) as well as in nonrepresentational approaches to narratives, including narratives of family photos.

Nonrepresentational Ethnographies of Family Photos

Vannini writes about both nonrepresentational ethnographies (2015a) and nonrepresentational methodologies (2015b), bringing together his analysis of at least ten years of nonrepresentational theory and ethnographic research rooted in debates "on the analytics, aesthetics, and politics of ethnographic representation" (2015a, 317). Contrasting them with representational ethnographers, Vannini (2015a, 318) describes nonrepresentational ethnographers as "striv[ing] to animate rather than simply mimic, to rupture rather

than merely account, to evoke rather than just report, and to reverberate instead of more modestly resonating, in this sense offering a true 'escape' from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation."

Much like Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre's calls for post-qualitative researchers to move away from "formalization, and tortured systematicity in this work" (St. Pierre 2016, 63), Vannini (2015a, 319) urges researchers to break from "methodological timidity." At the same time, he pragmatically cautions researchers against fully abandoning methodological skills, proposing instead that they use "traditional research methodologies with a sense of the creative, the practical" to create spaces where methods can "be made to dance a little" (Vannini 2015a, 319).

In this section of the paper, I engage with Vannini's evolving qualities of nonrepresentational ethnography (performativity, vitality, corporeality, sensuality, and mobility), focusing on performativity and vitality. I do so while remaining aware of Vannini's (2015a, 324) assertion that there is a great deal of internal heterogeneity among these qualities and heeding his advice to be "mindful of the dangers of forming new canons . . . and the perils of eliding the numerous disagreements existing over nuanced ideas underlying the five qualities." I also work from within Code's framing (detailed previously) and selected indigenous scholars to lay out an ecological and nonrepresentational ethnographic approach to family photographs and narratives about those photographs.

Performativity, Vitality, and Ecologies. According to Vannini, a key quality of nonrepresentational ethnography is vitality. He writes that "non-representational research renders the liveliness of everyday interaction through methodological strategies that animate, rather than deaden, the qualities of the relation among people, objects, organic matter, animals, and their natural and built environments" (Vannini 2015a, 320).

Vitality is a concept that has exploded across social theory, especially in light of burgeoning new materialist research suggesting that "materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable" (Coole and Frost 2010, 9). I posit that performativity is also a form of vitality. In making this connection, I draw on Vicki Bell's (2012) reading of Deleuze (1988), in which she takes "the concept of performativity into new conversations" (109) and "elaborate[s] the concerns that are expressed in the concept, by inclining it more boldly towards the complexities of a world whose elements are always in processes of constitution, of reiterative enfolding" (107).

Indigenous scholars offer significant contributions to these conversations about nonrepresentational narratives by highlighting how storytelling is a performative, vital, embodied, and dialogic practice that "serve[s] to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story" (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 45–46; see also Kovach 2010; Simpson 2011; Watts 2013). Some also underline the entanglements of politics, ethics, epistemologies, and ontologies in storytelling, discussing how "Place-Thought" connections have endured "despite five hundred years of colonialism" (Watts 2013, 32). Indigenous scholar, poet, and artist Leeane Simpson (2011, 70; emphasis added) describes storytelling as collective, communal, and onto-epistemological processes that "can lead to resurgence through visioning and *dancing new realities and worlds into existence*."

This attention to how various beings and objects emerge and grow in specific conditions of possibility also resonates with the rich ecological nonrepresentational approach of anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000, 345), who argues that objects, subjects, and human and nonhuman lives grow and evolve through "self-transformation over time of the system of relations within which an organism or artefact comes into being" (see also Code 2006). Indeed, Ingold's (2011, 92) work exemplifies vitality, performativity, and ecologies; it also articulates "an ontology that assigns primacy to the processes of formation as against their final products, and to the flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter." Drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Ingold (2012, 433) defends "the variability of matter—its tensions and elasticities, lines of flow and resistances." Matter, including what most researchers call data, is always moving and must be followed, rather than captured or collected.

Approaching family photos with attention to the vitality of the matter or materials that we are working with—in this case study, family photographs—means that they are not inert objects "waiting only to be read" (Haraway 1991, 198) but rather objects that we are, as Ingold puts it, corresponding "with" and "following." In my ongoing process of revisiting my own family photos and developing an approach for viewing and discussing family and archival photos with Indigenous collaborators, I recognize that we are partly attending to stories that had already been told and retold, but we are also revisiting, remaking, and creating new stories, relations, and worlds. Awareness of these processes resonates with the idea of instituting imaginaries and of how, as researchers, we are not only engaged in the making of knowledges but also in the making of worlds or "worldlings" (Ingold 2011, 2013; see also Heidegger 1971). As Barad (2007, 185) puts it, we are entangled in the making of "the world in its differential becoming." This also leads to a different understanding of our epistemic responsibilities—a point that I take up in the final section of this paper.

Performativity and Practices. Vannini argues that one dimension of nonrepresentational ethnography's focus on performativity is an emphasis on people's practices. This attention highlights links between performativity and the "practice turn" (see Ingold 2007, 2011; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny 2001; Thrift 2008), which posits an entanglement of materialities and practices such that "understanding specific practices always involves apprehending material configurations" (Schatzki et al. 2001, 3). As Vannini (2015a, 320) writes, the focus is on people's actions and interactions including "ritualized performances, habitual and non-habitual behaviors, play, and the various scripted and unscripted, uncertain, and unsuccessful doings of which everyday life is made." The emphasis is thus not only on objects or subjects but also on the practices within which these are located, made, and remade.

A nonrepresentational approach to family photographs informed by theories of performativity and practice, as I am laying out in this paper, attends to images as a set of practices whose content and meanings are in turn made within social practices, including the specific research practices wherein the photos are viewed and discussed. Gillian Rose (2010, 1) is notable for adopting this stance in her work; she approaches family photographs not as a collection of images or as a textual archive but rather as "something that people do . . . as a social practice" while also recognizing that photographs are visual objects "embedded in practices." She argues that researchers ought to attend to "what particular people do with those objects and explor[e] the consequences of those doings" (Rose 2010, 3; see also Chalfen 1987, 2002). Along the same lines, Martha Langford (2008, 223) examines the performative functions of photograph albums. She writes, "A photographic album is a repository of memory. A photographic album is an instrument of social performance." For my case study specifically, this means approaching the photographs as part of a complex and intricate "meshwork of interwoven lines" (Ingold 2011, 60) that entwine family stories, family and socio-cultural histories, and visible and invisible processes of decolonization across time and space.

Attention to performativity and practices can extend to the performativity of research methods and practices as well (e.g., Law 2004, 2009; Lury and Wakeford 2012; Mol 2002). This approach is well explicated in the work of Annemarie Mol (2002, 154), who writes: "Methods are not a way of opening a window on the world, but a way of interfering with it. They act, they mediate between an object and its representations." Contesting the view in spectator epistemologies that method illuminates a "given reality" (Law 2004, 143), a nonrepresentational approach to method calls for situated, provisional, partial knowing—one whereby stories, worlds, and realities unfold in relational processes and practices. If photographs are considered (through and as) performative methods, then photo elicitation and studying archival photos have the potential to bring forth particular stories and social worlds, to the

exclusion of other narratives. As Richard Chalfen (1987, 70) puts it, "the story does not appear in the album," nor is it "told by the images"; rather, the focus is on "the telling and the retelling" of the stories that emerge from looking at family photographs. In the next section I take up the question: How do we work with narratives about or from viewing family photos?

Nonrepresentational Narratives (and Family Photo Narratives)

What does it mean to work with nonrepresentational narratives and more specifically, nonrepresentational narratives about family photos? To address this question, it is important to begin by noting that dominant approaches to narrative analyses, including research on visual methods, assume that narratives reflect, represent, or impose a narrative structure on lived experiences, life stories, or realities (see critique by Somers 1994). However, growing attention has been given, especially in the humanities, to nonrepresentational and performative narratives, or what Somers (1994, 607) calls "ontological narrativity": an approach that defines "narrative and narrativity as concepts of *social epistemology* and *social ontology*" (Somers 1994, 606; emphasis in original). Guided by my larger politic-ethico-onto-epistemological framework offered by Code as well as narrative theories, I work with Somers's nonrepresentational approach to narratives, weaving this with Kuhn's (2007) specific guidelines for working with family photos. This ontological shift to nonrepresentational understandings of narrative focus on questions of being, relationality, the performativity of our epistemic practices and concepts, processes of becoming and making, and "the specificities of knowledge making . . . both found and made" (Code 2006, 22). Here, I first lay out Somers's approach to narratives, reading her alongside Code and Kuhn. I then analyze one photo using this guiding framework, demonstrating that this reconfigured narrative approach – which I refer to as an ecological approach to narratives – has several implications for how to work with family photos.

An Ecological Approach to Narratives about Family Photos. Somers promotes a multilayered approach to address several types and dimensions of narratives. She argues that there are at least *four* kinds of nested narratives: (i) ontological narratives; (ii) social, public, and cultural narratives; (iii) metanarratives; and (iv) conceptual narratives. These four narrative types are cross-cut in turn with four dimensions of narrative: "1) relationality of parts, 2) causal emplotment, 3) selective appropriation, and 4) temporality, sequence, and place" (Somers 1994, 616). Put differently, all narratives "are constellations of relationships (connected parts) embedded in time and *space*, constituted by what I call *causal emplotment*" (Somers 1992, 601; emphasis in original). I will briefly lay out the four types and four dimensions in the following, with specific attention to how this approach can help us to make sense of family photos.

The first type of narrative, "ontological narratives," are "the stories that social actors use to make sense of—indeed, *to act in*—their lives" (Somers 1994, 618; emphasis added). For Somers, these are not representations per se; rather, they are what theorists describe as agential, performative, and generative—they are made in particular conditions of possibility, and they make and remake identities. As Somers (1994, 618; emphasis in original) notes: "Ontological narratives make identity and the self something that one *becomes.*"

"Social, public and cultural narratives" (Somers 1994, 614) are a second type of narrative. The stories people tell us are constituted by and unfold within "intersubjective webs of relationality [that] sustain and transform narratives over time" (Somers 1994, 618). These social, public, and cultural narratives are "attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual, to intersubjective networks or institutions, however local or grand" (Somers 1994, 618).

A third type of narrative, metanarratives, are, as Somers (1992, 605) writes, "the stories in which we are embedded both as social actors and in our analytic role as social scientists"; "[o]ur sociological theories and concepts," she explains, "are encoded with aspects of these metanarratives, which can include 'Progress, Decadence, Industrialization, Enlightenment.'" She draws from Foucault (1972), arguing that metanarratives are similar to the "masternarratives," "which usually operate at a presuppositional level of social science epistemology or beyond our awareness" (Somers 1992, 605). In the two decades since Somers outlined her approach to narrative, it has become clear that Colonization is another metanarrative within which we are embedded.

A fourth type of narrative, "conceptual narratives," describes "the concepts and explanations that we construct as social researchers" to "reconstruct and plot over time and space the ontological narratives and relationships of historical actors, the public and cultural narratives that inform their lives, and the crucial intersection of these narratives with the other relevant social forces" (Somers 1994, 620). Our conceptual narratives lead us to hear, coproduce, and write particular narratives; a shift in conceptual narratives will alter these specific narratives.

Like all narrative types, conceptual narratives are characterized by emplotment and selective appropriation, meaning that researchers must enact their epistemic responsibility for "what and how he/she claims to know" (Code 2001, 275). Code's (1987, 2006) longstanding work on epistemic responsibility can also be inserted into this part of our analysis, especially the idea (shared by both Code and Somers) that our knowledge-making concepts are not neutral but are imbued with a normative sense of how we and our epistemic communities believe the world should be. As Somers (1996, 71; emphasis added) puts it, "The questions we ask in social science are . . .

inherently ontological, or to put it simply, contain a priori decisions about *how we understand the social world to be constituted*." Code goes even further with this point, arguing that our questions are motivated by how we *want* the social world to be constituted. As Joseph Rouse (2016, np; emphasis added; see also Rouse 2015) expresses so well, "conceptual understanding and ethical accountability are always entangled," and this "establishes an accountability *for what we become and how we live.*"

This central dimension of this nonrepresentational approach to knowledge making, narratives, and family photos is what firmly established its politico-ethico character. When interpreting family photos and narratives, we work from a "politics of possibilities" (Barad 2007, 46), and we "striv[e] to achieve a politically-epistemically responsible" (Code 2006, 219) analysis and intervention.

Ecological Narratives and Analyzing One Family Photo

This is a photograph of my aunt Hannah, her mother and father (my grandmother and grandfather), and one of her younger brothers. This photo was taken on the day that my aunt Hannah left her family and home to work as a missionary on an Indian reservation in the province of British Columbia.

I had looked at this photo many times before. It was part of one of our treasured family stories, told and retold, with sadness, about a young woman's "calling from God" and about the loss of a daughter who could not return home for seven years—not even for her twin's wedding. It was also a story—told and retold across the years of my childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood—about my aunt's spiritual vocation to "work with the poor" and "help the Indians."

I returned to this photo in my grandmother's album in the summer of 2016. To begin my analysis of this single photo, I drew on Kuhn's (2000, 2002, 2007) well-known approach for working with family photographs and cultural memory. I maintain that her practice of deeply analyzing just one photo using four guiding questions (Kuhn 2007) can be viewed as a way of analyzing "ontological narratives" as well as their embeddedness and articulations within shifting social, public, and cultural narratives. Somers expands the narrative resources of Kuhn's approach, especially for scholarly work, by considering how meta-narratives and conceptual narratives form part of the stories that are told/heard. Kuhn in turn widens Somers's ontological narrativity approach, adapting it for use with family photographs and the "memory work" involved in analyzing and narrating from and about those photos. As Kuhn (2000, 186) puts it:

> Memory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered, taking it not as "truth" but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined, for its meanings and its possibilities. Memory work is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory.

To analyze my family photo of my missionary aunt Hannah, I begin, here, with Kuhn's (2007, 284) key guiding questions.

1. Consider the human subject(s) of the photograph. Start with a simple description, and then move into an account in which you take up the position of the subject….
2. Consider the picture's context of production. Where, when, how, by whom and why was the photograph taken?
3. Consider the context in which an image of this sort would have been made. What photographic technologies were used? What are the aesthetics of the image? Does it conform to certain photographic conventions?

4. Consider the photograph's currency in its context or contexts of reception. Who or what was the photograph made for? Who has it now, and where is it kept? Who saw it then, and who sees it now?

These questions enable me to tell a new ontological narrative about the photo, which I also analyze using Somers's intersecting narrative layers and dimensions.

Same Photo, New Narratives: An Ontological Narrative. Now, sixty years after the photo was taken and fifty years after I first saw it in my grandmother's album, I see it differently. I tell a different ontological narrative about it, one that exhibits key intersecting dimensions: emplotment, selective appropriation, time, sequence, place, and a relationality of parts. My reconfigured narrative about this family photo is also partly constituted by and through the ontological narratives that my mother and aunts shared; the contemporary social, public, and cultural narratives within which it was embedded; the metanarratives that framed it, then and now; and the conceptual narratives with which, as a scholar, I have come to analyze it.

My aunt Hannah passed away in 1994 at the age of fifty-eight. I was thus unable to ask her about this photo and its wider narratives. In revisiting my grandmother's photo album with Hannah's sisters (my mother and aunt), I learned that Hannah and her cousin Eleanor both went to work at the Anaham "Indian Reservation" in the interior of the province of British Columbia, where Hannah, as her photo album letters denote, "devoted herself to the sick at the hospital for one year." Hannah then completed a teaching certificate in Montreal, after which she returned to Anaham to teach and act as principal in an Indigenous day school (grades seven and eight) for four years. One of her roles was to prepare children to attend the residential school in Williams Lake, about 114 miles away.

What follows is part of my remade ontological narrative.[1] I weave together responses to Kuhn's four guiding questions, and I tell a story that is both "social and interpersonal," rooted in the recognition that "ontological narratives can only *exist interpersonally in the course of social and structural interactions over time*" (Somers 1994, 618; emphasis in original).

The photo was taken in front of my grandparents' white farmhouse on a farm in my hometown in northern New Brunswick. This was like a "first day of school" photo, except that Hannah was taking on a much more daunting endeavor. She was about to travel from one end of the country to the other (over 5000 km) to embark on her first missionary assignment. Hannah's brother (my uncle) snapped the photo with a Kodak Brownie camera.

Hannah, 21 years old, is in her Catholic nun's "habit"—a long white dress and veil. My grandmother is wearing her "Sunday best." My grandmother, one of the most joy-filled people I have ever known, looks into the camera with an uncharacteristically serious expression. I know from the stories she has told me about this photo and its context that she is bursting with pride, pleased that her daughter has taken on what was considered a noble profession for a young woman in the 1950s. I also know that she feels like her heart is breaking because her daughter will not be able to return home for many years.

This was a photo I had seen often as a child. I grew up knowing from the letters she sent and the articles that she published in varied Catholic Church publications (such as "The Apostle," "Catholic Youth," and "The Canadian League") that aunt Hannah was challenged, but also grateful to be, as she put it, "(l)iving with a tribe of poor Indians for five years."

This photo was kept in one of my grandmother's photo albums. In response to Kuhn's question, "Who was the photograph for?", this photo had a key purpose in my family and an additional, pivotal one for me. It was connected to a family story of both pride and grief. On the one hand, the photograph symbolized the beginning of a highly respectable vocation for a young woman; on the other hand, it also spoke about the loss of a daughter who was prohibited from visiting her family (with rare exceptions) because, as her letters explained, she had "given herself to God." Its purpose, its performativity, its epistemologies of reception changed over the years. The photo, and what I believed that it represented, also invoked my profound desire to be involved in social justice projects. My aunt's story was a central inspiration in my life, one that led me, also at the age of twenty-one, to go to South America with similar intentions of wanting to "work with the poor." I worked in "international development" projects for six years, working first in a community orphanage (for abandoned children) and then with United Nations water supply and sanitation projects. I now see those stories differently as well.

Ontological Narrativity:Working with Nested Layers of Narratives. This photo and my ontological narrative about it are lodged in wider social, public, and cultural narratives, including the historical and social awakening engendered by the findings of the TRC. I now know that Hannah was, in spite of her good and noble intentions, unwittingly complicit in the colonial legacy of residential schools, which were "designed to rip out of children their Aboriginal identity, culture, beliefs and language" (TRC 2015a, 2); part of a historical period that has since been named one of "the darkest chapters in Canada's past" (TRC 2015a, 271, Appendix A). The students of Indigenous day schools (such as the one where she was principal for four years) were also subject to "discrimination, linguistic and cultural dispossession, and estrangement from

the land," and Indigenous children's "culture, families, and languages were disrupted by oppressive government policies and decisions that circumscribed their daily lives in schools" (Raptis 2016, 153).

Two key features of ontological narrativity can be highlighted here in relation to the photo. First, ontological narratives are consistent with the view that narratives and "ethnographic stories are agential" in that they "intervene" (Winthereik and Verran 2012, 38) and have the "capacity to re-present the world" (Winthereik and Verran 2012, 37). Narratives "act" and "do things" (Frank 2010, 43); they bring new relationships, materialities, and social realities into being (Frank 2010; Law 2004). According to Somers (1994, 618), "the relationship between narrative and ontology is processual and mutually constitutive." That is, in looking at this sixty-year-old family photo, rather than reporting "on the past, we are in fact remaking the past" (McAllister 2011, 25; see also Mauthner 2015).

A second point to underline about ontological narratives is that as a non-representational approach to narratives, they focus on unfolding subjectivities and narrative identities (Ricoeur 1985; Somers 1992, 1994). Narratives and narrative identities are made in the telling and retelling of those narratives, both in relation to the people in the photo and the people looking at the photos. According to Somers (1994, 606), "it is through narratives and narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities." Revisiting my own family albums has led to a radical shift in my reading of my family history and my personal lifelines. My own identity has been made and remade through this process.

The wider narrative of this family photo is also affected by changing metanarratives. Across several decades, I had looked at this photo through dominant metanarratives, viewing my aunt as working toward "Progress" and enhanced states of "Development." The same photograph becomes something completely different, however, through the lens of Colonization, an increasingly dominant metanarrative of the early twenty-first century.

Finally, as I came to make sense of this image, as a scholar and through a research project on family photos, I recognized that I needed to rethink my conceptual narratives about family, relations between Indigenous peoples and white settlers, and method. In relation to method, as detailed in the first section of this article, I moved away from an understanding of methods as neutral techniques for gathering fixed data out there. Rather, I began to think about the politico-ethico-onto-epistemological character of methods—as interventions, relationships, ethical practices—and how these applied to my ethnographic practices and my analysis of narratives and family photos.

I have also remade my conceptual understandings of family photos. Standing in the Canadian Museum of Human Rights in the summer of 2016 with Indigenous Elders and survivors of residential schools, I saw a different kind of family photo on display. One could argue that photos of Indigenous children attending residential schools, which have been reproduced and increasingly put on display in media, online, and in public venues in recent years, can be interpreted as a particular kind of family photograph. This is partly because residential schools were "created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families" (TRC 2015a, 3). Moreover, this point is based on Rose's (2010, 10) argument that social, public, and cultural narratives of family photos have widened to include how particular kinds of "family photographs are entering public circulation" and "public spaces of display," thus changing the conceptual meanings of both *family* photographs and intimacies.

This leads me to my final question: how do we approach, analyze, or tell new stories about and from these family photos? I take this up in the final section of this paper.

Negotiating Representation

As I move on from my own photo and its changing narratives across time, I am faced with the dilemma of how to approach the testimonies I have read from residential school survivors and the stories I have heard at the TRC Conference and from the three-generational family with whom I am collaborating. I ask myself: How do we deal with issue of representation? As I argued throughout this article, a shift to nonrepresentation means thinking about the dialogic and performative character of narratives and how they are made and remade within relational webs and relational ontologies. The questions that guide my thinking in this section are the following: If we uphold nonrepresentational ways of knowing, how do we still hold onto the representational dimensions of stories? Can we have representation without representationalism? (Neimanis 2015). Or as Sandilands (quoted in Neimanis 2015, 138) asks: "How can the recognition of the limits of representation coexist with the desire to include—to represent—other voices more fully?"

These are complex questions that strain the boundaries of nonrepresentational theory and methods. My approach is to think *with* others who offer guidance while agreeing with Astrida Neimanis (2015, 148),[2] who argues that the issue is "not one of solving the 'problem' of representation" but rather about "how we negotiate it." To begin to negotiate the tensions between representation and nonrepresentation, I return to Code, literary resources, and Indigenous scholars who write about storytelling.

Code (2006) grapples with issues of representation and nonrepresentation in her writing about "vexed questions" of knowing others, especially marginalized others. In particular, I draw attention to Code's work on second person acknowledgement, and advocacy. She writes that her approach to instituting ecological imaginaries "repositions and revalorizes experiential evidence" from a strategic "ethico-political" and pragmatic position (Code 2006, 52). Although Code draws on and understands earlier critiques of representational approaches to narratives, identities, and experience (for overview see Doucet and Mauthner 2008), she also recognizes that when human rights violations and epistemic injustice occur, it might be necessary to uphold the representational veracity of testimonial evidence as a way to witness and acknowledge the stories of others (especially others who have faced oppression or abuse) and advocate *with* those who testify about those abuses. She holds that this dilemma, "currently alive and urgent in feminist, antiracist, and other postcolonial theories of knowledge," is one in which "experiential, testimonial reports claim *an enhanced, if not uncontested, credibility and authority* in this approach to knowledge" (Code 2006, 23; emphasis added).

To address the complicated understanding of testimonial evidence as simultaneously contested and credible, Code (2006) draws from Ricoeur's (1993) speech to Amnesty International on how to make sense of narratives in the midst of postmodern arguments on fragmented subjectivities, and she explores narratives and testimonies of trauma, especially those of rape and human rights abuses. Code highlights how most narratives are told and retold in the first or third person. Recognizing that "both forms of speaking have been fraught with difficulties," she maintains that all narratives do not seek a "detached assent to an indifferent truth" but rather "a second-person acknowledgment from and of (an)other(s)" (Code 2006, 229). It is this "acknowledgement" from an engaged listener and community that "make[s] knowing possible" (Code 2006, 229).

Code's (2006) point about acknowledgement is closely linked to her arguments about advocacy and negotiating empiricism, realities, and knowledges. She posits that even though it is a "contentious claim," she nevertheless holds to the view that "advocacy is often what makes knowledge possible" (Code 2006, 23). Advocating for others is a complex "epistemic and an ethico-political issue" (Code 2006, 193), and Code is careful to explain how it is not meant to be a patronizing activity whereby one speaks *for* others (see also Alcoff 1991). Code concurs with Haraway (2000, 167) that knowing "is always an interpretive, engaged, contingent, fallible engagement"; implicitly or explicitly, we make choices about what narratives we will bring attention to and fight *with and for*, thereby "casting our lot with some ways of life and not others" (Haraway 1997, 36).

Code thus highlights how "taking sides" (Becker 1967) is especially important in light of the fact that most narratives and testimonies are told and heard on "an epistemic terrain where credibility is unevenly distributed and testimony often discounted or denigrated on the basis of whose it is" (Code 2006, 18; see also Fricker 2007).

What I am highlighting in this discussion of stories and narratives is that second-person acknowledgement, recognition, and advocacy are all part of Code's concept of epistemic responsibility. This is a concept that entangles politics, ethics, epistemology, and ontology and can thus be called a politico-ethico-onto-epistemological approach to ecological and nonrepresentational knowledge making. It has resonance with a now burgeoning conversation among new materialist and nonrepresentational thinkers about sister concepts, such as onto-epistemological accountability and responsibility (Barad 2007; Rouse 2009, 2015; Verran 2001) and ontological politics (Law 2004; Mol 1999, 2002). It is a view of the politics and ethics of knowing that is neither about mastery nor about the "right response to a radically exterior/ised other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part" (Barad 2007, 393). In relation to narratives, such an approach demands that we be accountable for *why* and *how* we listen to stories, *which* stories we listen to, and if and how we acknowledge and retell these stories. It does not ask questions about representation, seeking to uncover singular "truths," but asks whether a knowledge-making practice leads to just and cohabitable worlds (Code, 2006). As Mol (2002, 165) writes, "if we can no longer find assurance by asking 'is this knowledge true to its object?' it becomes all the more worthwhile to ask, 'is the practice good for the subjects (human or otherwise) involved in it?'"

These arguments and those of many of the authors I have cited in this article are explicitly or implicitly rooted in a wider set of ontological commitments that recognizes ontological multiplicity and/or ontological alterity (see Blaser 2014). As anthropologist Mario Blaser (2014, np) writes, an onto-epistemological approach, while internally heterogeneous, points broadly to

> ethnographic descriptions of the many-fold shapes of the otherwise, an injunction not to explain too much or try to actualize the possibilities immanent to others' thoughts but rather to sustain them as possibilities; and, as a corollary, a politics that initially hinges upon the hope of making the otherwise visible so that it becomes viable as a real alternative.

If multiple worlds or wordlings are possible, then the researchers' or ethnographers' role is not to represent but to contribute to bringing new stories,

relationships, and worlds into being. As Simpson (2011, 33;) argues, "Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality"; storytelling becomes a way to "envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice."

Conclusions

This paper details my process of developing an ecological and nonrepresentational approach for conducting an ethnography of family photos as objects of investigation, practices, and sites for the making and remaking of decolonizing stories and histories. Informed by my reading of Lorraine Code's instituting ecological social imaginaries of knowledge making and her concept of epistemic responsibilities, which I use as framing devices, I bring Code into conversation with scholars who develop arguments for nonrepresentational theory and method, working especially with scholarship on performativity and vitality and how these connect to developing a nonrepresentational ethnographic approach for working with family photographs and narratives. I also take up Vannini's call to attend more closely to issues of power and injustice in nonrepresentational approaches. Finally, I develop a nonrepresentational approach—that blends politics, ethics, ontology, and epistemology—for viewing and analyzing family photos, and I revisit and re-read one of my own treasured family photographs through this framework.

Working with family photos and memories can move us onto difficult terrains of memory, ethics, and politics. On the one hand, there are spaces of vulnerability that one enters when we look again at our own family histories and we rethink, renarrate, and remake those histories, the cherished people in them, and the many narrative identities that were made in the emplotment and reemplotment of particular stories across time.

On the other hand, viewing and attempting to analyze the photographs of others—even as witness, ally, or advocate—is ethically complicated. One conclusion I have come to through this research process is that publicly told testimonies and stories of the traumatic histories of residential schooling and the many photographs that now speak that history belong to the people in those photos and their families. In the third part of my research project, wherein I am working with a cross-generational family and their photos, I am following their lead on these matters. Guided by the nonrepresentational and ecological approach laid out in this article, my focus is on fostering relationships, research as intervention with multiple effects, and ontological "processes of formation as against their final products" (Ingold 2011, 92).

I end this article with two sets of reflections that guide my research on family photographs as I move forward. The first insights are from Marianne Hirsch, who has written extensively about family photographs, cultural memory, and trauma. She asks us to think carefully about how to engage with

> the ethics and the aesthetics of remembrance in the aftermath of catastrophe. How do we regard and recall what Susan Sontag has so powerfully described as the "pain of others?" What do we owe the victims? How can we best carry their stories forward, without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves, and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them? How are we implicated in the aftermath of crimes we did not ourselves witness? (Hirsch 2012, 2)

Finally, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a leading voice on Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies, poses a powerful and provocative question for researchers to ask themselves as they think about moving into any research encounter. I have found these thoughts helpful in thinking about working with Indigenous collaborators on photographs and narratives of memory and trauma. Drawing from Indigenous (specifically, Maori) practices of welcoming visitors into communities, she asks: "How did you come to be here at the entry point of this community?" (Tuhiwai Smith 2014, 17) and urges researchers to reflect on what it means to enter into

> a research space, to have you reflect upon the deceptively simple moments of meeting as researcher and researched. This is not the interview, the encounter or the observational moment but the human-being to- human-being meeting, the beginning, in its ritual, spiritual, visceral, uncertain, sweaty first touch of skins, histories, genealogies, politics. (Tuhiwai Smith 2014, 15)

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Notes

1. Some of the details of this story have been changed, and all names have been changed.
2. Neimanis is drawing in turn on the work of Vicki Kirby (2011).

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