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Lost and (Re)found

Found Snapshots and the Uncanny as a Return of the Repressed

A Master's Thesis for the Degree *Master of Arts* (Two Years) in Visual Culture

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Abstract

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by Jennilee Kinnunen

Anonymous forms of non-art photography have received a great deal of attention in recent years. Museum exhibitions and published compilations of what is commonly referred to as 'vernacular photography' have appeared regularly since the late 1990s. An interest in photographs produced by anonymous amateurs is further reflected in the growing popularity of collecting snapshots that have been lost or discarded by strangers.

This thesis is an investigation of so-called 'found snapshots', guided by Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny as a return of the repressed. While most current research is focused on representing them as aesthetic objects or cultural artifacts, this thesis is concerned with how anonymous snapshots are perceived by individuals. To develop an understanding of found snapshots and their reception in terms of the uncanny, this thesis takes a multidisciplinary approach in which theoretical texts related to psychoanalysis, photography, and art history are used in conjunction with articles, interviews, and other non-academic sources that address the subject of anonymous snapshots and the interests individuals have in collecting them.

This thesis begins with an introduction to the snapshot genre of photography and the practice of collecting found snapshots before turning to Freud's influential 1919 essay on the uncanny, '*Das unheimliche*', to introduce and explain the concept that acts as its unifying theme. In the text that follows, the uncanny is used as a tool to explore the reception of found snapshots as both images and objects. As a whole, this thesis seeks to contribute a new perspective to the body of knowledge about anonymous forms of amateur photography and to demonstrate the research potential of this under-theorized area of visual culture.

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Introduction

Fig. 1. Anonymous photograph, ca. 1950s.

Research motivation and objective

Within the borders of a 1950s-era black-and-white print is a middle-aged woman wearing sunglasses [Fig. 1]. Her legs are crossed and her hands placed firmly on the arm rests of the lounge chair she sits in. In the background is a scattering of outdoor furniture and in the upper left corner, the bottom half of someone wearing a dress. Filling the lower right portion of the frame is the finger of the anonymous photographer, likely included in the image by mistake. The woman in sunglasses looks directly at him (or her, we will never know), but she does not smile as people often do in photographs. The viewer might wonder why. Was she upset? Did the photographer catch her by surprise? Removed from its original context, the photograph begs answers to questions that we can never answer. Who is the woman pictured? What happened to her? How did this photograph of her end up in the introduction to someone's Master's thesis?

The photograph above, available online for the purchase price of $17.50,[1] belongs to a popular collecting category of photographs made by anonymous amateurs. As a collector of what are commonly referred to as 'found photographs', I have a preference for snapshots. Like the photograph above, snapshots are amateur photographs typically 'shot' to capture moments of everyday life for personal use.

My interest in snapshots began with the discovery of my parents' photo albums from the 1970s. While I was initially drawn to the snapshots they contained as documents of my family history, I soon developed a fondness for their arbitrariness, the banality of their subjects, and the square format and deeply saturated colors of the prints themselves. After finding similar snapshots for sale in antique stores and at flea markets, I began to purchase them. What is unique about so-called 'found snapshots', like the photograph of the woman in sunglasses, is that it is usually impossible to establish the identities, locations, and circumstances of the people and places they depict. They are completely mysterious at the same time that they appear no different from one's own family photographs.

Within the strange familiarity of anonymous snapshots are traces of the uncanny. Understood by Nicholas Royle as "a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar",[2] the uncanny was most notably developed as a concept by Sigmund Freud in his 1919 essay, '*Das unheimliche*', translated into English under the title 'The uncanny'.[3] Initially conceived as a contribution to the study of aesthetics, Freud's essay has since received attention across a broad range of disciplines, including art, literature, film, philosophy, cultural studies, and queer theory, and continues to be of academic relevance.[4] With this thesis, I will participate in this vein of scholarship by drawing from Freud's concept of the uncanny to examine found snapshots and their reception.

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[1] Mark Sullo, 'Sunglasses with attitude', *Past pictures: vintage found photography*, viewed 16 April 2012, <http://pastpictures.net/new1a.html>.
[2] Nicholas Royle, *The uncanny: an introduction*, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 1.
[3] Sigmund Freud, 'The uncanny' in *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, volume XVII (1917-1919): an infantile neurosis and other works*, trans. & ed. James Strachey, Hogarth Press, London, 1955, pp. 217-256.
[4] Royle, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

Current state of research and academic relevance

The present interest in anonymous snapshots is not entirely new. The history of snapshot photography has been addressed in books since at least the 1970s,[5] with published compilations of images produced by unknown photographers first appearing around the same time.[6] According to Mia Fineman, curator of photography at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the publication of these compilation books contributed to an interest in collecting anonymous snapshots and other forms of what is termed 'vernacular photography'.[7] In more recent years, similar books have been published with greater frequency.[8] Snapshot collector Joel Rotenberg is of the opinion that the current wave of interest was sparked by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's 1998 exhibition *Snapshots: the photography of everyday life, 1888 to the present*.[9]

Indeed, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there have been a number of exhibitions focused on photographs produced by anonymous amateurs. In 2000, the Met presented *Other pictures: anonymous photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection*. The exhibition *Close to home: an American album* was shown in 2004 at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, and in 2007, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC presented *The art of the American snapshot, 1888-1978: from the collection of Robert E. Jackson*. These exhibitions were followed by the 2008 showing of *Now is then: snapshots from the Maresca Collection* at the Newark Museum in New Jersey.

Each of these exhibitions was accompanied by the publication of an exhibition catalogue.[10] The ways in which the catalogues' contributors approach vernacular photography vary from sociohistorical investigations to analyses influenced by modernist aesthetics. The exhibition catalogue for the Met's *Other*

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[5] See Brian Coe & Paul Gates, *The snapshot photograph: the rise of popular photography*, Ash & Grant, London, 1977.
[6] See Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin death trip*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1973. See also Ken Graves & Mitchell Payne (eds.), *American snapshots*, Scrimshaw Press, Oakland, CA, 1977.
[7] Mia Fineman, 'Kodak and the rise of amateur photography', *Heilbrunn timeline of art history*, October 2004, viewed 3 April 2012, <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/kodk/hd_kodk.htm>.
[8] See Guy Stricherz, *Americans in Kodachrome: 1945-1965*, Twin Palms, Santa Fe, NM, 2002. See also Robert Flynn Johnson & William Boyd, *Anonymous: enigmatic images from unknown photographers*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 2005.
[9] Joel Rotenberg, 'The art of the snapshot?', web log entry, 22 July 2008, viewed 17 January 2012, <http://art-of-the-snapshot-question-mark.blogspot.com>.
[10] See the 'Exhibition catalogues' section in the bibliography at the end of this thesis, pp. 47-48.

pictures, for example, shows an interest in relating anonymous snapshots to art.[11] The catalogue includes more than 140 reproductions of photographs dating from the 1910s through the 1960s, "the golden age of the black and white snapshot".[12] Fineman, one of the exhibition's curators, represents the snapshots reproduced in the book as aesthetic objects that are made more alluring by the errors of the amateurs who produced them and the veil of mystery that surrounds them.[13] She draws comparisons between the images and the work of famous photographers like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank, and Diane Arbus,[14] finally concluding that anonymous snapshots "[teach] us what art can be."[15]

The exhibition catalogue produced to accompany the National Gallery's showing of *The art of the American snapshot* represents a different approach to anonymous photographs.[16] In it are reproductions of around 250 snapshots, together with four essays tracing the evolution of the snapshot in the United States. Rather than aestheticizing the arbitrary and accident-prone nature of snapshots as Fineman does, the catalogue's contributors attempt to explain *why* snapshots look the way they do, with reference to technical, social, and cultural factors. The catalogue ends with an afterword written by Robert E. Jackson, whose collection was the focus of the exhibition.[17] The catalogue accompanying the Newark Museum's showing of *Now is then* similarly closes with an interview with collector Frank Maresca.[18] These texts offer the reader insight into what makes anonymous snapshots so fascinating to individual collectors.

The question of why individuals collect the snapshots of strangers has been considered outside of exhibition catalogues as well. Collectors' interests have been addressed in non-academic articles,[19] as well as in interviews published online.[20]

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[11] Mia Fineman, *Other pictures: anonymous photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection*, Twin Palms, Santa Fe, NM, 2000.
[12] ibid., p. 148.
[13] ibid., pp. 144-150.
[14] ibid., p. 148.
[15] ibid., p. 150.
[16] Sarah Greenough, et al., *The art of the American snapshot, 1888-1978: from the collection of Robert E. Jackson*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC & Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2007.
[17] Robert E. Jackson, 'Afterword' in *The art of the American snapshot*, op. cit., pp. 271-276.
[18] Marvin Heiferman, 'Interview with Frank Maresca' in *Now is then: snapshots from the Maresca Collection*, Heiferman (ed.), Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2007, pp. 161-165.
[19] See Oliver Bennett, 'View finder', *Design week*, vol. 18, no. 35, August 2003, pp. 14-15. See also Rick Poynor, 'True stories', *Print*, vol. 60, no. 2, March 2006, pp. 33-34.
[20] See Michelle Hauser, 'A fluid and expressive medium: interview with Robert E. Jackson', *Observatory*, published 24 November 2010, viewed 16 January 2012, <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=22618>. See also Liv Gudmundson, 'Barbara Levine on vintage

Collectors themselves have also written essays regarding the snapshots they find,[21] and snapshot collecting is the subject of a 2004 documentary film titled *Other people's pictures*.[22] As I will demonstrate in chapter 1, collectors' reasons for accumulating snapshots are varied and not limited to the aesthetic and sociohistorical concerns of exhibition catalogues.

With this thesis, I aim to contribute to the body of knowledge about anonymous or 'found' snapshots. While exhibitions of such photographs tend to focus on their relation to culture at large, I am interested in addressing how found snapshots are viewed by individuals. By considering them in relation to the Freudian uncanny, I hope not only to develop a new perspective on found snapshots and their reception, but also to suggest that these ordinary photographs are fertile ground for more theoretical pursuits.

Theories, methods, and structure

Given that anonymous snapshots have received little theoretical attention, it seems appropriate to consider them here in relation to texts that are already well-established in academia. This thesis thus relies heavily on Freud's essay on the uncanny,[23] in addition to Roland Barthes's influential book, *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*.[24] While 'The uncanny' has proven an important point of reference in studies of contemporary culture, *Camera lucida* has played a central role in the development of photographic theory. Furthermore, both Freud's essay and Barthes's book have to do with individual perception; the former concerns aesthetics and the uncanny as a quality of feeling, while the latter focuses on the effects of photography on the viewer. Both texts are thus well-suited to the investigation of the reception of found snapshots.

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vernacular photo albums and found snapshots', *Lesphotographes.com*, published 8 November 2011, viewed 27 February 2012, <http://www.lesphotographes.com/2011/11/08/barbara-levine-on-snapshot-photography>.

[21] See Barry Mauer, 'The found photograph and the limits of meaning', *Enculturation*, vol. 3, no. 2, Fall 2001, viewed 17 January 2012, <http://enculturation.gmu.edu/3_2/mauer/index.html>. See also Rotenberg, op. cit.

[22] Cabot Philbrick & Lorca Shepperd, *Other people's pictures*, DVD, The Cinema Guild, New York, 2004.

[23] Freud, op. cit.

[24] Roland Barthes, *Camera lucida: reflections on photography*, trans. Richard Howard, Hill and Wang, New York, 1981.

My general intent with the concept of the uncanny is to use it as a tool to develop and guide my analysis of found snapshots and their reception. I have thus limited my discussion to those ideas in Freud's essay that seem most relevant to my topic, at times departing from his text to clarify how the uncanny is to be understood in this thesis, specifically, or to reference how it has been interpreted and used by other scholars. I refer, for example, to Nicholas Royle's book *The uncanny: an introduction*,[25] as well as to Hal Foster's study of the uncanny and Surrealism in his book *Compulsive beauty*.[26] Barthes's *Camera lucida* also concerns the uncanny; it is a book not only about the reception of photography, but also about the uncanny aspects of the photographic medium. I use his text to support and further develop my interpretation of viewers' reception of found snapshots in relation to the uncanny.

This thesis departs from most current research on anonymous snapshots in its consideration of both the visual and material aspects of snapshots and their effects on the contemporary viewer. As I suggested previously, most publications on the subject focus on snapshots either in terms of their aesthetic value and relation to art, or in terms of their historical and cultural significance. Marvin Heiferman makes a similar observation in the exhibition catalogue for *Now is then*, suggesting that there is more to snapshots than either of these readings allows.[27] Heiferman proposes that "we both consider them as evocative three-dimensional objects and treat them as two-dimensional images."[28]

In his essay on vernacular photography,[29] Geoffrey Batchen agrees that studies of non-art forms of photography should look to material culture for methodological guidance.[30] At the same time, Batchen criticizes material culture's tendency to "seek the meanings of objects through a restoration of their original contexts and social settings", which, in the case of vernacular photographs, are often lost to the contemporary viewer.[31] Such is the tendency of publications concerned with the sociohistorical implications of anonymous photographs, such as the exhibition catalogue for *The art of the American snapshot*. For Batchen, the task of

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[25] Royle, op. cit.
[26] Hal Foster, *Compulsive beauty*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993.
[27] Marvin Heiferman, 'Now is then: the thrill and the fate of snapshots' in *Now is then*, op. cit., p. 52.
[28] ibid.
[29] Geoffrey Batchen, 'Vernacular photographies' in *Each wild idea: writing, photography, history*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2001, pp. 56-80.
[30] ibid., p. 77.
[31] ibid., p. 78.

the scholar "is not to uncover a secret or lost meaning but to articulate the intelligibility of these objects for our own time."[32]

This thesis, too, takes interest in what snapshots have become, removed from their original context, and in how viewers perceive them in the here and now. My investigation relies not only on the theoretical texts mentioned previously, but also on an anthropological approach to interpreting visual materials.[33] Like the methods recommended by Heiferman and Batchen, such an approach considers photographs as material objects, paying attention to their physical attributes and context.[34] I thus refer not only to the image content of found snapshots, but also to their material form and recontextualized use and reception. In addressing how found snapshots are looked at and understood by contemporary viewers, I rely on sources from the United States and Europe, where snapshot collecting is most prominent. These sources include those mentioned in the previous section: articles and interviews, the writings of collectors, and a documentary film. While my analysis of the reception of found snapshots depends primarily on these sources, I acknowledge that it may also be influenced by my own experiences finding and collecting photographs, if only subconsciously.

Another point worth noting regards the individual snapshots I have chosen to illustrate this thesis. The examples I have selected are not in any way meant to be a representative sample of the incalculable number of snapshots that have been produced since the end of the nineteenth century. They serve instead to acquaint the reader with snapshot photography and found snapshots, and to support arguments within the text. They are limited to vintage snapshots because old photographs are most readily available and what most collectors prefer to collect.

Snapshot photography and found snapshot collecting are given a more thorough introduction in chapter 1, as a means of establishing context for the reader. Here I define what a snapshot is – and, more specifically, what a 'found snapshot' is – before going on to delineate what interests individuals have in collecting them.

In chapter 2, I turn my attention to the concept that structures this thesis: the uncanny. Relying mostly on Freud's essay, I develop an understanding of the uncanny as a subjective experience involving a return of the repressed. I consider

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[32] ibid., p. 79.
[33] See Gillian Rose, 'An anthropological approach: directly observing the social life of visual objects' in *Visual methodologies: an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, Sage, London, 2007, pp. 216-236.
[34] ibid., p. 219.

how the uncanny can be applied to the interpretation of the image content of an individual snapshot, and then transition to a discussion of the concept's relation to the recontextualization of found snapshots and their reception as images, as well as objects.

In chapter 3, I focus on the uncanny aspects of the viewing, collecting, and compiling practices of snapshot collector Drew Naprawa. In doing so, I consider the more personal effects of found snapshots, with reference to both the uncanny and Barthes's notion of the *punctum*. I also consider Drew's collection in relation to the connection Foster makes in *Compulsive beauty* between the found objects of Surrealism and the uncanny compulsion to repeat.

Finally, in chapter 4, I discuss found snapshots in terms of the photographic uncanny and the medium's association with death. Specifically, I use Barthes's understanding of photography's particular temporality, together with the associated notion of the *punctum* of time, to show how the uncanny reminder of death is redoubled in the reception of found snapshots, with consideration given to both their visual and material aspects.

While the uncanny acts as the unifying theme of this thesis, my approach to found snapshots and their reception is not based solely on psychoanalysis. It is also not limited to the aesthetic and sociohistorical concerns of most current research. By also employing anthropological methodology and theories related to photography and art history, I take a multidisciplinary approach appropriate to the study of visual culture.

1. Found snapshots

1.1 Snapshot photography

A snapshot is an informal photograph, typically 'shot' by an amateur photographer for personal use. The term 'snapshot', originally used in hunting to refer to a gunshot fired quickly and haphazardly, began to be applied to photographs following George Eastman's introduction of the Kodak No. 1 camera in 1888.[35]

The Kodak No. 1 marked the advent of amateur photography by making photographic technology accessible to casual users. Eastman, the founder of Eastman Kodak Company, designed the small, hand-held box camera with the unskilled amateur in mind. The Kodak No. 1 came loaded with a 100-exposure roll of film that, once used, would be returned with the device to Eastman's factory in Rochester, New York to be developed and printed. While the film underwent processing, the camera would be reloaded with film and returned to the consumer. The Kodak system's ease of use was marketed with the slogan "You press the button, we do the rest."[36]

Following the introduction of the Kodak No. 1 camera, photography quickly became a popular recreational activity, with amateurs using their cameras to capture moments of everyday life. Within ten years of its invention, more than 1.5 million Kodak cameras had been sold and were in use.[37] The popularity of roll-film cameras grew throughout the following decades, so that by 1954, more than 70 percent of the 53 million families living in the United States owned cameras.[38]

Given the vast number of snapshots that were made during these years, it is not surprising to find among them clichés that have come to define the snapshot as a photographic genre. Vacationers pose in front of tourist attractions; friends and families share meals around tables; Christmas trees stand tall and covered in tinsel [Figs. 6-8]. Amateur photographers, after all, did not typically make snapshots to be original, but to produce personal mementos of their lives. They made snapshots to commemorate important events, such as weddings and graduations; to record

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[35] Sarah Greenough, 'Introduction' in *The art of the American snapshot*, op. cit., p. 2.
[36] Fineman, 'Kodak and the rise of amateur photography', op. cit.
[37] Heiferman, 'Now is then' in *Now is then*, op. cit., p. 42.
[38] Sarah Greenough, 'Fun under the shade of the mushroom cloud: 1940-1959' in *The art of the American snapshot*, op. cit., p. 153.

birthday parties, family get-togethers, and other group activities; to document travels and tourist sites; to capture the appearance of children and pets, cars and houses.[39]

While they were usually made with a specific purpose in mind, snapshots did not always turn out the way photographers had intended. Inexperience and technological flukes led to the appearance of unexpected details in snapshots, including fingers [Fig. 1], surprise shadows [Fig. 2], eccentric croppings [Fig. 7], motion blurs, light leaks, and double exposures [Fig. 9].[40]

The function of snapshots was deeply personal. As objects, snapshots were held in one's hand, displayed in a frame, pinned to a wall, or placed in an album. As images, they were looked at, reminisced over, and talked about.

Inevitably, however, snapshots fall silent. When they are lost or discarded, they become separated from the close circle of family and friends who once animated them with speech. Like the snapshot of the woman in sunglasses [Fig. 1], they become anonymous curiosities that turn up for sale at yard sales and flea markets, in thrift stores and antique shops, and by online vendors, such as eBay.[41] Other snapshots remain hidden in someone's garage or attic, tucked between the pages of a book, or lying on the street, where they wait to be found.

1.2 Found snapshots

A growing interest in collecting ordinary photographs that escape traditional definitions of 'authorship' has led to the popularization of the terms 'anonymous photography' and 'vernacular photography'. These terms are commonly used to describe genres of non-art photography including daguerreotypes and tintypes, *cartes de visite* and photo postcards, mug shots and amateur erotica, and even the most banal of photographic forms: the snapshot.

Many collectors of anonymous snapshots have indicated a preference for the term 'found photography'. Collector Nigel Maister believes that "the more established 'vernacular photography' [smacks] of pretension",[42] while collector Joel Rotenberg takes issue with the term's analogy with 'vernacular architecture' or

[39] Fineman, 'Kodak and the rise of amateur photography', op. cit.
[40] Heiferman, 'Now is then' in *Now is then*, op. cit., p. 47.
[41] ibid., p. 51.
[42] Nigel Maister, 'About Foundphotography.com', *Foundphotography.com: a gallery of inadvertent art*, viewed 15 December 2011, <http://www.foundphotographs.com>.

'vernacular music'. Rotenberg explains that unlike found snapshots, neither vernacular architecture nor vernacular music demand reinterpretation. "Vernacular architecture is made by architects, vernacular music by musicians", he explains, "but the people who produced the snapshots that we like may simply have snapped the shutters of their cameras."[43]

As some collectors have pointed out, the reinterpretation required by found photographs ties them to the art historical conception of 'foundness'. Rotenberg argues that found snapshots acquire new meaning through a "contextual twist" that places them within the tradition of the Duchampian 'found object'.[44] Another collector, Barry Mauer, makes reference to the 'found object' of Surrealism. He compares his own habits of viewing and compiling found photographs to the Surrealist practice of collecting and exhibiting found objects, thereby freeing them of meaning through decontextualization.[45]

Found photographs are not usually acquired by chance. While Mauer's collection began with photographs he found on the streets of Minneapolis,[46] most collectors actively seek snapshots in antique stores, at flea markets, on eBay, and wherever else they might be sold.

For the purposes of this thesis, my preference will be for the term 'found photography' and, more specifically, 'found snapshot'. I will use 'found snapshot' to refer to a snapshot that has been lost or discarded, and later discovered by someone who knows nothing to little about the original context in which the photograph was produced. The finder is not usually able to identify the subjects of a found snapshot, for example, nor does he or she know the identity or original intention of the photographer. This is precisely why, as Rotenberg indicates, found snapshots are more demanding of reinterpretation than other genres of non-art photography.[47] The term 'found snapshot' is also meant to place emphasis on the reception of the contemporary viewer – the individual who not only finds the photograph, but must also 'find' meaning for it.

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[43] Rotenberg, op. cit.
[44] ibid.
[45] Mauer, op. cit.
[46] ibid.
[47] Rotenberg, op. cit.

1.3 Collecting found snapshots

A question often posed to collectors of found snapshots is what makes these ordinary photographs worth collecting. For some, the attraction of found snapshots lies in their everyday nature. According to an article on the subject, collectors detect a greater sense of authenticity in their "directness, ineptitude, and lack of artifice".[48]

Found snapshots are also appreciated for their historical density. As Rotenberg observes, collectors typically prefer vintage snapshots to those that were produced more recently. Many are drawn to snapshots as material objects, bearing the physical traces of time and usage [Figs. 5 and 10]. Some collectors have a preference for snapshots with borders, as opposed to cropped snapshots and the borderless prints that came into style around 1980. But Rotenberg insists that collecting old photographs is not necessarily an exercise in nostalgia. Collectors may be interested in the past for its strangeness, for its obscurity, or as a source of information.[49] Some collectors, for example, approach found snapshots with a historical, sociological, or cultural interest, aiming to extract from the images some truth about the past.[50]

Other collectors prefer to delight in the past's obscurity and in the inherent mystery of found snapshots. Some, recognizing the impossibility of analyzing a found snapshot with any certainty, choose to create their own narratives to accompany the photographs they find. For example, the website *Laughter is the spackle of the soul: an archive of found photography and lost moments* features a collection of found photographs displayed with captions written by the finder himself.[51]

Other collectors appreciate found snapshots for their aesthetic qualities. A snapshot's visual interest is often enhanced by accidents in production [Fig. 1], technological flukes [Fig. 9], the physical effects of time and handling [Figs. 5 and 7], and additions made to the photograph by the hand of an individual [Fig. 10]. As collector Robert E. Jackson points out, "the visual vocabulary of impressionism, cubism, and surrealism […] has made us generally comfortable with the aesthetics of

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[48] Poynor, 'True stories', *Print*, vol. 60, no. 2, March 2006, p. 34.
[49] Rotenberg, op. cit.
[50] Mauer, op. cit.
[51] 'Mushroom', *Laughter is the spackle of the soul: an archive of found photography and lost moments*, viewed 20 March 2012, <http://www.saysomethingcryptic.com/spackleofthesoul>.

snapshots."[52] Jackson prefers to appreciate found snapshots as formal aesthetic objects "without the weight of any of the narrative import that accompanied the taking of the photo".[53]

The appeal of found snapshots may also be linked to personal emotions and memories. Collector Damien Frost is drawn to found snapshots with a "personal touch", appreciating them for their potential to become "adopted memor[ies]".[54] For Barbara Levine, "collecting [found snapshots] is about the anticipation I am going to discover something which I find beautiful or speaks to me emotionally."[55]

The capacity of found snapshots to touch the viewer's subjectivity is important in terms of their relation to the uncanny. Just as the reception of found snapshots varies from person to person, so too is the uncanny a subjective experience that moves individuals in different ways. In the following chapter, I will introduce Freud's seminal text on the uncanny and begin to develop an understanding of its connection to found snapshots and their reception.

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[52] Jackson, 'Afterword' in *The art of the American snapshot*, op. cit., p. 273.
[53] Robert E. Jackson, as quoted in Michelle Hauser, 'A fluid and expressive medium: interview with Robert E. Jackson', *Observatory*, published 24 November 2010, viewed 16 January 2012, <http://observatory.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=22618>.
[54] Damien Frost, as quoted in Oliver Bennett, 'View finder', *Design week*, vol. 18, no. 35, August 2003, p. 15.
[55] Barbara Levine, as quoted in Liv Gudmundson, 'Barbara Levine on vintage vernacular photo albums and found snapshots', *Lesphotographes.com*, published 8 November 2011, viewed 27 February 2012, <http://www.lesphotographes.com/2011/11/08/barbara-levine-on-snapshot-photography>.

2. The uncanny

2.1 A quality of feeling

In 1919, Freud published his essay 'The uncanny'. His text is, in part, a contestation of Ernst Jentsch's 1906 essay, 'On the psychology of the uncanny', in which the uncanny was first identified and explored in relation to psychology. Of all the literature available on the subject of the uncanny, however, Freud's text is the most indispensable.[56]

Freud begins his essay by identifying the uncanny as belonging to a "province" that is "rather remote" to the interests of psychoanalysis, the theory of psychology that he himself conceived.[57] The uncanny, he explains, is more closely related to the subject of aesthetics, insofar as it concerns "not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling."[58] Freud's study, however, departs from the focus of traditional aesthetics on "feelings of a positive nature" – namely, "what is beautiful, attractive, and sublime" – by turning to "the opposite feelings of repulsion and distress."[59]

Because this thesis will focus on the uncanny in relation to the reception of found snapshots, it is important to note at the outset how the uncanny will be understood as a quality of feeling. First, I will depart from Freud's emphasis on 'negative' sense impressions and his claim that the uncanny is confined "to what is frightening – to what arouses dread and horror".[60] What is more important to my understanding of the uncanny is the "common core" of uncanny phenomena that Freud seeks to identify in his essay.[61] It is the presence of this 'core' that defines the uncanny in this thesis, rather than any particular quality of feeling. This is because "people vary so very greatly in their sensitivity to this quality of feeling",[62] as Freud points out, as well as in their general reaction to things that are considered uncanny. This point is also relevant to the reception of found snapshots; viewers' responses to

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[56] Royle, op. cit., p. 6.
[57] Freud, op. cit., p. 219.
[58] ibid., p. 220.
[59] ibid., p. 219.
[60] ibid.
[61] ibid.
[62] ibid., p. 220.

Fig. 2. Anonymous snapshot, ca. 1925.

them vary. Nicholas Royle's description of the uncanny in his book, *The uncanny: an introduction*, can also be considered in relation to the reception of found snapshots. Like the uncanny, a found snapshot "can be a matter of something gruesome or terrible […] But it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy".[63]

As an example, consider a found snapshot depicting a dead deer [Fig. 2]. Centered in the photograph is the cadaver of a buck, propped up against the exterior wall of a building and supported by a barrel under its belly. The shadows of the photographer and three companions fill the lower half of the frame, stretching up toward the animal's remains. The reason the snapshot was taken will never be known. Perhaps it was made to document the prize kill of a hunting trip or perhaps to show the fatal result of a car accident. Regardless of the photographer's intention, the image is likely to produce feelings of unease in some viewers. Other viewers, however, may admire the image for the abstract quality of the figures' shadows. Some may appreciate the photographic print's elongated rectangular form or simply value the snapshot for its strangeness. In short, both the uncanny and the reception of

[63] Royle, op. cit., p. 2.

found snapshots involve subjective experiences that influence individuals in different ways.

At the end of this chapter, I will return to the snapshot of the dead deer to consider its relation to the Freudian uncanny. Ultimately, I will suggest that it is not uncanny because it has the potential to "[arouse] dread and horror", but because it shares the "common core" that, for Freud, distinguishes certain things as uncanny. [64]

2.2 (Un)heimlich *and the return of the repressed*

In pursuit of the 'core' of the uncanny, Freud first proposes to determine what meaning has come to be attached to the word in the course of its history".[65] He sets forth to determine the meaning of '*unheimlich*', the German word for 'uncanny', under the heading of its opposite, '*heimlich*'. Based on the definition of '*heimlich*' as "homely", Freud points out that one might be "tempted to conclude that what is 'uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is *not* known and familiar."[66] Such a conclusion is not unlike Jentsch's equation of the uncanny with what is "novel and unfamiliar" or otherwise capable of producing a sense of "intellectual uncertainty".[67] According to Freud, such a definition is incomplete.

After a brief foray into other languages, Freud returns his attention to the German word '*heimlich*'. He finally establishes that the word's meaning belongs to not one, but two sets of ideas. "[O]n the one hand", he explains, "it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight."[68] Thus, Freud concludes, the uncanny is not simply what is strange and unfamiliar, but also what "ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light."[69] In psychoanalytic terms, "the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed."[70]

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[64] Freud, op. cit., p. 219.
[65] ibid., p. 220.
[66] ibid.
[67] ibid., p. 221.
[68] ibid., pp. 224-25.
[69] ibid., p. 225, quoting Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, as quoted in Daniel Sanders, *Worterbuch der Deutschen sprache*, 1860.
[70] Freud, op. cit., p. 247.

2.3 Motifs of the uncanny

In the second half of his essay, Freud puts his hypothesis to the test by "review[ing] the things, persons, impressions, events and situations which are able to arouse in us a feeling of the uncanny".[71] He begins by offering his interpretation of E. T. A. Hoffman's story, 'The sandman', previously related by Jentsch to the uncanny on the basis of the "[u]ncertainty whether an object is living or inanimate" – a feeling provoked by the figure Olympia, an automaton.[72] Freud offers a different reading of Hoffman's story in which the sandman, the mythic figure who tears out children's eyes, acts as the tale's primary source of the uncanny. For Freud, the sandman evokes a fear of damaging or losing one's eyes that recalls the childhood anxiety of being castrated.[73] From this, Freud suggests that the uncanny arises due to the return of repressed infantile complexes.[74]

Freud goes on to consider other phenomena capable of provoking a sense of the uncanny. Among these is the figure of the double, formerly studied by Otto Rank in relation to reflections in mirrors, shadows, spirits, the soul, and the fear of death.[75] Freud relates the double to the uncanny "recurrence of the same thing",[76] and later names the similar factor of "involuntary repetition" as a source of the uncanny.[77] Freud also identifies the beliefs in magic, sorcery, and the return of the dead as uncanny, and points to their association with a primitive conception of the universe.[78] Freud explains that while this early stage of magical and animistic thinking has been surmounted, traces of it remain shallowly buried in the 'enlightened' mind, so that when something occurs that seems to confirm primitive beliefs, one gets a feeling of the uncanny.[79] Freud concludes, then, that the uncanny has to do with the revival of surmounted primitive beliefs, as well as with the return of repressed infantile material.[80] His investigation of uncanny phenomena thus leads him to the same conclusion reached in the first part of his essay; that is, at the 'core' of the uncanny is the return of the repressed.

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[71] ibid., p. 226.
[72] ibid., p. 230.
[73] ibid., p. 231.
[74] ibid., p. 233.
[75] ibid., pp. 234-35.
[76] ibid., p. 234.
[77] ibid., p. 237.
[78] ibid., p. 247.
[79] ibid., pp. 240-41.
[80] ibid., p. 249.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify how the concept of 'repression' will be understood throughout this thesis. According to psychoanalytic theory, when an emotional impulse is repelled from one's conscious mind – when it is repressed – it is transformed into anxiety. Thus, Freud concludes that the uncanny belongs to a class of frightening things "in which the frightening element can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*."[81] It is important to remind the reader, however, that in this thesis, the uncanny is not understood as being limited to feelings of "dread and horror",[82] but as having the capacity to evoke a range of emotional responses in individuals. The 'repressed', then, may refer to an aspect of one's experience that has been simply forgotten or put out of mind. It may also be understood metaphorically in relation to a material object, for example, that has been contained in some way. Thus, the uncanny as a return of the repressed is not to be understood in strictly psychoanalytic terms.

2.4 Found snapshots as uncanny

2.4.1 Motifs considered

Now that I have delineated Freud's concept of the uncanny as a return of the repressed, and how it is to be understood in this thesis, it is possible to return to the found snapshot presented in the first section of this chapter. The most obvious way to relate this photograph to Freud's conception of the uncanny is by looking for motifs within the content of the image that are linked to the uncanny in his essay. This approach is worth brief consideration, given its popularity in studies relating the uncanny to visual art and literature,[83] including Freud's own literary analysis in 'The uncanny'.

As should be apparent, the snapshot of the dead deer contains several of the motifs that Freud associates with the uncanny. The shadows that fill the lower half of the frame are 'doubles' of the photographer and his companions. Freud traces the uncanniness of the double to "the fact of [it] being a creation dating back to a very

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[81] ibid., p. 241.
[82] ibid., p. 219.
[83] Hal Foster, for example, relates the uncanny confusion between the animate and the inanimate to figures central to Surrealist imagery, including dolls, mannequins, and automatons. See Foster, op. cit.

early mental stage, long since surmounted", that has become, through repression, "a thing of terror".[84] Stretching up toward the cadaver at the center of the snapshot, the shadows appear as the "uncanny harbinger[s] of death"[85] that Freud associates with the double. The fact that there is not just one shadow, but several repeated across the lower half of the frame, is reflective of the uncanny recurrence of the same thing. The dead deer itself recalls Freud's comment that the uncanny is experienced most strongly in relation to death and dead bodies.[86] Based on the appearance of these motifs, then, one might conclude that the snapshot is uncanny. It does not necessarily produce a feeling of fear or anxiety in the viewer, as I noted previously, but it does share the common core of the uncanny: the return of the repressed.

This uncanny 'core' can be located not only by identifying uncanny motifs in art and literature, as other scholars have done, or in the image content of a found snapshot, as I have done here. This limited approach undermines the critical capacity of the uncanny and, furthermore, is an insufficient means of understanding the uncanny qualities of found snapshots, specifically. Throughout the remainder of this thesis, then, I will move beyond this method, suggesting other ways in which the uncanny can be understood in relation to found snapshots as images, as well as objects.

2.4.2 The familiar in the unfamiliar

Largely the result of shifts in context, found snapshots are *unheimlich*. In the hands of their original owners, snapshots are the epitome of *heimlich*, in both senses of the word; they are at once "intimate", "comfortable", and "belonging to the house", and "concealed" and "kept from sight".[87] When lost or discarded, they become *unheimlich*, To the person who discovers them, found snapshots are not only strange and unfamiliar, but also like secrets revealed. But in spite of their strangeness, found snapshots lead the viewer "back to what is known of old and long familiar."[88]

As noted in chapter 1, the snapshot represents a banal and ubiquitous genre of photography. Most people have become acquainted with the snapshot's physical

[84] Freud, op. cit., p. 236.
[85] ibid., p. 235.
[86] ibid., p. 241.
[87] Sanders, *Worterbuch*, op. cit., as quoted in ibid., pp. 222-223.
[88] Freud, op. cit., p. 220.

form and the clichés of its aesthetics, not only through their own photographic practices and experiences handling and viewing snapshots made by friends and family, but also through the representation of snapshots in advertisements, books, movies, and other forms of mass media. Thus, even though found snapshots represent unknown subjects and were produced by an outmoded form of photographic technology, they maintain elements that are familiar to the viewer in the here and now.

Found snapshots have the capacity to return to the mind of the viewer aspects of the individual and collective experience. Collector Astrid van Loo's attraction to found photographs is based on "the recognition of a shared experience" that arises from the knowledge that "we have all taken photographs like this".[89] "[S]omehow", she explains, "you recognize yourself in them."[90] Thus, although their subjects are often unidentifiable, found photographs tap into the collective consciousness at the same time that they remind the viewer of his or her individual experiences with snapshot photography.[91] Within the strange familiarity of found snapshots, then, is the uncanny return of the repressed.

2.4.3 From concealed to revealed

Found snapshots themselves may be seen as embodying a metaphorical return of the repressed. As previously noted, found snapshots are *unheimlich* not only in their departure from what is 'homely', but also in that they are no longer 'concealed'. Once held in picture frames, family albums, and wallets, snapshots that are lost or discarded end up in the public sphere, in shops and on sidewalks. No longer "kept from sight" or "withheld from others", [92] found snapshots are in full view and available for possession.

In Cabot Philbrick and Lorca Shepperd's 2004 documentary film about collecting found snapshots, *Other people's pictures*, snapshots are treated not as the personal mementos they started out as, but as collectible objects.[93] Filmed at Chelsea Flea Market in New York City, the documentary attempts to explain why people

[89] Astrid van Loo, as quoted in Bennett, op. cit., p. 14.
[90] ibid.
[91] Bennett, op. cit., p. 15.
[92] Sanders, op. cit., as quoted in Freud, op. cit., p. 222-223.
[93] Philbrick & Cabot, op. cit.

collect strangers' photographs, at the same time that it documents how snapshots are handled by collectors and the dealers who sell them. While some dealers carefully organize snapshots into binders or containers by category, others throw them into boxes or dump them out on tabletops. Some dealers keep the albums they acquire together, while others tear them apart, extracting from their pages the snapshots that are most likely to sell, and then discarding the others.

Watching how snapshots are treated in the public sphere leaves one with the impression that they have left their proper place. One dealer even remarks that he feels a sense of guilt when he disassembles albums.[94] Another explains that she has been approached by people shocked to see a family album for sale on her table. They have demanded, "Where's the family? How could you do this?"[95] Indeed, an encounter with these once 'intimate' and 'concealed' images in the public sphere is likely to rouse a "sense of homeliness uprooted"[96] or "a sense of a secret encounter", [97] both of which are identified as uncanny in Royle's book. Such impressions are redoubled when one is faced with the personal image content of found snapshots.

Found snapshots offer glimpses into the private lives of anonymous individuals. In one snapshot, a woman gazes at a baby [Fig. 4]; in another, a group of friends shares a bottle of champagne around a table [Fig. 7]. When snapshots like these are found, the personal becomes impersonal; "intimacy is replaced by voyeuristic speculation".[98] It is not uncommon for collectors to be accused of voyeurism – of seeking pleasure in the representations of other people's private lives. As viewers, we may get the uncomfortable sense that we are seeing and handling photographs we are not meant to.

This is particularly true of found snapshots marked by errors, like tilted horizons, motion blurs, and light leaks. Found snapshots exhibiting such mistakes reveal what was likely not intended by the photographer, much less meant for public exposure. As collector Joel Rotenberg points out, there is no evidence indicating that the original photographers appreciated such images. He explains that he has often come across double exposures pasted into an album without comment. When comments are included, he continues, it is often to simply remark on the general subject matter of the photograph. Comments that point to errors typically say

[94] Larry Baumhor, as quoted in ibid.
[95] Estelle Rosen, as quoted in Philbrick & Cabot, op. cit.
[96] Royle, op. cit., p. 1.
[97] ibid., p. 2.
[98] Geoffrey Batchen, 'From infinity to zero' in *Now is then*, op. cit., p. 125.

something like "Double exposure" or "This one didn't come out" – never “Wow!” or the equivalent.[99]

Presumably unappreciated by their original makers, if not discarded by them, found snapshots marked by such mistakes are now highly visible. They show up for sale in antique stores, displayed on museum walls, and printed in books. They represent a popular collecting category of snapshots in which they are valued precisely because of the errors they display. Thus, found snapshots not only expose the private moments of strangers’ everyday lives, but may also reveal what their original owners regarded with distaste or even discarded. In this way, found snapshots are themselves uncanny, as private or otherwise ‘repressed’ photographs that have been brought to light.

As I have argued in this chapter, the relation between found snapshots and the uncanny is not limited to the appearance of certain motifs in the content of individual images. As a concept defined by the return of the repressed, the uncanny may also be understood in terms of the recontextualization of found snapshots as both images and objects. When snapshots move from the private home to the public sphere, they become *unheimlich*; their revelation transforms them from personal mementos into anonymous curiosities. However, while the subjects of found snapshots are often unknown, they have the capacity to revive the viewer’s memories of his or her own experiences with snapshots and snapshot culture at large. In the following chapter, I will demonstrate how found snapshots also have the potential to recall more personal aspects of one’s past, focusing on the viewing, collecting, and compiling practices of an individual collector.

[99] Rotenberg, op. cit.

3. Refound snapshots

Fig. 3. Page from Drew's 'family' album, featuring three anonymous photographs, ca. 1950s-70s.

3.1 Drew's 'family' album

Drew Naprawa is a snapshot collector featured in the documentary film *Other people's pictures*.[100] The viewer's first encounter with Drew is at New York City's Chelsea Flea Market, where he is shown shuffling through a handful of black-and-white snapshots. Later, Drew is shown seated on a couch in his home, leafing through the pages of a photo album. He explains that when he was a child, he enjoyed looking through personal albums at photographs of himself and his family. When he was a teenager, however, Drew's mother entered a religious cult and his family's photo albums disappeared.

[100] Philbrick & Shepperd, op. cit.

The photo album Drew holds in his hands does not contain personal family photographs, but found snapshots [Fig. 3]. He says that he began "collecting photographs just randomly", later deciding to place them in an album. As he did so, Drew continues, "I realized that I was putting together a photo album of a family – not my own – but it seemed to be feeling like a real family album."[101] From the found snapshots he had "randomly" accumulated, then, Drew had unconsciously assembled a 'family' album.

In the following sections, I will discuss Drew's collection of found snapshots in relation to the uncanny. I will first consider the emotional effects triggered by the strange familiarity of his collection, commenting on both the photographs themselves and their compiled form. I will then interpret Drew's unconscious accumulation and assemblage of familiar photographs into a 'family' album as acting out an uncanny compulsion to repeat.

3.2 The return of the familiar

In chapter 2, I developed an understanding of the uncanny as a return of the repressed – as being that "which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar."[102] I went on to suggest that found snapshots can, therefore, be seen as uncanny on the basis of their potential to seem familiar to the viewer, in spite of their anonymity. I attributed the strange familiarity of found snapshots to the ubiquitous and ordinary nature of the snapshot genre of photography. I will now establish that found snapshots also have the capacity to recall more poignant aspects of one's personal past and experience. In the words of Geoffrey Batchen, "these same, unexciting images are capable of inducing a photographic experience that can be intensely individual, often emotional, and sometimes even painful."[103]

Familiar details in the image content of a found snapshot may rouse the involuntary emotional effect associated with Roland Barthes's notion of the *punctum*. In *Other people's pictures*, Drew points out one photograph that he feels particularly drawn to. The black-and-white snapshot shows a woman from behind, looking down at a baby lying in front of her on a table [Fig. 4]. Drew explains, "The

[101] Drew Naprawa, as quoted in ibid.
[102] Freud, p. 220.
[103] Batchen, 'From infinity to zero' in *Now is then*, op. cit., p. 126.

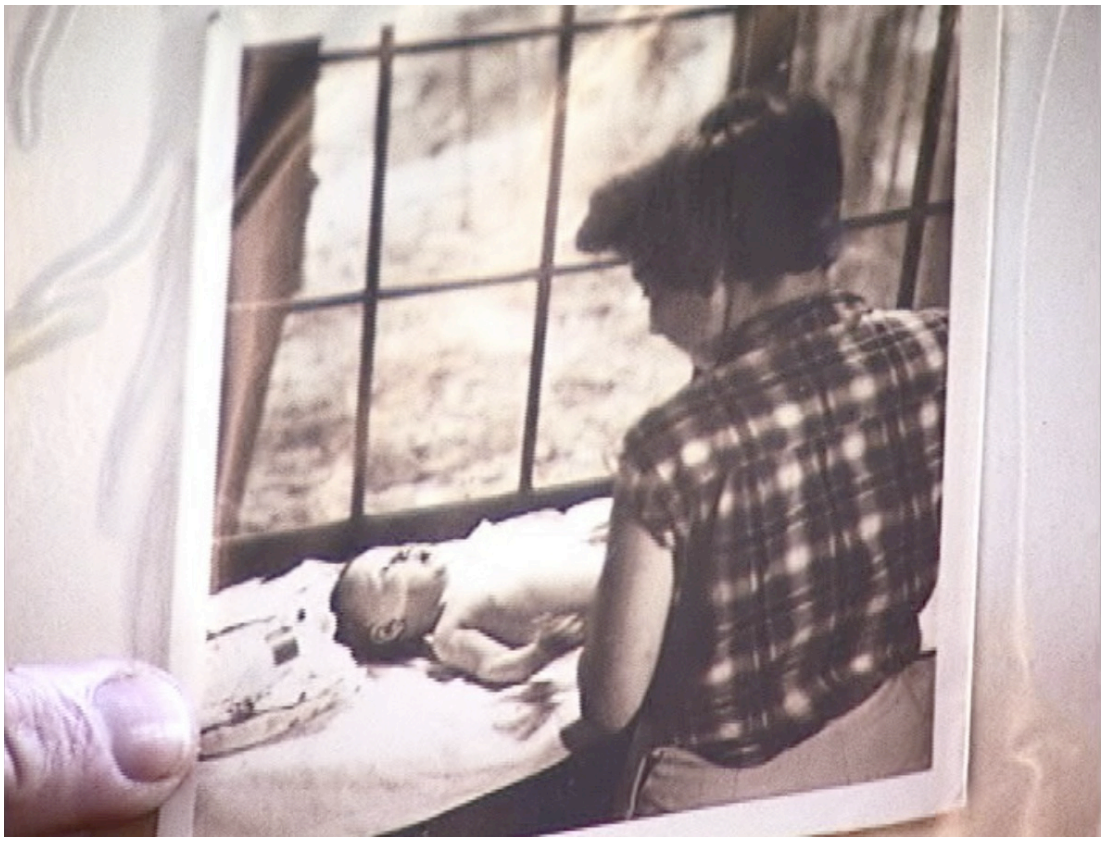

Fig. 4. Page from Drew's 'family' album, featuring an anonymous photograph, ca. 1960.

woman from behind – the way she's dressed, her haircut – looks like my mother did back in the late '50s, early '60s."[104] These visual aspects touch Drew like Barthes's *punctum*, a detail in a photograph that "pricks" the viewer in a personal way,[105] transforming the photograph into something "new […] marked in [the viewer's] eye with a higher value."[106] Indeed, Drew only collects snapshots marked by the *punctum* – photographs he finds "compelling".[107]

When the familiar and unfamiliar meet in a found snapshot, the viewer may experience not only the involuntary emotional response of the *punctum*, but also a sense of the uncanny. Just as found snapshots have the potential to evoke a memory or emotional response, so too can the uncanny be that which "eerily remind[s] us of something".[108] As a whole, Drew's collection of found snapshots is reminiscent of the family albums he has lost, consisting of photographs that recall his own personal history. Drew says he selects snapshots for his collection "not because they're

[104] Naprawa, as quoted in Philbrick & Shepperd, op. cit.
[105] Barthes, op. cit., p. 27.
[106] ibid., p. 42.
[107] Naprawa, as quoted in Philbrick & Shepperd, op. cit.
[108] Royle, op. cit., p. 2.

beautiful, not because they're interesting to anybody else, but for me in particular, they have some resonance that has something to do with my own life and my own childhood."[109] The unknown woman in Drew's collection reminds him of his mother, for instance, appearing as an uncanny double of her. Other snapshots in his collection feature a young boy; in one image, a boy sits in a man's lap and in another, a boy stands with a woman on a beach [Fig. 3]. It is likely that Drew recognizes aspects of himself in these anonymous children, and that is why he selected their photographs for inclusion in his collection.

As previously noted, a sense of the uncanny may arise with the recognition of something familiar in the lost or discarded snapshots of strangers. The familiar aspects of Drew's collection of found snapshots are more personal than those founded in the banality of the snapshot genre. However, the ordinary nature of snapshot photography plays a role in this more intimate sense of the uncanny, too. Because they resemble viewers' own photographs, found snapshots can more easily evoke personal memories than other genres of photography. Their banality thus increases their potential to evoke a sense of the uncanny based on the commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar.

The uncanny can also be related to Drew's assemblage of his collection of found snapshots into a form resembling his own lost family albums. In his reception and handling of found snapshots, Drew is not only recalling, but also repeating aspects of his personal past. The uncanny, too, as Royle observes, is "indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or 'coming back' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat."[110]

3.3 The compulsion to repeat

In his essay on the uncanny, Freud identifies "the repetition of the same thing" as a source of the feeling.[111] According to Freud, the "factor of involuntary repetition […] forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance'".[112] As an example, Freud recounts wandering

[109] Naprawa, as quoted in Philbrick & Shepperd, op. cit.
[110] Royle, op. cit., p. 2.
[111] Freud, op. cit., p. 236.
[112] ibid., p. 237.

through an unfamiliar town in Italy, where he repeatedly found his way back to the same street without intending to. When he arrived at the same place a third time, Freud says he became overwhelmed with an uncanny feeling.[113] He attributes the uncanniness of such recurrences to "the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat'" – a compulsion proceeding from instinct that is "powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle," the drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain.[114] Freud concludes "that whatever reminds us of this inner 'compulsion to repeat' is perceived as uncanny."[115]

In his book, *Compulsive beauty*, Hal Foster develops an understanding of Surrealism in relation to the Freudian uncanny. He argues that the early-twentieth-century cultural movement is uncanny on the basis of its partaking of a return of the repressed and a compulsion to repeat,[116] maintaining the uncanny's significance to Surrealist oeuvres and notions.[117] Among these is the theory of objective chance, a concept involving unforeseen encounters with people or objects that bring aspects of the unconscious mind to light.[118] A form of objective chance Foster discusses in detail is the Surrealist found object.

Foster asserts that the found object of objective chance is not "objective, unique, or found in any simple sense",[119] but "an uncanny reminder of the compulsion to repeat."[120] Freud's understanding of the uncanny experience of the repetition of the same thing as involving not only chance, but also the impression of something fateful, is similar to Surrealist founder André Breton's definition of objective chance as both "fortuitous" and "foreordained".[121] For Foster, this "paradox basic to Surrealism" points to the uncanny compulsion to repeat.[122] As he explains, "each repetition in objective chance seems fortuitous yet foreordained" precisely because there is a "compulsion operative in objective chance" through which "the subject repeats a traumatic experience, whether actual or fantasmatic,"

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[113] ibid.
[114] ibid, p. 238.
[115] ibid.
[116] Foster, op. cit., p. 23.
[117] ibid., p. 21.
[118] Janine Mileaf, *Please touch: Dada and Surrealist objects after the readymade*, Dartmouth College Press, Lebanon, NH, 2010.
[119] Foster, op. cit., p. xix.
[120] ibid., p. 21.
[121] André Breton, *L'Amour fou* [*Mad love*], trans. Mary Ann Caws, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1987, as quoted in ibid., p. 29.
[122] Foster, op. cit., p. 29.

that has been repressed.[123] Foster thus interprets the Surrealist found object as a "lost object regained"[124] – an object not simply discovered by chance, but unconsciously sought through the subject's compulsion to reenact past traumas.

According to this line of reasoning, the found snapshots that started Drew's collection were not collected as "randomly" as he claims,[125] but 'refound' through an uncanny compulsion to repeat. Like the found objects of objective chance, Drew's collection is based on traumas that involve the origin of desire in loss.[126] Driven by an unconscious longing for his own lost family photographs and albums, and a compulsion to reenact their traumatic disappearance, Drew has accumulated found snapshots with personal resonance, and then compiled them into a form resembling a family album. In this way, Drew's findings are refindings – not only of that which has been lost or discarded by others, but also of the snapshots and photo albums he himself has lost.

Ultimately, however, Drew's collection represents "a failed refinding of a lost object".[127] "[N]ot simply a fetish that covers up lack", but "a figure of lack",[128] Drew's collection is like the Surrealist found object – "always a substitute, always a displacement, that drives on its own search."[129] Because the found snapshots in Drew's collection cannot fully reconcile the traumatic loss of his own family photo albums, his unconscious desires remain unfulfilled. The lost objects of his past, "never recovered, [are] forever sought, forever repeated."[130] These compulsive repetitions can also be understood in a more positive light, as Foster understands Surrealist art – that is, as an attempt to work through past traumas.[131]

Like the found objects of Surrealism, found snapshots are uncanny in their partaking of a return of the repressed and a compulsion to repeat. They have the potential to remind the viewer of his or her own personal past, producing an involuntary emotional effect that can be understood in terms of Barthes's notion of the *punctum*, as well as the uncanny. As I have shown, the repressed can return through the recognition of a personal detail in the otherwise unfamiliar image content

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[123] ibid., p. 30.
[124] ibid., p. 29.
[125] Naprawa, as quoted in Philbrick & Shepperd, op. cit.
[126] Foster, op. cit., p. 48.
[127] ibid., p. xix.
[128] ibid., p. 42.
[129] ibid., p. 43.
[130] ibid., p. 42.
[131] ibid., p. 48.

of a snapshot, or in the material form of a group of found snapshots. The collecting and compiling of found snapshots can also reveal the subject's unconscious and unsatisfiable desires, founded in loss, and be interpreted further as acting out an uncanny compulsion to repeat.

In the following chapter, I will consider found snapshots and the uncanny in relation to other forms of loss. Specifically, I will discuss found snapshots in terms of their capacity to act as uncanny reminders of the passing of time and the loss of life. In doing so, I will no longer focus on the practices of an individual collector, but return to a more general consideration of the reception of found snapshots as images, objects, and products of photography.

4. Death redoubled

4.1 Death and the (photographic) uncanny

The connection between the uncanny and photography is well-established in academic literature. Tom Gunning locates "the fundamentally uncanny quality of photography" in the medium's capacity to produce "a specter-like double" of reality.[132] Laura Mulvey's book, *Death 24x a second: stillness and the moving image*, includes a chapter on the uncanny nature of the photographic index,[133] which Mulvey understands as a material "trace of the past in the present"[134] that enables "exchanges across the boundaries between the material and the spiritual, reality and magic, and between life and death." [135] What both Gunning's and Mulvey's texts demonstrate is that intersecting with photography's relation to the uncanny is its relation to death.

As a reminder to the reader, the manifestation of death figures prominently in Freud's text on the uncanny. Freud writes, "Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts."[136] As Freud suggests, the uncanniness of death is not to be conflated with that which is "purely gruesome";[137] it, too, shares the core of all things uncanny: the return of the repressed. According to Freud's logic, the return of the dead is experienced as uncanny on the basis of its seeming to confirm the surmounted primitive belief that the dead can reappear as ghosts in the world of the living. Freud also indicates that the inevitability of death itself is not only an idea that "no human really grasps", but also one that the human unconscious has little use for.[138] As a fact forgotten by most people during the course of their everyday lives, the reality of death is experienced as an uncanny return of the repressed when one is suddenly reminded of it.

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[132] Tom Gunning, 'Phantom images and modern manifestations: spirit photography, magic theater, trick films, and photography's uncanny' in *Fugitive images: from photography to video*, Patrice Petro (ed.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1995, p. 47.
[133] Laura Mulvey, 'The index and the uncanny: life and death in the photograph' in *Death 24x a second: stillness and the moving image*, Reaktion Books, London, 2006, pp. 54-66.
[134] Mulvey, *Death 24x a second*, p. 10.
[135] ibid., p. 65.
[136] Freud, op. cit., p. 241.
[137] ibid.
[138] ibid, p. 242.

In photography, the presence of death is often latent; in the study of photography, however, it is not. Of all the academic literature addressing the relation between death and photography, Roland Barthes's *Camera lucida: reflections on photography* is the most prominent. As photographs, found snapshots can be understood in terms of Barthes's interpretation of photography and its reception, as already demonstrated in chapter 3. In the following sections, I will revisit Barthes's seminal text and explore some of his ideas in relation to found snapshots. As I have done throughout this thesis, I will consider the reception of found snapshots as both images and objects. In doing so, I will show their particular relation to the issues of time and death Barthes discusses and, by extension, to the uncanny.

4.2 Death and photography

In *Camera lucida*, Barthes sets off to define the "fundamental feature" of photography[139] – what it is "in itself".[140] Similar to Gunning and Mulvey, Barthes finds an inherent strangeness in photography's capacity to stop and preserve the real world in an image. He states that "both [the photograph and its referent] are affected by the same amorous or funeral immobility, at the heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb".[141] For Barthes, there is something unsettling about the seeming indistinction between a photograph and its referent; they cling together in a disconcerting way.

It is in photography's indexical relation to reality that Barthes locates the essence, or *noeme*, of photography. As "literally an emanation of the referent",[142] the photograph, for Barthes, "attest[s] that what I see has indeed existed."[143] Within the photograph, reality and the past are superimposed.[144] Photography thus has a particular tense, which Barthes identifies as the *noeme* of the medium: "That-has-been".[145]

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[139] Barthes, op. cit., p. 9.
[140] ibid., p. 3.
[141] ibid., p. 6.
[142] ibid., p. 80.
[143] ibid., p. 82.
[144] ibid., p. 76.
[145] ibid., p. 77.

It is in the certainty of "reality in a past state" that photography becomes bound up with death.[146] Barthes explains that by shifting the reality of the photographic referent's existence to the past, "the photograph suggests that it is already dead."[147] He later elaborates on this position in relation to a photograph of Lewis Payne, made by Alexander Gardner in 1865 as Payne waited in his jail cell to be hanged for the attempted assassination of Secretary of State W. H. Seward. Barthes sees the subject of the photograph not only as he who is already dead, but also as "he who is going to die. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake."[148] Within the photograph, then, there is a collision of past, present, and future, including, for Barthes, the "imperious sign of my future death".[149] For Barthes, every photograph is marked by both the uncanny "return of the dead"[150] and the recognition of one's own death in the future. Barthes associates a second *punctum* with this awareness, different from that of the 'detail' to which I referred in chapter 3. "This new *punctum*," Barthes writes, "is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* ('that-has-been'), its pure representation."[151]

As I suggested previously, the presence of death in photography is latent. This is largely because photography's *noeme*, according to Barthes, is "experienced with indifference" in a world proliferated by photographic images.[152] He writes that modern society is losing its ability "to conceive of *duration*" and, as a result, "the astonishment of 'that-has-been' will also disappear. It has already disappeared."[153] Without the ability to conceive of the passing of time in life or in photography, one is hard-pressed to experience the *punctum*'s "vertigo of time defeated."[154] Death is thus repressed in most photographs, as it is in everyday life. But as Barthes indicates, photography's *noeme* is more likely to resurface in some photographs than in others. In the following section, I will consider how the uncanny reminder of death is redoubled in the reception of found snapshots.

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[146] ibid., p. 82.
[147] ibid., p. 79.
[148] ibid., p. 96.
[149] ibid., p. 97.
[150] ibid., p. 9.
[151] ibid., p. 96.
[152] ibid., p. 77.
[153] ibid., pp. 93-94.
[154] ibid., p. 97.

4.3 Death and found snapshots

Forgotten in art photography and experienced with indifference in the generalized photographic images of modern life,[155] photography's 'that-has-been' is more likely to resurface in the reception of photographs produced by amateurs. According to Barthes, "it is the amateur […] who stands closer to the *noeme* of Photography."[156] It was an amateur, after all, who produced the so-called 'Winter Garden Photograph' of Barthes's deceased mother as a child that roused him from indifference.[157]

One might argue that the uncanny, too, is more likely to be experienced in the reception of amateur snapshots than in the reception of photographs produced by professionals for artistic, commercial, or journalistic purposes. This is because snapshots' uncontrived nature, together with their indexical relation to reality, means they are further removed from "the realm of fiction" in which Freud asserts that "many things are not uncanny which would be so if they happened in real life."[158] Thus, as personal photographs made by amateurs, found snapshots are more likely than other photographic images to awaken within the viewer a sense of the uncanny, as well as of reality in a past state.

As an example, consider the found photograph of a young man wearing a suit [Fig. 5]. The photograph is identifiable as an amateur snapshot made for personal reasons; the subject was shot outdoors in natural light, as opposed to in a studio, his image now appearing on a flimsy bordered print, accompanied by the handwritten words "My Lover". The photograph reproduces the clichés of the snapshot genre: the subject is in focus at center frame, where he stands tall and smiling. Like most of the photographs to which Barthes refers in *Camera lucida*, the snapshot is of a person – more specifically, an anonymous person.

The viewer's awareness of 'that-has-been' is stronger when one looks at photographs of strangers like this one. In his essay on artist Tacita Dean's *Floh*, a monograph of found photographs, Mark Godfrey asserts that the effect of Barthes's *noeme* is "redoubled" in "anonymous portraits anonymously taken".[159] He writes:

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[155] ibid., p. 117.
[156] ibid., p. 99.
[157] ibid., p. 77.
[158] Freud, op. cit., p. 250.
[159] Mark Godfrey, 'Photography found and lost: on Tacita Dean's *Floh*', *October*, vol. 114, Fall 2005, p. 103.

Fig. 5. Anonymous photograph, ca. 1922.

> If any photograph reveals to its viewer his temporal distance from the moment of exposure, and his separation from the subject of the photograph, then it does so much more so when the image is of a complete stranger, for the viewer is distanced from the person in the image to start with.[160]

As amateur photographs of unknown subjects, found snapshots bring to the fore the photograph's testament of a past reality, and with it, the uncanny realization of "*that* is dead and *that* is going to die."[161]

When the viewer's attention is drawn to the passing of time, so too is it drawn to the reality of death. In a photograph like that of the young man, the viewer experiences the man as having really existed "*in flesh and blood*"[162] – as having been alive in front of the lens at some point in the past. The viewer then also acknowledges that the man is going to die at some point in the future, relative to the time of the photograph, and that he may already be dead. Of his own collection of found photographs, collector Frederic Bonn remarks, "[A]s I only collect old ones,

[160] ibid.
[161] Barthes, op. cit., p. 96.
[162] ibid, p. 79.

there's every possibility that the subjects are dead, which is strange."[163] For Bonn, the recognition of death in the photographs in his collection is influenced by their age. The same is true for Barthes in *Camera lucida*.

According to Barthes, the effect of the *punctum* of time and death is stronger in old photographs. He writes, "[The *punctum* is] more or less blurred beneath the abundance and disparity of contemporary photographs, [but] vividly legible in historical photographs."[164] Not only do collectors of found snapshots typically prefer old snapshots, as noted in chapter 1, but found snapshots typically *are* old, meaning they are more likely to embody the *punctum*'s uncanny return.

The age of a found snapshot is often apparent in both its image content and material form. The young man in the snapshot under consideration, for example, wears a shirt and suit in a style from the 1920s. The print itself is sepia-toned, bordered, and marked by hand with what is presumably a date: "4/22". While "4/22" could point to the twenty-second of April, it is more likely, given the style of the subject's clothing, that it indicates that the photograph was produced in April of 1922.

In viewing the found snapshot, one might use the date to determine whether the subject is still alive, as Barthes does in *Camera lucida*.[165] If the snapshot was taken in 1922, then ninety years have passed since the young man stood in front of the camera. What this suggests is that he who appears very much alive in the image is now surely dead. The snapshot's age, then, not only draws attention to the passing of time, but also confirms "*that* is dead".[166] For Barthes, the date of a photograph "makes me lift my head, allows me to compute life, death, the inexorable extinction of the generations".[167] The date of the found snapshot thus draws attention to the ultimate extinction of the viewer's own generation – that time in the future when the viewer, too, will be no more.

The *punctum* of time and death is reinforced through the physical effects of time and handling on the photograph itself. Traces of age and wear are common to snapshots like that of the young man and the Winter Garden Photograph. As snapshot collector Joel Rotenberg notes, "Snapshots have 'suffered' more than most

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[163] Frederic Bonn, as quoted in Bennett, op. cit., p. 14.
[164] Barthes, op. cit., p. 96.
[165] Barthes, op. cit., p. 84.
[166] ibid., p. 96.
[167] ibid., p. 84.

photos, because they tend to be undervalued and neglected."[168] Like the Winter Garden Photograph, the corners of the found snapshot of the man are blunted and the sepia print is faded.[169] The top portion of the photograph is torn. The marks photographs gather over time emphasize that time that has passed. As Godfrey explains, "Photographs might initially show what 'has been' […] but in their eventual physicality they bear witness to an expanded temporality – not just the instant of exposure, but the time of printing, storing, and gathering dust".[170] Thus, in old photographs like found snapshots, the viewer sees not only 'that-has-been', but also the expanse of time and time's ultimate defeat.[171]

This effect is further intensified by the context of a found snapshot being a once-personal object that has been lost or discarded. As remarked in one article, "[The found photograph's] loss and reappearance in a stranger's collection are reminders of life's fragility."[172] Similarly, snapshot collector and director of *Other people's pictures*, Lorca Shepperd, comments in a radio interview that looking at found snapshots "makes you think of your own mortality".[173] Recognizing that we all appear in photographs that will one day be lost and forgotten, Shepperd explains that finding other people's snapshots causes one to think, "Someday I'm not gonna be here, and what's gonna happen to my photographs?"[174] In these ways, recognizing found snapshots as discarded objects, no different from one's own personal photographs, leads to an uncanny reminder of that which one has tried to forget: the inevitability of death.

Like other photographs, found snapshots are uncanny in that they remind the viewer of his or her own mortality at the same time that they allow for "the return of the dead" – what Barthes calls "that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph."[175] As in other instances of the uncanny, its effect varies in the reception of found snapshots. While Bonn perceives it as simply "strange" that the people in the photographs he collects may now be dead, found snapshot collector Leonie Branston recalls a night on which she felt so bothered by the presence of dead

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[168] Rotenberg, op. cit.
[169] Barthes, op. cit., p. 67.
[170] Godfrey, op. cit., p. 111.
[171] Barthes, op. cit., p. 96.
[172] Poynor, op. cit., p. 34.
[173] Lorca Shepperd, in Andrea Seabrook, 'Other people's pictures', *NPR: national public radio*, digital audio file of radio interview with Cabot Philbrick & Shepperd, NPR, 20 June 2004, downloaded 27 February 2012, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1964382>.
[174] ibid.
[175] Barthes, op. cit., p. 9.

people's photographs in her home that she no longer wanted them. She explains that owning such photographs feels "like having a family of ghosts living in your bedroom with you, and sometimes that's not nice."[176] Leonie's response to the uncanny quality of found snapshots is exemplary of the feelings of "dread and horror" that Freud associates with the uncanny in his essay.[177]

As I have argued, found snapshots have a unique capacity to bring photography's uncanny aspects to the viewer's attention. The emergence of photography's *noeme* in found snapshots is aided not only by the fact of found snapshots being amateur photographs of unknown subjects, but also by their age and materiality. With the return of the forgotten *noeme* of photography is the return of photography's relation to death – that of the photographed subject and of the viewer – and, therefore, the uncanny return of the repressed.

[176] Leonie Branston, as quoted in Philbrick & Shepperd, op. cit.
[177] Freud, op. cit., p. 219.

Conclusion

Review

With this thesis, I set off to investigate found snapshots and their reception, using Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny as a unifying theme and means of guiding my work. I began in chapter 1 by establishing for the reader the context of found snapshot collecting, going on in chapter 2 to develop an understanding of the uncanny based on Freud's essay on the subject. While I adopted Freud's definition of the uncanny as a return of the repressed, I departed from his psychoanalytic understanding of repression as a strictly psychological operation that necessarily results in anxiety. I emphasized that the uncanny is a fully subjective experience, not defined by 'negative' sense impressions, but by a literal or metaphorical return of the repressed.

In the latter half of chapter 2, I began to work toward establishing a connection between the uncanny and found snapshots. I started by interpreting the image content of an individual snapshot as uncanny on the basis of the appearance of motifs identified with the concept in Freud's essay. Deeming this approach inadequate to my investigation, however, I went on to consider the uncanny in relation to the recontextualization of found snapshots. No longer 'familiar' and 'concealed', but 'unfamiliar' and 'revealed', found snapshots, I argued, become *unheimlich* when they move from the private home to the public sphere. I went on to note found snapshots' potential to seem strangely familiar to viewers, largely as a result of the ubiquitous and ordinary nature of snapshot photography, and I pointed to the uncanniness of finding strangers' snapshots in the public sphere. I also asserted that found snapshots, as once private or otherwise 'repressed' photographs brought to light, are representative of a metaphorical return of the repressed.

In chapter 3, I returned to the idea that found snapshots are uncanny in their capacity to return memories and experiences to the mind of the viewer, in spite of their anonymity. Focusing on the 'family' album assembled out of found snapshots by Drew Naprawa, I explained how familiar details in a snapshot can rouse a more personal sense of the uncanny, and how such details can also be understood in terms of Roland Barthes's notion of the *punctum*. I then went on to offer a reading of

Drew's collection as a "failed refinding of a lost object."[178] In doing so, I showed how a collector's approach to found snapshots can be interpreted as being driven by an uncanny compulsion to repeat, through which his or her unconscious desires are revealed in a return of the repressed.

Finally, in chapter 4, I discussed found snapshots in terms of the photographic medium's uncanny association with death, drawing from Barthes's exploration of photography and its reception in *Camera lucida*. Specifically, I considered photography's *noeme* and the *punctum* of time and death in relation to visual and material aspects of found snapshots, including their indexical nature, amateur production, anonymity, age, physical form, and context. In doing so, I established that found snapshots have a unique capacity to bring forth photography's particular temporality and connection to death in an uncanny return of the repressed.

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated how found snapshots can be understood in terms of the uncanny as a return of the repressed. In the end, it seems that part of what makes these photographs so fascinating to collectors is the opportunity they present not only to refind photographs that have been lost or discarded by others, but also to refind aspects of oneself.

Further considerations

With this thesis, I aimed to contribute a new perspective on found snapshots to the body of knowledge about anonymous forms of non-art photography. In contrast to most current research, I focused on individuals' reception of found snapshots using a multidisciplinary approach that drew from a variety of academic and non-academic sources. In doing so, I hope to have demonstrated that found snapshots are open to research.

Indeed, much remains to be explored. Given the limited scope of this thesis, it has not been possible for me to consider every way in which found snapshots and their reception can be interpreted or understood in terms of the uncanny, specifically. If one were to pursue this particular approach further, one might consider what cultural, social, and historical repressions are brought to light in the reception of found snapshots. One might then assess the extent to which the recent interest in

[178] Foster, op. cit., p. xix.

found snapshots can be seen as a response to the traumas and losses revealed in their reception.

A more specific angle would be to consider found snapshots through the lens of the digital age, in which photographs can be created, altered, and deleted with the push of a button. No longer fragile and personal mementos preserved in albums and frames, but digital images displayed on the Internet for all to see, snapshots today are more likely to be viewed on a screen than looked at and held in one's hands. The digitalization of culture, and the losses it entails, may explain collectors' preference for old snapshots and their desire to possess them in their material form. While some scholars have already commented on the allure of found snapshots in relation to the digital,[179] their comments are brief and in need of elaboration. Now that snapshots have been refound as a subject of interest, academics should work to secure their lasting return from obscurity.

[179] See Godfrey, op. cit., pp. 113-114, and Heiferman, 'Now is then' in *Now is then*, op. cit., p. 42. See also Nancy Martha West, 'Telling time: found photographs and the stories they inspire' in *Now is then*, op. cit., pp. 87-88.

Additional images

Fig 6. Anonymous photograph, 1965.

Fig. 7. Anonymous photograph, ca. 1950s.

Fig. 8. Anonymous photograph, 1934.

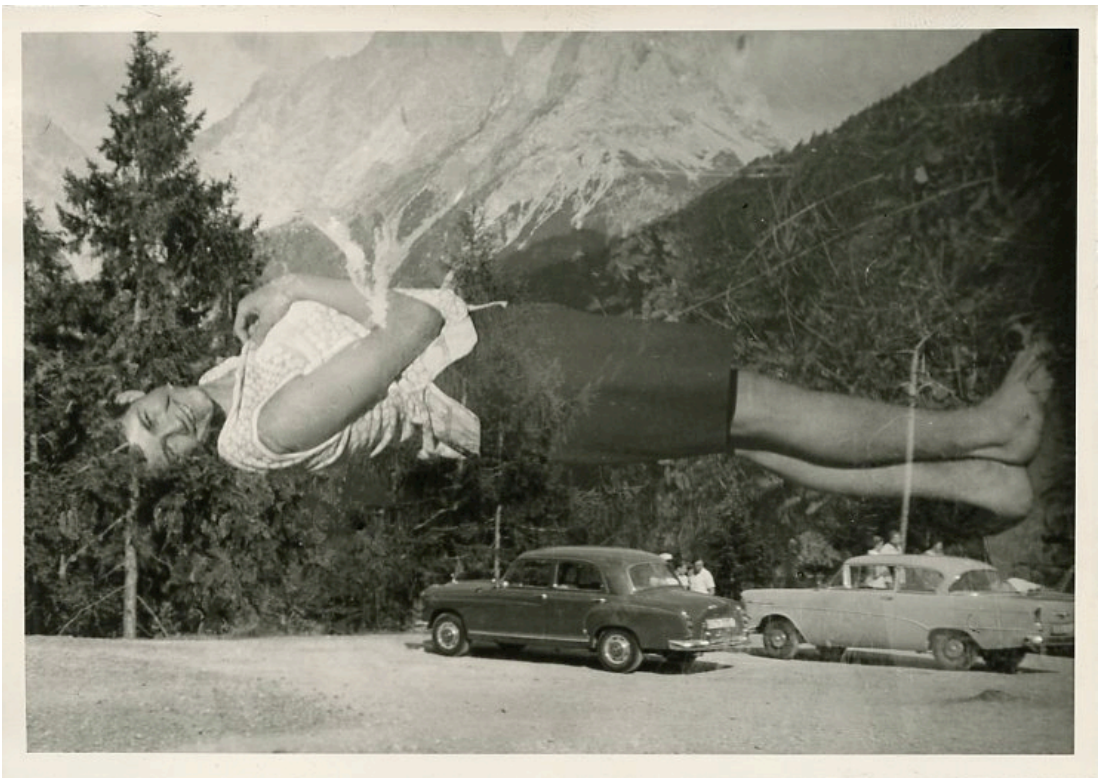

Fig. 9. Anonymous photograph, ca. 1950s.

Fig. 10. Anonymous photograph, ca. 1940.

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