Some playlists are a genre mix, some offer a mood mix, and others, such as the one curated here, are a decade mix.

Historically, photography seemed to be part of the “ground” of communication research understood to be socially, culturally, and politically significant and useful as a tool to augment research, but as a “figure,” a central object of study, the prevue of art historical analysis or journalistic attention to the documentary or evidentiary capacities. This makes sense because photographs lack a syntax or grammar; there is not “a set of general rules by which one patch of light related to another one” (Cmiel & Peters, 2020, p. 173). What, exactly, do photographs communicate? Photographs, despite being ubiquitous, are persistently ambiguous and positioned as unreliable narrators; therefore, their place within the “discography of communication” has historically been a bit suspect. Relatedly, as media history and theory grew and developed as a field, Michelle Henning (2018) and Simone Natale (2018) observe that the history of photography was rarely included. Henning (2018) suggests that “even those writers who see the history of photography as a crucial part of the history of contemporary networked or mass media often accept the view that it was initially divorced from other media developments” (p. 128).

And while this might have been the case, the tune has changed, and we can look to the Canadian Journal of Communication (CJC) for one indication of when. Photography has a noticeable presence in the CJC archive beginning roughly around 2003. This playlist is a “decade mix” highlighting some of the work between 2003–2013. Though the articles may be published in this time frame, their case studies and examples span from 1895 to the early twenty first century. In terms of approach, many of the larger themes in thinking about photography from decades past are present: formal compositional analysis; sociocultural analysis, including a mixture of alarm, dread, and suspicion; and questions about what “the digital” means for photography.

Decade mixes work because there is often that elusive “something” that unites a genre across a decade. The eighties, for example, have a sound. Given this
broad thematic span, and the 100-plus years of material our authors have at their disposal, it might not seem to have “a sound.” You might have to listen a bit closer, but it is there. How camera technologies work and the resulting implications of that particular kind of technology can be heard across this mix: X-rays and the power and pull of the invisible (Natale, 2011); pinhole photography’s soft focus and resulting “otherworldly aesthetic” (Fatona, 2006, p. 230); the skin-tone bias across both analogue and digital cameras (Roth, 2009); the potential in the ubiquitous production of aerial and satellite photographs (Parks, 2013); and the devastation of technical detail according to Paul Virilio (McAllister, 2008). While perhaps not as defining as the literal sounds from the eighties, in part because of the many, many machines and applications that fall under the umbrella of “camera technology,” the sound gets a little bit stronger when we take a look at the bigger picture.

This decade is significant in the CJC archive as a moment when work on photography begins to amass and photography starts to move from “ground” to “figure.” This is also evident in the number of books published about photography that are reviewed in the CJC: Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity by Celia Lury (published in 1997, reviewed Simon, 1999); Regarding the Pain of Others by Susan Sontag (published in 2003, reviewed Berterlsen, 2004); Faking Death: Art Photography and the Canadian Imagination by Penny Cousineau-Levine (published 2003, reviewed Finn, 2004); Image Ethics in the Digital Age edited by Larry Gross, John Stuart Katz, and Jay Ruby (published 2003, reviewed Rusted, 2007); Locating Memory: Photographic Acts edited by Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (published 2006, reviewed Tegelberg, 2008); and Dead Matter: The Meaning of Iconic Corpses by Margaret Schwartz (about post-mortem photography) (published 2015, reviewed Moir, 2017).

This playlist highlights a decade that, despite its quieter “sound,” has a lot to say. A playlist can change the tone of a moment, change the mood of a room, get the party started. You may have noticed that nowhere here, and not necessarily in these articles either, have the boundaries been set on what photography is. Mishka Henner’s (2015) Photography Is offers more than 3,000 phrases that define what photography is (could be?), and this mix demonstrates that photography could be defined as a “both/and” medium, which makes it hard to fit nicely into categorical definitions. It is both the past and the present, both a process of life (Zylinska, 2015) and a form of death (Barthes, 1981), both evidentiary fact and fiction. This body of work, selected because of their connections to photography, which has historically been conceptualized in terms of indexicality—or as Roland Barthes (1981) famously put it, “in Photography I can never deny that the thing has been there” (p. 76)—also coalesces around ideas of absence or exclusion. The absence of bodies in Melina Mollineaux’s photographs and the absence of Black Canadians in Canadian history (Fatona, 2006); the historical absence of paying
attention to certain technologies in media history and theory (Natale, 2011); Virilio’s fear of an absence of imagination if we let “vision machines” take hold (McAllister, 2008); the absence of people of colour in photographic colour calibration cards leading to certain bodies being excluded from literally showing up on film (Roth, 2009); the absence of phenomenology in infrastructure studies (Parks, 2013); and the absence of a global environmental movement, which spurs Stewart Brand’s campaign for a whole Earth photograph (Russill). This mix suggests that while it is productive to consider what photography could be, it is also important to consider what inclusions and exclusions, what presence and absence, studying photography draws into focus.

**Playlist**

**Article 1**


In Andrea Fatona’s analysis of Canadian artist Melina Mollineaux’s exhibition Cadboro Bay: Index to an Incomplete History, the significance of the type of camera used is pulled into focus, and the technical process required to make these photographs becomes inextricably intertwined with how Fatona reads the exhibition. Mollineaux’s exhibition features pinhole photographs taken at Cadboro Bay on Vancouver Island, where Black people held Emancipation Day picnics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The photographs are interspersed with poetic text, Mollineaux’s “imaginings of ‘mundane moments’ or ‘everyday experience’ of individuals at an Emancipation Day picnic” (p. 230).

While the poetic texts provide a space in which the subject speaks, Mollineaux’s photographs trace the physical spaces where these gatherings would take place, without a referent, observing presence through absence. As commentary on the invisibility of Black Canadians in historical narratives, and the absence of historical visual evidence of Black people gathering at Cadboro Bay, her work “stands in for
and simulates what she imagines as existing in that space and place” (p. 236).

Pinhole cameras capture light onto light-sensitive materials without the use of a refractory lens, which is common in most cameras. As a result, pinhole photographs do not depict split second motion, as the image takes longer to render in real time, but rather capture a place experienced over a period of time. Consequently, while Mollineaux’s work highlights absence and invisibility, the process of photographing with a pinhole camera requires her sustained physical presence.

Article 2


Focused on Paul Virilio’s use of mimetic techniques to create graphic imagery in his wider catalogue, Kirsten Emiko McAllister’s analysis highlights a growing social and cultural attitude: a general suspicion of and panic surrounding the “destructive forces of vision machines” (p. 569) that have structured a significant portion of philosophical and cultural writing about photography. Much of Virilio’s critique of vision machines stem from his phenomenological approach in which “sight … is the sense that forms the foundation of our capacity to perceive and thus know … the world” (p. 569). Relying on vision machines has severe consequences for the physiological and cognitive processes required for continued sight in a literal sense, as well as in a more figurative sense, for our ability to recall experiences. A consequence of relying on vision machines for memory, then, is a lack of imagination. Vision machines, and cameras in particular, record in detail, and for art and imagination to thrive, “imprecision and incompleteness to suggest possibilities beyond what is seen” (p. 572) is required. Vision machines turn humans into passive recipients that receive the images that pass before us, instead of active participants in imagining, creating, and perceiving the world around us. Virilio is not alone in his fears of the consequences of an image-rich society, but, as McAllister points out, the way he makes these criticisms, his reliance on mimesis, indicates he may not be as free from the “destructive forces of modern technology” (p. 577) as his critiques might suggest. However, in practice, “vision machines” are not antithetical to imagination. In conversation with Canadian poet

Note: Roy Miki, Arriving in St. Agathe Manitoba
and activist Roy Miki, McAllister (2012) discusses the differences in official and unofficial photographs of Japanese internment camps in Canada. Over the course of their conversation, they discuss a specific photograph from Miki’s childhood, pictured here and included in Miki’s (1995) collection *Random Access File*, which he notes “was very present in my imagination while I grew up” (McAllister, 2012, p. 224), challenging the dichotomy Virilio suggests between vision machines or imagination.

**Article 3**


Drawing on the experience of both analogue and digital photographers, Lorna Roth provides a compelling history of the skin-tone biases within “the actual apparatuses of visual reproduction” (p. 115), specifically film stock emulsions and digital camera design. Roth uses the emblematic “Shirley card,” as a way into a history of the technical and social dimensions of race and photography. The Shirley card was a reference card used by lab technicians and photographers to calibrate colours when developing print photographs. Using white skin tone as the default standard led to issues printing photographs of anyone with darker skin tones, and it was not until the mid-nineties that Kodak created a multiracial “Shirley card.” Roth notes that this did not have to be the case: early film emulsion could have been designed to be more sensitive to the continuum of skin tones, if there had been “recognition of the need for an extended dynamic range” (p. 118). Though not all digital cameras have been designed with this in mind, Roth notes a gradual shift in attention to whether cameras can accurately capture a range of skin tones within a single frame and how colour cards are constructed. Contemporary issue with facial recognition technologies adequately identifying white faces and routinely misidentifying people of colour (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018) suggests this bias is being reproduced, yet again.
Article 4


Simone Natale takes us back to one of the first medical applications of imaging technology by tracing the relations between early histories of wireless and X-ray technology in the late nineteenth century. Readers may be initially drawn in by the connection between the occult and these two technologies, but Natale also positions X-ray technology within the longer history of media (not just to be examined as part of the history of medicine) and articulates radiographic printing as X-ray photography. Doing so connects a historical photographic process that is both technical, banal, and medical to a larger history of media and communication technology, positioning photography beyond the more familiar artistic, cultural, and administrative applications. This historical account provides a treasure trove of details: the name X-ray was supposed to be a placeholder but accidentally caught on; one of the most reproduced photographic images of the end of the nineteenth century was the first X-ray, of X-ray inventor Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen’s wife’s hand; the public craze around X-ray exceeded the reaction to the invention of the cinema. These details reposition a now banal and specialized use of photography, serving as a reminder of the ways “new media” and its novelty “play[s] a relevant role in charting desires and public concerns towards media technologies” (p. 272).

Article 5


Lisa Parks develops the concept of “signal territories” as a way to study U.S. broadcast infrastructure through three different modes of “Earth observation”: historical network maps, Google Earth interfaces, and fieldwork. All three modes of obser-
vation are visual: Google Earth uses, among other data layers, aerial photography, and Parks’ fieldwork is in part documented through photographs of sites visited. While not about photography, Parks’ article demonstrates how photography is taken up as an evidentiary form in academic research to both document, track, supplement, and support. Arguing that broadcasting cannot “be reduced to the sites of the screen, the studio, or the home, but rather exist as an enduring potential in vertical space” (p. 287) Parks uses a variety of images to sustain this argument, as she both “zooms in” to the individual “node” of a single physical installation and “zooms out” to show the bird’s eye view of Google Earth’s aerial view. The photographs of material sites provide a level of detail that is only accessible if one is physically present, offering at once both a technical and phenomenological approach.

**Bonus track**


This is only a “bonus” track in so far as it is an editorial, a genre that does not always, nor are they required to, contain both the depth of field and specificity we find here. Alongside the issue introduction, in which all manner of Earth-observing media appear, from “globes, radar, sonar, satellites, atomic clocks, GPS, drones, and ultraviolet light detection as well as radio, photography, cartography, and computers” (p. 281), Chris Russill highlights Stewart Brand’s preoccupation with a whole Earth *photograph*. And it is, *photograph*. Brand’s focus on photography is noteworthy as the technicality of images from space are not tra-
ditional photographs as they are “images ... electronically transmitted and pro-

cessed” (p. 280). This is somewhat curious, as analogue photography—the primary mode available on Earth at the time—missed the key element in understanding Earth observation: the worldwide web of electronic signals that covered the planet. While the point here is not so much that Brand got it wrong, both *Earthrise* and *Blue Marble* suggest he might have been on to something, for our purposes the insistence on photography as his preferred Earth-observing media is, perhaps, telling. What does *photograph* signify that *image* does not?

**Photographs**


Bethany Berard is a PhD candidate and Instructor in Communication & Media Studies at Carleton University. Email: bethany.berard@carleton.ca

**References**


