



**Looking for a “Now-Time” in Family Film Footage:
Appropriating and Activating Archival Images in the Present**

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Abstract:	<p>This article presents an ongoing project, Mneme-Automaton/Memory-Machine, which involves collaborative interventions with an existing body of amateur family film footage and written texts. As an integral part of engaging with this material, we identify our different relationships to it: one author as a direct descendant of its producers, the other with no personal connection to the collection. Although both of us are remote in time and space from the original contexts of its production, our intention is to identify a Benjaminian “now-time” for the material to activate it in the present and render it visible and legible in new ways. In this article, we describe and appropriate selections of the film footage, thereby transforming it into an archive that evokes subjective and affective sensations and experiences that extend beyond the “historical index” of the source material.</p>

Looking for a “Now-Time” in Family Film Footage: Appropriating and Activating Archival Images in the Present

Alyssa Grossman and Arine Kirstein Høgel

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Introduction

In this article, we describe our personal encounters and collaborative interventions with an existing collection of amateur family films. Our goal is to identify a Benjaminian “now-time” for the material to activate it in the present and render it visible and legible in new ways. According to Benjamin, historical time is not simply something measured by clocks. Instead, he argues that each moment is filled with simultaneous temporal moments, a conception of the present as “now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (Löwy 2005, 101). Through multisensory writing and haptic criticism, we explore how our own affective and sensory responses to these images can be used as a means of engaging critically with broader issues of remembrance work and archival transformation.

The films we are working with were shot in the 1920s and 1930s. They comprise nearly four hours of 16mm footage of the everyday lives of Alyssa Grossman’s ancestors, a family of Eastern-European Jewish immigrants who settled in Brooklyn, New York, at the turn of the twentieth century. We additionally have access to half a dozen typewritten newsletters from that same period, produced by the Grossman family. Over time, a handful of family members have sporadically and unsystematically reproduced these images and texts, and converted them to newer analogue and digital formats. Currently there is no single, fixed location for this collection; rather it is scattered throughout various individuals’ homes, shoe boxes, inboxes, and hard drives.

Much existing anthropological research on amateur or domestic archives tends to focus either upon how such documents are constructed and circulated, or how they might

perform social, cultural, psychological, and political discourses of memory. They analyze either how biographical images can be viewed as elements of social history (Peixoto 2008), or the complex and conflicted meanings inherent in family photographs (Poister 2001), their abilities to mediate between public and private memory (Hirsch 1997; Kuhn 2007), or the inevitable tensions between truth and fiction in any document of personal history (Citron 1999). While we are concerned with such issues, including the specific life histories and socio-cultural narratives that can be gleaned from this collection, our affective and embodied relationships with the material align our own work with a different theoretical agenda.

Using personal and anthropological approaches, we have begun sifting through the socio-historical and psycho-biographical content of this material, in an effort to describe and appropriate it through visual and textual means. Our collaborative process involves responding to this footage from very different perspectives: Alyssa Grossman, an anthropologist and filmmaker, is a direct descendent of its producers; while Arine Høgel, also an anthropologist and filmmaker, has no immediate or personal connection to its history. For several years, Alyssa had been looking for ways to approach this material in a way that would engage with its roles and meanings beyond those of a merely historical or personal family document. This task proved complex, since her relation to the footage was simultaneously close and distant: she recognized many of the places depicted in the films, and knew the names of some of the people in them, though many had died before she was born. Alyssa invited Arine, as a detached outsider, to participate in looking at these images with different eyes, in an attempt to extract other affective and aesthetic layers from the footage. Our emerging dialogues about this material have served as foundations for plans to reshape and re-edit it into a new film that reflects on these sensorial traces, as well as its own relationship to both time and memory.

Through this process, we have been adding our own, newer archival layers to this material, in an attempt to evoke subjective and affective sensations and experiences extending beyond the mere “historical index” of the source material. We adopt here visual and cultural studies scholar Laura U. Marks’ definition of an archive, which can exist in a range of everyday and institutional spaces, and includes traces of the past from both found and appropriated images (2015, 171). On the one hand, this archive-in-the-making has emerged through our ongoing categorization of the footage according to diverse genealogies, topographies, shooting styles, and recurring motifs. On the other hand, in our handling of this

material we have paid attention to its fragmentary, lacunary qualities, acknowledging the impossibility of ever being able to fully grasp, describe, or contain it.

The temporal and socio-historical distance that inevitably arises when dealing with such traces of the past raises questions about how to interpret the “almost untransmittable character of the archive.... [in that] there is no pure sense to it” (Didi-Huberman 2012, 98). As Marks has noted, documented images and representations of history “come into the world and retreat back into experience in a ceaseless flow of unfolding and enfolding” (2015, 770). Didi-Huberman also suggests that the archival image must be “unfolded” in every aspect of its phenomenology. As researchers and as visual anthropologists, we have approached these archival corners and surfaces both conceptually and materially, using experimental (and potentially transgressive) forms of writing and editing to generate new forms of encounter with them in the present, thus provoking possibilities for further interpretations and acts of remembrance to occur.

Our research is guided by the understanding that an archive is not just a repository of items from the past, a static site for storing dormant memories. Rather, it is a dynamic space where images, texts, objects, people, and ideas interact and evolve, continuously articulating alternative relationships and meanings. As film studies scholar Dagmar Brunow argues, the memories that emerge in relation to the archive are invariably reworked and remediated, as they surface and circulate at distinct historical moments, through different forms of media (2017, 98). In our project we aim to treat these media in ways that will draw out the material’s shifting, unsettled, volatile meanings and energies. We endeavor not only to interpret, but also to “perform” memory (see Kuhn 2010). Engaging in collaborative interventions that seek to “incorporate, absorb, critique, and refashion” elements of this archive (Erlil and Rigney 2009, 5), we employ aesthetic strategies that deliberately highlight the material’s dialectical, dynamic tensions between past and present.

Between the Frames

The footage with which we are working was filmed with a Cine-Kodak, the first amateur home movie camera launched in 1923. A film studies scholar might make a case for how an immigrant family’s systematic use of such early film technology could be interpreted as a “conscious and purposeful staging of memory” (Kuhn 2007, 284) to visualize and record their aspirations and community-building efforts. A media studies approach might examine

how changes in technology can affect the historical and cultural dynamics of home movie practices over time (Van Der Heijden 2017). A more traditional anthropologist might focus on such footage as a visual record of how a particular group of people decide to frame themselves through their chosen medium (Davison and Mahashe 2014). Such approaches, however, in adhering to realist conventions and grounding the material in a fixed space and time, would not account for the complex tangle of emotions, sensations, and memories that arise when we watch this specific collection of images and texts. What invariably hits both of us when looking at the images is a sense of something invisible, something that exists between the frames, something that cannot be identified in any single shot. We propose here to approach these images from a different angle—to treat them as more than just documents from the past. We regard these photographic undertaking as a practice that generated certain memories “back then,” but that also releases of new sets of personal, idiosyncratic recollections and imaginings in the “now.”

We follow a Benjaminian critique of historical method, abandoning a linear, progressive concept of history for a materialist one. As Benjamin writes in *The Arcades Project*, “History is not simply a science but also and not least a form of remembrance” (1999, 471). He conceives of the past as a dialectical clash of images from the past colliding with the present, and it is only through the lens of this immediate concept of the present, the “now-time,” that we can fully grasp these discontinuities of history. Our own intentions are not to try and reconstruct the Grossman genealogy, or put together an accurate chronology of family events. Instead, we seek to explore temporal constellations with a redeeming actuality, inspired by the idea of a “now-time” as more than a mere link between past and future (Mills 2014; Bullock et. al 2006).

Thus we must consider how our readings are always acts of *constructing* the past, mental constellations that emerge “when the conditions of the present render them visible” (Herzog 2016, 221). As American playwright Amy Herzog writes, films themselves are constellations of objects, images, sounds, spaces, locations, and temporalities; any work with the film object’s “multiple ‘presents’” must involve “flexible and adaptive methodologies, methodologies that can engage with specificities, with matter, in dialogue with the ephemeral, the durational, the transitory” (2016, 232). Our own appropriations of the past through writing (in this article) and through editing and materially intervening with the

Grossman family footage (in development, not directly analysed here)¹ are motivated by a present-day impulse to create new affective spaces of memorial and archival encounter.

Two contemporary theoretical perspectives have been crucial to this task. According to French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman (2012), the documented image exceeds what it literally depicts, as it also contains nonverbal elements that yield more than strictly semantic or documentary information. The researcher must consider how photographic objects are always products of a psycho-dynamic moment, and how they carry a certain phenomenology in their entire appearance. Didi-Huberman thereby proposes an examination of the ways in which images elude depictions of figurative knowledge. As he notes:

We must *tighten our point of view* of the images and omit nothing of the “imaging” substance, even going so far as to question the *formal* function of a zone in which “there’s nothing to see,” as we wrongly say when facing something that seems empty of informative value— a dark area at the edge of a picture, for example. Symmetrically, we must *widen our point of view* to restore to the images the *anthropological* element that makes them work (emphasis in the original, 2012, 41).

In a similar vein, Marks’ writing on haptic criticism accentuates the non-semantic elements of photographic practice by promoting a way of looking that evokes an embodied sense memory. In haptic criticism, dealing with archival images is a corporeal act that stimulates and yields writing colored by the critic’s own sensory and private memories. Haptic criticism seeks to bring forth “a connective tissue among entities separate(d) in time and place” (Marks 2002, xv), by incorporating personal responses to the material and by working with the meanings arising from the lapse of time between the present and the original moment of the material’s production. It also seeks to foreground the textures and non-semantic dimensions of the archival object. By employing haptic criticism as a method

¹ Early stages of this project, under the working title “Mneme-Automaton/Memory-Machine,” have been presented in conference papers at the *Art, Materiality and Representation* Conference, British Museum/SOAS, London (June 2018), the *Film Philosophy* Conference at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden (July 2018), the 15th Biennial Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, Stockholm University, Sweden (August 2018), and at the *Visual Spectrum* Seminar Series, Department of Cultural Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden (September 2018).

in approaching the Grossman family footage, we aim to interact with this material in ways that generate “connective tissue” between us as viewers and the filmed images as tangible objects of perpetual encounter.

We also have been inspired by historical avant-garde practices that problematize media images and their roles in constructing reality (see Russell 2018, 73), incorporating experimental methods and techniques into our work of “archival intervention” (Brunow 2015). This process involves deprioritizing elements such as the socio-historical factors embedded in the footage, or the actual contexts of its production. Instead, we foreground our affective relationships to the images and the ways in which subjective and private associations infiltrate our descriptions and appropriations of the material. By including the multisensory dimensions of associative thinking and remembrance evoked by our interactions with the images, we surrender our positions as cool-headed observers. Our understandings of the images are shaped by our current encounters with them. As synesthetic components become integral to our assessment of the film footage, our writing is transformed by our subjective responses. It is through this very activity that we can begin to identify the vital moments of a “now-time” in the film footage. Thus, a subjective approach to our material does not exclude an awareness of the critical moment; rather it facilitates the deployment of haptic criticism to investigate a field of energy that encompasses frictions and tensions between us and the filmed images.

Individual and Anthropological Encounters

Below, we build on what Amy Herzog describes as “cinematic encounters” (2016, 217), a notion that refers not only to the image being screened, but also to the material objects and events connected to the broader filmic experience. As co-authors and collaborators, we have our own distinct relationships to the archival documents at hand, and our respective positions have influenced our individual and joint treatment of them. As an integral part of engaging with this collection, it has become essential that each of us acknowledge our unique and different relationships to the material.

Because the films were made by Alyssa’s relatives, she has had access to personal and historical information that provides a more biographical type (however fragile) of understanding; whereas Arine’s encounter with the archival images is guided by affective factors stemming primarily from within the images themselves. Since family archives and

records are often linked to intense memories and emotions, they sometimes “need to be looked at askance in order to reveal their more-than-personal significance” (Marks 2015, 202). Because such contrasting (and at times conflicting) standpoints are critical to our analysis, we have each contributed passages to this article that detail our own reflexive and affective responses to the material.

Here we present excerpts from our individual writings, which have become integral parts of our broader, collaborative activity of archival appropriation. In formulating these discussions about specific scenes from the footage, we examine and compare our respective sensory and subjective responses to it.² The differences in our writing styles and in what we find relevant to discuss, point to the differences in how we each independently deploy our memories and perceptions as we engage with the films. This exercise, undertaken as a written reflection, is our attempt to translate synesthetic experience into what Marks describes as “wet words.” She writes, “When translating from one medium to another, specifically from the relatively more sensuous audio-visual medium to the relatively more symbolic medium of words, the task is to make the dry words wet from the encounter” (2002, *x*). As our project has developed over time, our writing has become part of a larger body of voices that includes other texts from the Grossman family archive, serving as a linguistic-sensory counterpoint to its visual forms.

By resisting conventional codes of realism in our interpretive methods, we challenge assumptions that the past can ever be fully captured through images or coherently narrativized through language. In re-visiting, re-writing, and re-editing the contents of this domestic collection through both subjective/personal and mechanistic/impersonal impulses, we engage in what film studies scholar Catherine Russell has labeled “archiveology”: a new form of sensory anthropology and media art practice that detaches film images from their “instrumental use” to invite new ways of knowing about the past through “retrospective and imaginative viewing practices” (2018, 43; 197). Ultimately, all technologies of visualization

² Our original intentions for re-editing this footage involved collaborations extending beyond the two of us, as our idea was to involve Artificial Intelligence as a means to help structure and direct our interventions into the material. Working with AI and machine-learning systems such as GAN (Generative Adversarial Networks) requires a complex procedure of building up sets of AI preferences from scratch, teaching them to recognize and categorize images through processes not unlike those practiced by film viewers and editors. In co-writing this article, delineating our subjective responses to specific sequences has not only helped us to identify various thematics that we wish to follow in the film’s development, but it has also generated new categories for visual themes and image subjects that we will eventually feed into the AI software.

and representation are devices for filtering a range of sensory impressions, confirming a “new level of corporealized presence within the machinery of observation” (Williams 1995, 11). Our work also responds to anthropologist Kathryn Ramey’s call for new practices of “productive dissonance” and “sensuous image-making” that can reinvigorate the discipline of anthropology in an effort to broaden the repertoire of anthropological tools used to analyze the complex technologies of memory, the materiality of the moving image, and the embodied, fragmented, dynamic realms of the archive (Ramey 2011, 257). Below, we provide a brief description of the origins and contents of the Grossman family archives, followed by personal statements detailing our individual responses to this material.

The Family Archives

Originally, this 16mm footage was filmed by members of the Grossman family, who immigrated to New York in the late 1890s from Russia (now part of Belarus). Six brothers and two sisters, along with their elderly parents, left their home in a rural village to settle in Brooklyn. The children found work as unskilled laborers in the garment industry, learned English, pursued higher education, and began to establish themselves as tailors, teachers, pharmacists, and delicatessen owners. The eldest brother, Isaac, went to medical school and became a doctor, eventually gaining the means to purchase a Cine-Kodak movie camera. He captured nearly four hours of footage in the decade between the late 1920s and 1930s. The material contains ordinary domestic scenes, activities in the neighborhood and on the streets, social gatherings, family celebrations. Much of it was shot in New York City, but there is also substantial footage of the (then) rural town of Danbury, Connecticut, where relatives would gather on weekends and summer vacations.

The footage demonstrates a surprising range of skills and techniques for an amateur camera operator from such an early era in the history of film. There are steady establishing shots, careful pans, close-ups, cutaways, reverse angle shots, and some evidence of simple in-camera and post-production editing. The people being filmed appear to have a genuinely sympathetic interest in the camera, and the mirth and energy governing the family interactions lends many sequences a generous quality that extends readily to the viewer.

Certain scenes appear more directed, where individuals seem to have been instructed to perform specific activities, such as playing a musical instrument or sitting down for a meal, usually without looking directly at the camera. Other scenes are more spontaneous, such as a

family stroll in Central Park, or a game of catch between children in the neighborhood. Isaac's son Morris sometimes helped with the filming. Morris may or may not have been responsible for some of the more erratic or unfocused images in the footage. He also may have had a role in producing some of the highly staged, dramatic scenes that take the form of short fiction films, not unlike the Keystone comedies that were popular at the time.³ With casts of characters drawn from multiple generations within the family, these sequences have simple narrative plots, punctuated by hand-painted intertitles.⁴

Another significant component of this documentary material is a series of family newsletters, produced between 1925 and 1937. The newsletters were named "The Silver Cord," a term stemming from Jewish mysticism that refers to ties between the spiritual and physical realms. The newsletters were typed up and distributed once or twice a year to members of the family. Each year the newsletters listed a different Editor-in-Chief, along with the offices of President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Librarian. The publications contain a variety of stories and reports, covering topics such as a day's hike in the countryside, an explanation of Mendel's laws of genetics, theories on Jewish identity, advice on child-rearing, humorous anecdotes about family members, and songs and poems by relatives of various ages.

The newsletters also contain transcripts of narratives by the family's progenitors, Wolf and Basha Grossman, who never learned to read or write, and whose only spoken languages were Russian and Yiddish. In this way, the family members were able to record memories of their past in the old country, alongside their process of resettling in America. In the very first newsletter from 1925, there is an expression of hope that the publication would encourage a new era of intergenerational socializing within the family. "We are all here to study and learn," states an editorial, urging everyone to "freely express opinions, thoughts, impressions, every occurrence of educational interest" (The Silver Cord 1925). In a special

³ Keystone Studios, an American film production company established in California in 1912, introduced the genre of slapstick comedy, which soon became a popular world-wide phenomenon. Keystone comedies featured ex-vaudeville artists such as Harold Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin, and used undercranked cameras (shot at eight to 12 frames per second), which sped up the projected actions, making the actors' movements appear more mechanical, frantic, and comical (Mast 1986, 80).

⁴ Before the introduction of sound in film, production cards printed with intertitles served a central role in film narration. The short fiction films in the Grossman footage make use of two basic types of intertitles: expository and dialogue (Bordwell et. al 2005, 275).

memorial issue written after the deaths of Wolf and Basha in 1937, one family member notes, “A chain can only be as strong as its weakest links, so let the members of the third generation who have been the weakest links, forge together in new activities and strength. Let us keep the ‘Circle’ united, and guard it for the fourth generation” (The Silver Cord 1937). Such impulses for community-building and foundations of care are strongly conveyed not only through the written narratives of the newsletters, but also through the filmic images themselves.

Unfamiliar yet Familial Memories (Alyssa)

I first approached this material with an interest in finding out more about my own relatives. Isaac, the cameraman, was the brother of my father’s paternal grandfather. I only learned of the existence of these documents a decade ago, during a casual conversation with a distant cousin. While I was familiar with the names of many people in the films, their faces were largely unknown to me. As an anthropologist and filmmaker, I also wanted to use it as the starting point for a self-reflexive ethnographic analysis, as a powerful example of visual and textual representations of the Jewish immigrant experience in early twentieth-century New York. Once I began to immerse myself in these images, however, I sensed that they were more than just familial or socio-cultural records.

The vivid yet fragmented qualities of this footage struck me as not unlike the very processes of memory itself. In this instance, the reliability of these films as a documentary record was punctured by the knowledge that the scenes contained within could be no more than fleeting, partial glimpses of an ultimately unknowable time and space. The textured surfaces of these films held stories not only about my ancestors and their daily lives; they also opened up a scattering of new memories and associations of my own, provoking considerations about the unsettled and unpredictable place of the past in relation to my own unfolding present.

The settings where some of this footage was shot—specifically the rural scenes from Danbury, Connecticut—include landscapes that I know and remember directly from my own childhood. According to family lore, Isaac had bought a plot of land in Danbury, about an hour outside of New York, so that his son Morris, who suffered from eczema, could spend time in the fresh country air. Isaac’s other siblings soon followed, including my own great-

grandfather and my great-grandmother, all building a cluster of cottages around the shore of Lake Kenosia. According to my relatives, it was a place where everyone loved to gather and socialize, where the children were free to run around and swim and play. My father spent his childhood summers there, and when I was little, I used to spend time there with my grandparents, though by that point there were only a handful of relatives who still went to Danbury, mainly from the older generations.

(PLACE FIGURE 2 HERE)

My grandparents sold their cottage shortly before they died in the late 1980s, and I have not been back there for nearly thirty years. But I still have very vivid memories of the place. When I watched this footage for the first time, I was confronted with an uncanny feeling: unfamiliar relatives I had never met, peopling a landscape that I recognized from my own past. The spaces from my remembered life were reflected back at me in black-and-white, now inhabited by family members who had never been present in my experienced life. As I watched and re-watched these images, the long-ago past threaded itself into my own more recent past, and the ghosts of relatives I had never met infiltrated my patchwork of childhood recollections and my incomplete knowledge of the family dynamics that preceded my existence.

Rather than entering into the images as narratives, I was perceiving them as spaces that exceeded the literal boundaries of the frames captured by the Cine Kodak. What do I see in my mind's eye when I think about Danbury? I see the steep steps leading down the hill from the road, with the high stone wall cutting across the slope. The clusters of touch-me-nots and the tangled raspberry patch in the backyard; the wicker sofa on the back porch, where my grandfather would do the *New York Times* crossword puzzle every morning. My grandmother's General Electric refrigerator in the kitchen, with its metal shelves that revolved around a thin metal pole. The delicate white plastic rings on the curtain rod in the room where I slept. The heavy wooden canoe paddles with their peeling layers of paint, stored in the dining room closet. The rustling of the weeping willow tree by the lake-shore; the honking of the Canada Geese flying overhead in late summer. The musty odor of the lake with its tangles of seaweed and lily pads. The great piles of leaves my grandfather would rake and burn in October, when we would go there for the annual Danbury Fair.

(PLACE FIGURE 3 HERE)

In a pivotal article about the relationship between film and memory, which I find myself returning to year after year, visual anthropologist David MacDougall argues that it is misleading to claim that archival or historical images on a screen could be anything other than “secondary representations” of memory, which itself is fluid, invisible, and ultimately ungraspable (1992, 29). Although memories are often conceptualized or described in visual terms, they still cannot be literally captured or documented through photographic technology. At the same time, though film cannot record our actual mental contours, it can document and project objects, faces, and landscapes from the past that remain (through material, chemical, and digital processes) more detailed and vivid, more fixed and pinpointable, than the fleeting, ungraspable memories that weave through our own minds. Seeing the familiar landscapes of Danbury in these films triggered my own sets of personal associations and feelings, but it also allowed me to literally visualize the presence of another past, or multiple pasts, within that same space. And these other pasts contained the very same hill, the same stone wall, the same lake-shore and weeping willow tree, which were part of my own existing repertoire of memories. There they were, graphically materializing on film, a medium which, as MacDougall notes, can sometimes seem “even more astonishing than memory” itself (1992, 29).

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Unfamiliar yet Familiar Memories (Arine)



As I approach the Grossman family film footage as someone completely unrelated to it, these images are more detached from their specific psycho-biographical associations than they are for Alyssa. When she invited me to collaborate on this project, with the idea that an outsider’s perspective could complement and broaden her own more immediate and situated connections to it, I watched through the film footage and was struck by its powerfully emotive and familiar qualities. An energy emanates from it that strikes the viewer, even with no prior knowledge about its contexts, characters, or narratives. On the one hand, the experiences that are captured hint at the immense efforts required to build a new life in America. On the other hand, the haptic impressions evoked by the less controlled handling of the camera in some of the material are highly affective and engaging. Looking at family

documents that span such a period of time would make some people think in terms of genealogy and chronology. For me, the parts of the material that stand out are the sequences that show less skilled handling of the camera and events that invite my sensory participation.

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One example of this type of footage begins with a scene that presents a group of children waiting and looking attentively at the camera. They are dressed in light summer clothes while standing beneath swaying bushes and trees. Their bodies are striped with rays of sunlight streaming through the moving thicket, and their eyes are screwed up against the glare. The group of children seems to be patiently waiting, perhaps for the cinematographer to get his shot, or for instructions from another adult. In the sequences that follow, the untrained camera haphazardly records the children's movements. We are presented with a montage of images, each lasting only a few seconds. The editing is done in-camera, simply by turning the recording mechanism on and off.

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The footage jumps from sequence to sequence, across time and space. The camera captures a kaleidoscope of events: children drawing while sitting on blankets on the grass, babies sleeping, adults engaged in conversation, a silhouette of someone moving into a thicket, trees waving heavily in the wind. In this scene, the camera is handled in a way that does not coherently follow a particular event. Instead, it provokes me as a viewer to revisit my own experiences of similar outdoor activities, such as excursions with relatives, school trips, birthday parties. I remember my entire body being exposed to the sun and wind from all sides. I recall the echoes of other children's shouts, and the surging sounds of trees and bushes. I feel the experience of time—a day that seems to never end. These memories are not specific, but rather glimpses into potentially cross-cultural or even archetypal childhood episodes that involve a momentary (and sometimes arbitrary) sense of communality through being grouped together with other children.

These emotional and sensory impressions are stimulated by the filmed images, sensations that would otherwise only have existed as nonverbal, nearly inaccessible glimpses into the past. In fact, when I try to attach these memories to a specific period of my life, the feeling vanishes. What remains with me most strongly is the sheer happiness of being released into the wild. A feeling of invincibility after an eternal day immersed in nature.

These fragments draw me in because of the less controlled way they have been shot, illustrating how the dominance of a purely sensory impact, rather than a managed overview of an event, can result in a more personal and immediate connection to photographically captured images.

The physical, socio-historical circumstances surrounding a photograph's production, what Didi-Huberman refers to as its "imaging substance" (2012, 41), can serve as an essential component of its aesthetic decoding. Dealing with the broader appearance of images in this way entails acknowledging how non-verbal or opaque levels of materiality draw us as viewers into the activities behind and beyond the camera. Additionally considering Marks' concept of haptic criticism, attending to the non-semantic aspects of images, we are pulled into a position where the boundaries between subject and object are increasingly blurred. Through engaging with the arresting textures and surfaces of visual disruptions such as photographic "mistakes" or "unprofessional" camerawork, we relinquish our neutral, objective position as detached scholars or observers. Haptic criticism thereby becomes a vital written means of bringing these affective and sensory interactions to the fore.

(PLACE FIGURE 7 HERE)

After reflecting upon my associations with the images described above, I began to wonder if my own sensory recollections would be at odds with the childhood of someone from a Jewish immigrant family in New York during the 1930s. The wild happiness I recalled above stems from my upbringing in 1970s Scandinavia. An idealization of "natural children" might not have been exactly what the Grossman children in these images were experiencing. Might they have come across as attentive only because they were taking instructions from their auntie, posing as their summer-school teacher? While drawing, might the children have been working on educational assignments? An event can signify and evoke more than its participants, its time-frame, and its location. To open the image to questions that move beyond the classic "who, what, why, where, and when," we need to be aware of the latent socio-historical differences at work. The handling of this particular technology and the experiences conveyed through this type of in-camera editing provide me, as a viewer, with an understanding that transgresses and complicates ideas of visibility, history, and memory.

(PLACE FIGURE 8 HERE)

Writing Through Memory

Grappling with the lacunary nature of this archive-in-the-making entails a realization that no fixed meaning can ever be attached to it. Instead, its meanings will always be shifting and evolving, contingent upon the dynamics and spaces of each new encounter. Rather than regarding the distance from the unknowable past as a loss, we treat these temporal ruptures and new encounters as a means to access and express alternative forms of “now-time” in the present. Reading collections of images and texts from the past requires putting together a dialectical index that allows them to manifest multiple forms of legibility at different points in time.

Alyssa’s written reflections refer to the complex relationship between human processes of remembrance and cinematic forms of documenting the past. In writing about her impressions of the footage, she evokes a multisensory set of memories, including sounds, smells, and feelings that lie outside the framework of the camera’s actual, visible frames. Her recollections extend beyond the photographically registered scenes to incorporate narratives, relationships, spaces, and associations that are not shown within the footage. Yet it is the projected images themselves that most powerfully echo Alyssa’s own internal memories of Danbury, as she identifies the topographies as mirroring parts of her own store of childhood recollections. The visual impact of these images pushes her own memories to intertwine with the landscapes contained in the footage, thereby allowing multiple pasts to inhabit a single remembered place. Thus, her experience of the “now-time” in this footage simultaneously complements and contradicts her own lived experience. Her unseen, unrecorded mental images comprise what Marks calls a “shadow archive,” consisting of immaterial traces such as memory and imagination, things that can never be physically located in any actually existing archive (Marks 2015, 193). Yet through Alyssa’s new encounters with this footage, these immaterial traces surface as literal, tangible, photographic manifestations of her own invisible memories and associations.

Arine approaches the material through an acute awareness of its broader phenomenological and haptic qualities, prioritizing its present-day emotional impacts over issues such as family genealogy or historical context. However, by attending to the filmic sequences that could be characterized as visually “noisy,” and through following her own subjective sets of physical and mental associations with these sequences, she responds to the footage in ways that give it new forms of legibility. By highlighting

synesthetic and affective processes of engaging with the material, she identifies alternative critical moments within it. From a Benjaminian perspective, new configurations of old and leftover fragments bring together disparate pieces of history—not in a linear or chronological manner, but in a disruptive and dialectical fashion. Such constellations no longer simply document the past; they pave the way for the formulation of multiple pasts, and for generating alternative means of understanding the present.

Throughout the process of working with the Grossman family footage, we both feel that it is not enough to simply tell stories *about* memory. Instead, we wish to *evoke* memory in a performative way through our own sensory responses to the images. In this sense, our writing in this article, as well as our plans to re-edit this footage, involve materially and affectively exploring the ways these different media can be mobilized to tap into both history and memory. In this collaborative practice of archival intervention, we seek inroads through and around the simultaneous fogginess and lucidity of memories that can never be definitively imprinted, captured, or seen, aiming to move “from the consciousness of the picture to the unconscious of the thought” (Dubois 1995, 170). Through formally drawing attention to the gaps and contradictions in such visual technologies, it is possible to position the past as a shifting, dynamic encounter that continually unfolds to reveal new insights in the emerging “now,” rather than as a static element to be regarded from a fixed point in the abstract future.

Writing about our encounters with this material constitutes the first phase in our collaboration. We have sought to identify particular sequences in the footage that connect to elements of our own contemporary experience. Our next step involves re-editing and organizing this material in ways that will convey its flashes of “now time”: the sensory and mnemonic impacts that these traces of the past have on us in the present. Along with our re-edited sequences of the original films, we intend to delve into further experiments with AI algorithms, as noted above. We will also incorporate additional material into the film, including photographs from surviving family members, video footage of fieldwork conducted with descendants of the Grossman family, excerpts of field notes, and other pieces of our own writing. We are working with potential soundtracks, including contemporary audio recordings of relatives commenting on the film footage, and recordings of voices reading passages from The Silver Cord newsletters. Through these extended material interventions, we are treating the archive’s mediatized forms not as vessels of memory, but as technologies

of memory (Sturken 1997, cited in Brunow 2015, 4). Reaching beyond these documents' representational capacities, we are contributing to the creation (and re-creation) of individual and collective forms of remembrance within a cross-generational, inter-cultural, multi-sited, interactive archival space.

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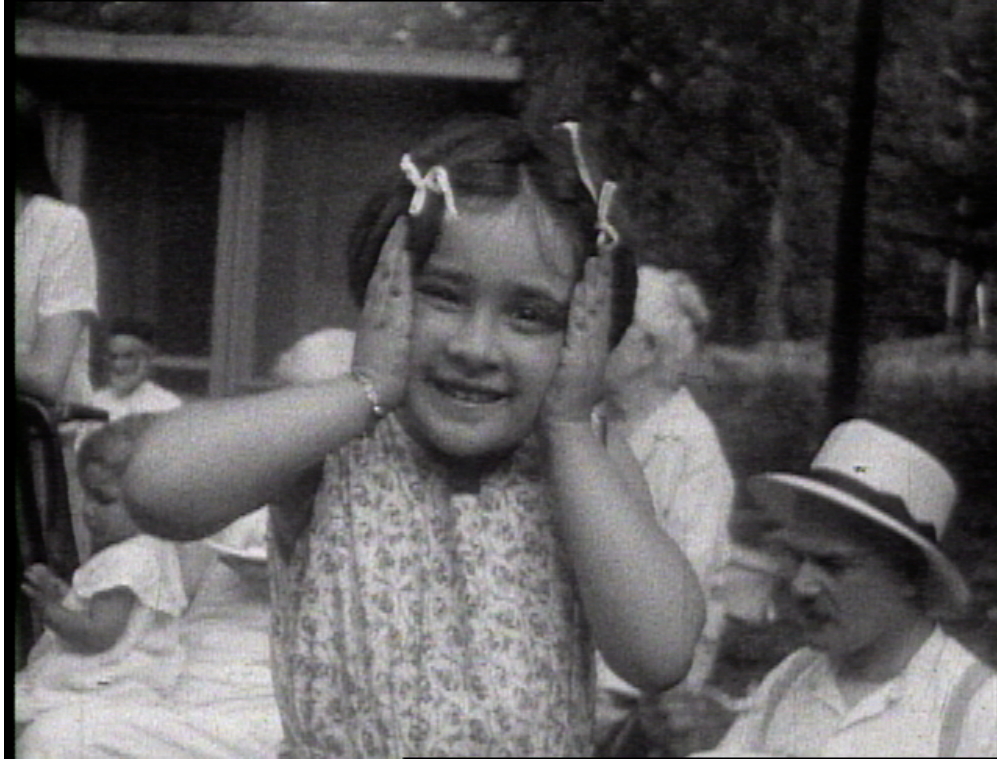


Figure 1
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 2
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 3
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 4
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

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Figure 5
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 6
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 7
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)



Figure 8
Grossman family archival footage. Image courtesy of Alyssa Grossman.

54x41mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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