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MEMORY OBJECTS, MEMORY DIALOGUES: COMMON-SENSE EXPERIMENTS IN VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Alyssa Grossman

Unpacking the secrets encoded in images and objects, we find the memory of the senses.¹

Introduction

Visual anthropologists who actually make films, as opposed to those who solely write about them, face a dual set of expectations from the academic community. Like all anthropologists, they must articulate their arguments and findings through the conventions of scholarly writing. But they must also master, to a certain extent, the technical, conceptual, and material challenges that accompany any work with visual media.

Recent debates have underlined the need to extend anthropological uses of film beyond the realm of “visual communication,” to treat it as more than just a means of conveying “pictorial” translations of anthropological ideas. It has been argued that being sensitive to such alternative approaches can lead to a different type of ethnographic knowledge: a sensory and bodily knowledge generated through the act of using a camera.² Yet even with increasing numbers of anthropologists working with visual media in new ways, it is widely acknowledged that there has been a “certain collective failure of the imagination” within the discipline.³ Often visual material still serves as a mere illustration of anthropological concepts, with the camera functioning as a tool for recording the pictorial equivalent of field notes.

Because most visual anthropologists are trained as anthropologists, rather than as artists, it is to be expected that their films might not conform to the “standards” of what is produced in the film industry or the art world. But this need not prevent them, if and when the occasion arises, from exploring innovative or unconventional approaches to their work with visual media. As Arnd Schneider argues, any

anthropological incursions into experimental film-making should not be performed for their own sake, but rather must make theoretical and contextual sense, and be somehow “linked to the experience of the subjects of anthropological research.”⁴ Yet anthropological films that do venture beyond conventions of the “narrowly realist paradigm” are still too often discouraged in academic contexts, or viewed as highly “contentious.”⁵

This chapter focuses on one such film that counters traditional ethnographic norms of visual representation. *Memory Objects, Memory Dialogues* (2011), a collaboration between Selena Kimball (a visual artist) and myself (a visual anthropologist), plays with the boundaries between anthropology and art, and uses material objects and the medium of film to generate, rather than merely reflect, different modes of anthropological understanding. The film consists of a dual-screen projection, juxtaposing a sequence of ethnographic interviews about a collection of artifacts with a series of 16mm stop-motion animations of these same artifacts.

I am hesitant, however, to categorize this project as “experimental” just because it incorporates visual elements that anthropologists might shy away from or regard as overly “artistic.” If we understand experimental film as “challenging major codes of dramatic realism” and using certain formal techniques to point to the illusory nature of visual representation,⁶ then *Memory Objects, Memory Dialogues* could indeed be considered to fall within such a category. It does contain animations of ordinarily inanimate objects. It does use a double projection format to convey multiple perspectives, times, and spaces. It does subvert linear narratives and play with temporal gaps through repetition and the recurrent use of black screen. But these features alone do not make this film experimental. It is rather the ideas and approaches mobilized in the processes of its conception and realization that land it on experimental terrain within the field of visual anthropology.

I steer away from the notions of “borrowing” from art practices or “applying” artistic methods to my anthropological activities.⁷ Instead, I regard anthropology as a discipline that possesses inherently artistic dimensions and capacities, which need only be recognized and embraced by its practitioners. In this case, I let the very subject matter of my research open up different lines of inquiry, contributing to the formation of a work that might not meet traditional expectations of what an “anthropological” film is or should do. Rather than adhering to a particular formula or a given set of shooting and editing conventions, I allowed material objects themselves to direct my research, thereby supplementing *and* transforming its direction, form, contents, and theoretical implications. Such tactics are surely more “logical” or “common-sense” than “experimental” (to return to Schneider’s stipulation, these pursuits should make “theoretical and contextual sense”), and hopefully, as the discipline of visual anthropology continues to mature, will become more and more mainstream.

My fieldwork primarily has been in post-communist Romania, focusing on sites and practices of memory in the urban context of Bucharest. Looking at how ongoing changes in Romania's global framework impact and reflect remembrance processes on local and individual levels, I have been exploring the contemporary dynamics of "transition" two decades after the 1989 revolution that ended 45 years of communist rule. Instead of focusing on explicitly commemorative, "official" arenas of memory production, such as archives, monuments, or museums, I am more concerned with "non-commemorative" memories⁸ that occur in "unofficial," often unexpected contexts—unnoticed corners of the city, interiors of people's homes, the all-too-underexplored realms of everyday life. I am interested in when and where such memories surface and how they manifest in tangible and intangible forms, including objects, images, discourses, and public and private landscapes.

Researching the topic of memory requires a departure from traditional participant observation practices. Simply interviewing someone about his or her memories is not enough to evoke the multi-layered, visceral processing activities involved in the intricate workings of memory itself. As Maurice Bloch writes, we perceive experience in "conceptual clumps" of visual, sensory, and linguistic information, which, to be made fully comprehensible, must be rearranged into logical and sequential thoughts and words.⁹ But while memories are often described through narratives or discourses,¹⁰ such accounts are only "re-representations" of the very complex sets of activities occurring during actual processes of recollection.¹¹

Bloch maintains that it is possible to come close to "living through" another person's memory if, as you encounter it, you flesh it out with your own experiences and emotions—an activity that involves you in processes similar to what the other person undergoes as they are doing the remembering.¹² I personally did not experience Romanian communism first-hand; so in order to supplement my intellectual understanding of this particular past, I needed to facilitate my own sensory and emotional recollections "by proxy," or by "knowing *through*" other people's accounts.¹³ These memories need to be more than explanatory accounts or descriptions of the past. They must leave room to stir the imagination—that of the person doing the remembering and that of the person doing the listening.

In this vein, central to my methodology are imaginative experiments I devise to actively provoke memories in my interlocutors, to revive in them the experience of remembering, and to produce similar experiences in myself. Inspired in part by the Mass Observation movement,¹⁴ which combined artistic and scientific sensibilities and focused on the "primacy of reality" through investigating the textures of everyday life,¹⁵ I treat objects and places not as records or reminders of the past, but as "inducers of reminiscence,"¹⁶ setting further processes of recollection in motion and allowing me to grasp their sensory and corporeal implications. Such an approach defines my fieldwork as a dynamic and relational process that profoundly influences and shapes—rather than merely aids or facilitates—my research.

In my investigations of memory traces within urban, domestic interior spaces of Bucharest, I asked a set of individuals to go through their household possessions, revisit their storage areas, and find an object to donate to me. I wanted things that were somehow associated with the past—specifically with the communist period in Romania before the 1989 revolution. I was not seeking explicitly political artifacts or souvenirs that had been preserved for sentimental reasons. Because I was looking for memories connected to the banal realms of everyday experience, I asked for items that were not worth much money and that people would be willing to part with permanently. I wanted ordinary things that had been tucked away or forgotten, objects considered outdated, shabby, no longer significant or relevant.

I filmed people as they rummaged through their cupboards and closets. Many of them initially insisted that they had nothing left from “back then.” But once they started looking, they often were surprised by what they found. Accompanying them around their cellars, balconies, pantries, and attics, I watched them rediscover items from their pasts, examining once familiar household goods with different eyes. After they chose an object to give to me, I asked them to write a few sentences about what it was and what it meant to them. I then filmed them reading these statements, which frequently led to several more hours of filming as further reminiscences surfaced.

As my interlocutors’ memories were triggered through finding the objects, so were my own. I was led into spaces of recollection not only through my physical contact with the artifacts, but also through the social and emotional experiences arising from these encounters (with the objects and with their donors). By helping to locate these artifacts and conjure forth their stories, I became part of the generative and constructive processes of recollection. Participating in such an experience offered me a more embodied understanding of the intangible elements of people’s memories, and deepened my empathic connections to the objects affiliated with these memories.

The Objects

The items that I collected were relatively unremarkable in and of themselves. They included objects such as a glass inkwell still partially filled with blue ink; a hand-dyed silk scarf; a polyester school uniform; an aluminum ice cube tray; a hand-crocheted shopping bag; a miniature porcelain figurine; a heavy manual typewriter; a hand-made wooden darning mushroom; and a pair of wire-rimmed eyeglasses missing some parts.

As my collection expanded, I realized that it was not a collection in the conventional sense of the word. It rather consisted of inadvertently accumulated bits of domestic clutter that had been long neglected, and in some cases completely forgotten. Nicolette Makovicky writes that household collections may be seen as sites of practical, non-discursive memory work, as their accumulation involves not only explicitly constructed narratives but also unspoken assumptions and

recollections.¹⁷ Many of my interviewees remarked that, until they had started searching for these objects and telling me their stories, they had not stopped to reconsider the multitude of associations and memories they had about them.

Manual typewriter (Figure 8.1):

I wouldn't have thought of a typewriter [to donate], something I've been familiar with since childhood, if in the 1980s, people hadn't become so obsessed with these machines. In order to discourage their use as a means of producing anti-Ceaușescu propaganda, there was a law that all owners of typewriters had to register them at their district's militia office ... During those years, this was the strangest queue of all. The typewriter queue in front of the militia office ... (Zoltán, aged 61)

Ice cube tray (Figure 8.2):

This is from the "Fram" fridge, also called the "Polar Bear"; our old refrigerator that used a lot of energy, in which I made cantaloupe ice cream for the first time. It spilled all over the fridge because the freezer didn't work. When we bought another fridge, an "Arctic" from Găești, in 1978, our poor "Fram" ended up as a chicken coop in the countryside. (Fotinica, aged 55)

Seltzer bottle (Figure 8.3):

Back then, seltzer water was the ordinary person's mineral water. It was never absent from the table ... When I was little, I was often sent to the seltzer bottle shop to exchange the cartridges, which I didn't enjoy doing ... There were several types of seltzer bottles. The older models were made of glass and wrapped in a mesh bag. This object is one of the everyday things I grew up with, but now it provokes in me a funny nostalgia. (Mónika, aged 37)

I came to see these artifacts as Benjaminian points of rupture, as they had lain dormant for many years, sparking unexpected recollections in a later present—a "historical awakening" providing fresh insights into contemporary perceptions of the past and the future. As Benjamin noted, our encounters with devalued and abandoned objects allow us not simply to remember the past, but also to better understand the current context where the past is read, as well as our lingering dreams, wishes, and projections.¹⁸ In this sense, mining storage areas and their forgotten contents could serve as an avenue for accessing old memories and provoking new ones, as well as for gauging people's feelings about the present and their expectations about the future.

Animated Collaborations

Just as I sought alternative methods for gaining a more intimate and embodied understanding of my interlocutors' recollections, I needed to find a way to appropriately treat this material through film. I did not wish to use the medium to merely



Figure 8.1 Manual typewriter. Digital film still by Alyssa Grossman.



Figure 8.2 Ice cube tray. Digital film still by Alyssa Grossman.



Figure 8.3 Seltzer bottle. Digital film still by Alyssa Grossman.

present my collection of objects and relay their histories, but rather to evoke the sensory, affective aspects of recollection.¹⁹ I wanted to emphasize memory's generative, constantly evolving qualities, and question the use of documentary images as an easy means of calling up a static past through mechanical processes of information retrieval.²⁰ I wanted the film's form and contents to convey the idea that individual memories are selected and transmitted through fluctuating and contingent social meanings and values, not handed down as a given set of biographical facts or fixed personal data.²¹

This was where my long-time friend and collaborator, Selena Kimball, stepped in. Selena and I had already worked together on a number of projects over the previous 15 years. Our work in Romania began in 1997, when we first traveled there to investigate the dynamics of the early post-communist period. After I

received a Fulbright grant two years later to work with an ethnographic museum in Bucharest, Selena and I produced an exhibition of objects, paintings, and texts stemming from the year-long postal correspondence we maintained while I was living in Romania and she was working out of her studio in New England.

In 2005, Selena joined me at a Romanian Orthodox nunnery where I was filming and researching the everyday lives of the nuns who lived there. Selena brought her 16mm Bolex camera along, and made a series of stop-motion animation sequences of me, alluding to some of my daily struggles with fieldwork and film-making. I incorporated her animations into my film, *Into the Field* (2005), using them as reflexive structuring devices that repeatedly interrupted (and interrogated) an otherwise observational exploration of the daily routines and rhythms of monastic life.

I wanted to incorporate similar stop-motion techniques into *Memory Objects*, *Memory Dialogues*, with my collection of household objects as the subjects of the new animations. In 2007, after I had completed another year of fieldwork in Bucharest, Selena joined me there for a few weeks with her Bolex camera.²² Initially, Selena deliberately kept herself in the dark about the objects' origins and their stories. She decided to read the donors' texts and watch the interviews only *after* filming and editing the animations. Rather than being concerned with conveying the objects' "actual" memories and narratives, she was more interested in their universal qualities as "auratic" objects.²³ She wanted to focus on the substance, form, and feeling of the artifacts themselves, and involve them in new activities that would add to their role not as vehicles for transmitting or illustrating their given histories, but as objects that could speak for themselves. Such an approach parallels what Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell describe as the anthropological shift from seeing artifacts as illustrations of social or historical systems, toward letting materials themselves "enunciate" their own meanings and "dictate the terms of their own analysis."²⁴

It took us two weeks to film ten animations. Using the balcony of my Bucharest apartment as an improvised studio, we spent hours shooting each object in short vignettes that Selena conceived in response to the collection I had assembled. Stop-motion filming requires the exposure of a single frame at a time, repositioning the object just a fraction between each shot in order to create the illusion of movement when the film is played back at 24 frames per second. Often it would take an entire day to film a sequence that in its finished form would last no more than 10 or 20 seconds.

Making the animations required us to physically intervene, placing the objects in new settings and circumstances. Selena and I became involved with them in ways that most curators or handlers of ethnographic material do not ordinarily allow themselves. While altering and dismantling objects was part and parcel of Selena's artistic practice, I had been taught that field collections must be preserved, handled with gloves, and displayed behind glass cases. Yet as I watched in horror as she cut a hole in one of the donated socks so she could film my hands sewing it up with

the aid of the donated darning mushroom, I found myself reconsidering the value of such “destructive” acts. As we cultivated our own relationships and affinities with these objects through direct, bodily contact, I became increasingly attuned to their material presence, recognizing them as much more than mere symbols or triggers of particular narratives about the past.²⁵ As Laura Marks argues, objects encode meaning not only metaphorically but also through physical contact.²⁶ Putting these objects to use allowed me to bodily connect with them and to engage not just with the narratives recounted by their donors, but also with their very forms, textures, and materials.

For instance, in order to make an animation showing trails of melting ice, Selena and I first froze water in the donated ice cube tray. Accustomed to using more “modern” trays made of plastic, we struggled with its inflexible metal frame to extract unbroken cubes that were large and uniform enough to film. Returning to my interviewee’s account of her “Fram” refrigerator, an infamous Romanian communist brand, I could draw upon this experience to relate to the frustration she must have felt when it failed to properly function. After my own battle with the ice cubes, I found myself echoing her wry appreciation of the fact that, after it became defunct, it was at least put to some use as a makeshift chicken coop in the countryside.

In another instance, as Selena and I carried the heavy manual typewriter around the streets of Bucharest, searching for an appropriate setting in which to animate it, my aching arms gave me a more physical understanding of the literal burden it must have been to have to lug these typewriters to the police station to be registered. The donor had explained to me that, since the keys wore down with use, in order for any dissident manifestos to be properly traceable, all typewriters had to be brought in to the militia for inspection every single year. Until that point, I had understood this memory as a narrative account, but now I had a more embodied knowledge of the responsibility involved in owning a typewriter in that particular context, and of the absurdity of having to stand in long, cold queues every winter for the sake of such a machine.

Manipulating objects and engaging with them in such ways evokes Robert Ascher’s accounts of the “imitative experiments” conducted by archaeologists in the 1950s. In these instances, archaeologists would put objects and materials to work in manners “simulative of the past” in order to test hypotheses and establish “legitimate inferences” about their previous roles and functions.²⁷ Unlike these archaeologists, Selena and I were not attempting to come closer to how these objects were originally used. But our unusual physical interactions with them sparked deeper understandings of their social and cultural relevance, and gave us unexpected insights into their ironic and poignantly humorous qualities. We brought several of the objects around the streets of Bucharest, filming them in landscapes where they could enter into new conversations with their surroundings. The donated porcelain bibelot almost seemed to grow in size and importance when we filmed it strolling down the sidewalk in front of Ceaușescu’s Palace of

the People, the second largest building in the world. Although the Romanian media (and much of the local population) tends to disparage the Palace as an abominable eyesore and an unwelcome reminder of Ceaușescu's totalitarian regime, the cute kitsch of the figurine somehow made the appalling kitsch of the Palace seem more laughable and less ominous (Figure 8.4).

To be able to laugh at the Palace of the People, rather than be crushed by it, resonated with my findings that Romanians' recollections included varied and strategic treatments of communist power structures. Rather than demonstrating either full complicity with or total resistance to the system, my interviewees had the capacity to work around it, even to mock it, with self-conscious and deliberate wit. Such a complex response is not the message conveyed by dominant memory discourses circulating in Romania's public spheres. Disseminated through the media, politics, and academic and cultural institutions, these official narratives tend to be more black and white, depicting the communist past either as something to be criminalized and condemned, or as having provided a sense of security and stability in people's lives, leading it to be romanticized and viewed with nostalgia. As sensory memories are particularly important when "official" histories fail to fully illuminate personal realms of experience,²⁸ my own embodied encounters during the process of making the animations gave new layers of meaning to my interlocutors' nuanced (and sometimes idiosyncratic) recollections.



Figure 8.4 Porcelain bibelot in front of the Palace of the Parliament in Bucharest (formerly known as Ceaușescu's Palace of the People). Photograph by Alyssa Grossman.

In its finished form, *Memory Objects, Memory Dialogues* consists of ten interviews, which I edited into a 26-minute-long sequence, and ten short animations, which Selena edited into a repeating 6-minute loop. The animations and the interviews play simultaneously, though they are not synchronized according to a particular plan, and rarely reference the same objects at the same time. They are intended to be projected either as a split image on one wall (for cinema and festival viewings), or on two screens on adjacent walls of a room (as a gallery installation) (Figure 8.5).

On one side of the projection, the animations present episodes that contain suggestive and sometimes unfinished narratives. The wooden darning mushroom hurtles through a sock stretched horizontally from one side of the frame to the other. The inkwell leaks a puddle of blue ink that forms a wavering shadow, then shrinks and disappears. Miniature cookbooks pile up in a stack, with one opening to reveal its illustrations dislodging themselves from the page to perform a tightrope act. The animations have retained their grainy, shadowy, flickering 16mm quality, and are silent, with no added sound track. Each one flashes by quite quickly (most last less than a minute), and between the scenes Selena inserted bits of film lead in bursts of blurry color that add to the film's "haptic" qualities.²⁹

As Marks argues, haptic images require the viewer to pay more attention to their material presence than to their meanings as representational narratives.³⁰ In order



Figure 8.5 Dual-screen installation of *Memory Objects, Memory Dialogues* (2011). Photograph by Rachel Topham for *Ethnographic Terminalia* 2011: Field, Studio, Lab.

to decipher such images, the spectator cannot rely on vision alone; the eyes must operate like organs of touch,³¹ giving rise to visceral responses that engage not just the intellect, but also the memory and other senses. This embodied act of looking propels the viewer to question the illusion of cinematic representation, and to participate in “shar[ing] and perform[ing] cinematic space dialogically.”³²

The corresponding interviews also invite haptic attention. While the voices of the speakers are heard as continuous narratives, for the most part people’s faces are not seen. Each interview begins with a black screen and a voice describing an object, which appears for several seconds, photographed on a plain white background. The object then gives way to black screen again, and we are brought into the donor’s personal stories, thoughts, and reminiscences, with the speaker’s image breaking through the black for only a few brief instances. The coherent flow of the aural narratives, together with the fragmented glimpses of the narrators themselves, draw upon but also subvert the documentary “talking heads” convention. As the stories unfold, the stretches of black allow for closer scrutiny of the other screen featuring the animations, but at the same time suggest the limitations of understanding or remembering through visual images alone.

As the animations loop four times during the course of the interviews, the images, objects, and stories diverge and overlap, producing new and unexpected dialogues. Chance encounters, where one donor’s animated object emerges and resonates with another donor’s memories, add new layers of significance and irony to the film. While the donor of the darning mushroom recalls her nervousness during her first day as a teacher, an animated school uniform appears, rapidly expanding and contracting as if it were breathing, seeming to reflect some of the anxieties and fears of the narrator on the other screen. While the donor of the cookbooks speaks about the gradual disappearance of food during communist times, another animation shows ice cubes slowly circling around and melting, leaving a dark, expanding ring in their wake. Occasionally, the animation of an object will appear while its own donor is speaking about it (another chance meeting), and the viewer may experience a flash of recognition, the way a memory can flare up in the mind. But then it quickly passes as the story changes and another animation flickers into sight.

The objects and narratives reference and speak to one another, but they do not represent or illustrate each other. While they offer glimpses into past and present material realities and human subjectivities, they do not provide definitive explanations or conclusions. As Marks reminds us, auratic objects can never be reduced to narratives, and they can never satisfy our wish to recover a memory in its entirety.³³ These open-ended dialogues and remnants echo what Elizabeth Cowie describes as cinema’s ability to activate the desire to see (“scopophilia”) and the desire to know (“epistophilia”), through never wholly fulfilling these desires.³⁴ They allow for gaps in the idea of completeness, saying more through their disjointed syncopations than through a linear, continuous story.

The multiple projections in *Memory Objects, Memory Dialogues* literally create a life-sized stereoscope, requiring the viewer to shift back and forth between them;

though in this case, a single, distinct image never comes into focus. The “incoherence of vision”³⁵ resulting from such a viewing arrangement may be destabilizing, but it is this very fact that makes it not just a visual experience, but a sensory one as well. The decentering of perception in stereoscopic vision, as film scholars have noted, physically impacts observers, making them more conscious of their unusual spatial position in relation to the objects on the screen, and drawing their attention to the very mechanisms of visual representation.³⁶ By cultivating such physical disjunctions and discontinuities, *Memory Objects*, *Memory Dialogues* opens up new spaces for affective engagement with the ambiguities and complexities of the remembrance process itself.

Conclusions

In a cautionary essay on documentary treatments of the phenomenon of memory, David MacDougall warns against film’s tendencies to convey memory as fixed or unchanging, particularly in its misleading and uncritical use of objects and images as signs of a “recoverable past.”³⁷ Many films, he argues, erroneously depict such “secondary representations” of memory as if they were memory itself, simplifying its “multidimensional” qualities and “stripping the representation of memory of much of its breadth and ambiguity.”³⁸ While the existing repertoire of ethnographic films about memory was likely more limited when his article was published in 1992 than it is now, MacDougall’s concerns reflect ongoing debates about the materiality of remembrance work and the challenges of using visual media in relation to issues of memory.

These debates appear to revolve around three main poles. One position considers objects to be “relics” that serve either as “witnesses of the past” or as vehicles for communicating people’s ongoing narratives about the past.³⁹ The second position challenges such assumptions, suggesting that material artifacts function more often as aids of forgetting than of remembering.⁴⁰ The third acknowledges that material forms cannot ever directly illustrate or give access to the past, and suggests that new strategies are necessary for experimenting with the evocation, rather than the representation, of memory.⁴¹

It is this third position that *Memory Objects*, *Memory Dialogues* takes as its starting point, though it uses the impossibility of memory’s representation to articulate a slightly different thesis. Rather than shying away from the use of material artifacts because of their potential to be mistakenly read as literal “signs” of memory, this project embraces the capacity of objects (as well as the medium of film itself) to resonate with and generate physical and emotional processes of memory. Through its multiple reframings of people, things, and stories, moving them in and out of legibility and generating haptic and embodied experiences, the film’s makers, subjects, objects, and spectators are provoked to search their own “circuits of sense memory,”⁴² bringing forth a range of other powerful memories in the process.

Reconfiguring a collection of discarded objects to stimulate new memories is an act with important ontological implications. By placing things in a new set of relations that are “internal and peculiar to the collection itself,”⁴³ the collection no longer just recalls the past; it paves the way for alternative formulations of multiple pasts. Returning to Benjamin, the power of objects emerges precisely after they have been removed from circulation, detached from their original contexts and reordered to allow us to make new connections and conclusions.⁴⁴ The resulting partial and fragmentary configurations serve as an avenue for piecing together the past not in a chronological, historical way, but in a dialectical fashion. Such dialectical images become legible only at particular moments, with each new reading different from the previous ones.

While the process of making *Memory Objects*, *Memory Dialogues* involved departures from conventional anthropological research and filming strategies, they were logical responses to the nature of the subject and materials at hand. By handling a collection of forgotten household objects in ways that most ethnographic artifacts are not ordinarily treated, and actively intervening to re-collect and relocate them, Selena and I developed new forms of engagement with the objects, with the medium of film itself and, by extension, with individual and collective memories. Our collaboration shifted the dynamics of fieldwork to allow the artifacts to operate not just as objects of recollection, but also as subjects constituting new memories and associations.⁴⁵ “When we arrange the material residues of the past in our impossible inventories,” writes Caitlin DeSilvey, “they arrange us in turn.”⁴⁶ Such reconfigurations might be unsettling as they counter certain expectations about how ethnographic encounters should be translated and understood, but they may also help to steer the discipline of visual anthropology and its practitioners into new and vital methodological and analytical territory.⁴⁷

Notes

1. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 195.
2. See Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, “Introduction: Visualizing Anthropology,” in A. Grimshaw and A. Ravetz (eds), *Visualizing Anthropology* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005); Anna Grimshaw, “Eyeing the Field: New Horizons for Visual Anthropology,” in A. Grimshaw and A. Ravetz (eds), *Visualizing Anthropology*; David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); and Marks, *The Skin of the Film*.
3. Amanda Ravetz, “From Documenting Culture to Experimenting with Cultural Phenomena: Using Fine Art Pedagogies with Visual Anthropology Students,” in E. Hallam and T. Ingold (eds), *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2007), 263.
4. Arnd Schneider, “Expanded Visions: Rethinking Anthropological Research and Representation through Experimental Film,” in T. Ingold (ed.), *Redrawing Anthropology: Materials, Movements, Lines* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 186.
5. Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright, “The Challenge of Practice,” in A. Schneider and C. Wright (eds), *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006), 6.

6. A. L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video: From the Canonical Avant-Garde to Contemporary British Practice* (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 1, 5. See also Arnd Schneider, "Expanded Visions," 178–80.
7. For descriptions of anthropologists and artists "borrowing" from each other's disciplines, see Alex Coles (ed.), *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, vol. 4 (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000); Caitlin DeSilvey, "Art and Archive: Memory-work on a Montana Homestead," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 33, 2007, 878–900, 881; and Kathryn Ramey, "Productive Dissonance and Sensuous Image-Making: Visual Anthropology and Experimental Film", in M. Banks and J. Ruby (eds), *Made to be Seen: Perspectives on the History of Visual Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 256.
8. Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), 69.
9. Maurice E. F. Bloch, *How We Think They Think: Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory and Literacy* (Oxford and Colorado, WY: Westview Press, 1998), 24.
10. Edward Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 116.
11. Bloch, *How We Think They Think*, 122.
12. *Ibid.*, 123.
13. Casey, *Remembering*, 81 (my emphasis).
14. See Charles Madge and Tom Harrison, *Britain by Mass Observation* (London: Penguin Books, 1939), 10.
15. Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan (eds), *Speak for Yourself: A Mass-Observation Anthology, 1937–49* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 4.
16. Casey, *Remembering*, p. 110.
17. Nicolette Makovsky, "Closet and Cabinet: Clutter as Cosmology", *Home Cultures*, 4 (3), 2007, 287–310, 304.
18. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 205.
19. See Annette Kuhn, "Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory in and With Visual Media," in *Memory Studies*, 3 (4), 2010, 298–313, for a discussion on how various forms of "mediated storytelling" can serve both to analyze and perform acts of memory in embodied ways.
20. John Sutton, "Remembering," in P. Robbins and M. Ayede (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 220. See also David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 210.
21. For overviews of theories of memory as a socially, culturally, and politically constructed process, see Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*; and Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).
22. We have described the details of this collaboration in "The Memory Archive: Filmic Collaborations in Art and Anthropology," *Reconstruction*, 9 (1), 2009, from <http://reconstruction.eserver.org/091/grossman&kimball.shtml> (accessed December 21, 2013).
23. See Marks, *The Skin of the Film*.
24. Amiria J. M. Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, "Introduction: Thinking Through Things," in A. Henare, M. Holbraad, and S. Wastell (eds), *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically* (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.
25. Cf. Daphne Berdahl, "Go, Trabi, Go! Reflections on a Car and its Symbolization Over Time," *Anthropology and Humanism*, 25 (2), 2000, 131–41, 131; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 17.

26. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 80.
27. Robert Ascher, "Experimental Archeology," *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 63 (4), 1961, 793–816, 793.
28. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 223.
29. Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 10.
30. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 163.
31. Marks, *Touch*, 2; see also Jill Bennett, "The Aesthetics of Sense-Memory: Theorising Trauma Through the Visual Arts," in S. Radstone and K. Hodgkin (eds), *Memory Cultures: Memory, Subjectivity and Recognition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 32.
32. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 150. See also Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 158.
33. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 81.
34. Elizabeth Cowie, "The Spectacle of Actuality," in J. M. Gaines and M. Renov (eds), *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 27–8.
35. *Ibid.*, 25.
36. *Ibid.*, 24–5.
37. David MacDougall, "Films of Memory," *Visual Anthropology Review*, 8 (1), 1992, 29–37, 32.
38. *Ibid.*, 33.
39. See Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory*, trans. S. Rendall and E. Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 89; Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 243–4.
40. Vincent Crapanzano, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 163; Adrian Forty, "Introduction," in *The Art of Forgetting* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 7.
41. Fernando Calzadilla and George Marcus, "Artists in the Field: Between Art and Anthropology," in Schneider and Wright (eds), *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, 108; Peter Crawford, "Film as Discourse: The Invention of Anthropological Realities," in P. I. Crawford and D. Turton (eds), *Film as Ethnography* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 78; Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 130; MacDougall, "Films of Memory," 29.
42. Marks, *The Skin of the Film*, 212–13.
43. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell (eds), "Introduction: Thinking Through Things," 22.
44. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 207.
45. Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell, "Thinking Through Things," 23.
46. DeSilvey, "Art and Archive," 900.
47. Versions of this paper were presented at the workshop "Nouvelles visions: film expérimental et anthropologie," at the Musée du quai Branly, Paris (2011), and at the Critical Heritage Seminar at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden (2012). Many thanks to Arnd Schneider, Caterina Pasqualino, Staffan Appelgren, Anna Bohlin, Katarina Karlsson, and Selena Kimball, for their valuable contributions and comments.

