Referential Tensions: Inheritance as Cultural Practice

by

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Department of Social Justice Education
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Abstract

This dissertation theorizes inheritance as a cultural practice by examining interpretive scenes set up by art works that re-tell recognizable historical events. I draw on the work of Hannah Arendt, specifically her concept of natality, in order to demonstrate the importance of approaching inheritance as a cultural practice, rather than a natural or automatic phenomenon. As such, inheritance is sensible as situated and relational, a set of enactments of appearances of the past as well as responses to such appearances. The historical re-tellings I address, such as The Black Audio Film Collective’s Handsworth Songs and Bracha Ettinger’s Eurydice series, are shown to take on and to re-cite fragments of existing historical representations whereby images, sounds, and textual fragments are de-contextualized and placed into new arrangements. Through the analysis of art works, I explore the expression of natality time and the opening of an interpretive space between being given a history and coming to act on that history. I show how the art works studied here insert themselves between a given event and the eventuality of its meaning, becoming performative interactions for practicing encounters with the past. Arriving late at the scene of the histories they reference, I argue that these art works take on what history gives as an end and artfully transform it into a beginning.
Throughout, it is encounters with art that provide opportunities to practice the forms of attention and imagination that are central to inheritance, and I show how the urgency of such practice is related to the present’s immersion in a deterministic time. I critique determinism and the sense of time it prescribes, arguing that determinism reduces the capacity for creative response. Determinism constructs human activities (including inheritance) as necessary and automatic processes that are determined in advance and naturalized rather than as uncertain practices that take place between people in the present. Returning to Arendt’s conception of natality, I propose a new temporal ground for inheritance, one that values uncertainty and contingency as fundamental aspects of human freedom.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1
Un-determining Time, Re-imagining Inheritance

In 2007, I began work as a Research Assistant on a book-length comparative study of two museum exhibitions of lynching photographs.¹ Part of my work on that project was to do research on other instances where taking or distributing photographs was implicated in, or became an extension of, socially sanctioned mass violence or murder. In these cases, such as the S-21 photographs taken as part of the Khmer Rouge extermination regime in 1975-1979, photography was not merely the means of documenting the aftermath of violence but was also an active part of it. Unsurprisingly, I found this research difficult. Not only because of the pain, suffering, and death recorded in most of the images, but also due to a strong sense of my own felt inadequacy in the face of these images. This inadequacy was specifically a sense that I was not up to the task (emotionally or intellectually) of looking at them or in formulating any kind of response to them. I felt at a loss.

I remember one morning in Trinity Library. While researching the Wehrmacht photographs,² I came across a set of images that have been widely circulated and discussed.³ The images in question were part of a series of seven photographs taken by a German soldier in the Gendarmerie on October 14, 1942 at Mizocz, Russia. These photographs depict the massacre of

² The Wehrmacht was the unified army of Germany from 1935-1945. The photographs in question were taken by soldiers and documented war crimes on the Eastern Front during World War II. See Simon (2014) for a discussion of these images and their exhibition.
³ These photographs appear in Alain Resnais’ 1955 film *Nuit et Brouillard/Night and Fog*. For a discussion of Resnais’ use of these photographs through a feminist frame, see Pollock, 2010.
the women and children of the Mizocz ghetto after a revolt had taken place earlier in October. The images are of a mass of women clustered together on a hillside, their bodies mostly naked. These photographs are well known and have been circulated widely, due no doubt in part to how these images, as Griselda Pollock (2010) argues, “re-absorb the event into pre-existing tropes which use eroticized or humiliated femininity to deflect from the encounter with death” (p. 853). These images are often described as possessing a certain ‘aesthetic’ quality tied to the visually available naked female body, making death into a beautiful sight to behold. In that moment in Trinity Library, however, the ‘aesthetic’ quality of these images did not deflect from my encounter with the intolerable violence and disregard for human life, but rather seemed to heighten my exposure. This was by no means the only terrible, frightening, or humiliating image I had encountered, and yet I was seized by what felt like the sudden, weighty knowledge of all that I had been studying. This prompted tears, followed by an impulse to turn away, shut the book, leave the library, leave the project. The lead researcher told me to take a break.

I didn’t leave the project. And, this moment has spurred more thinking than most. The unsettlement that this photograph evoked in me was partly to do with the fact that I knew I’d encountered the image before. The photograph strikes me as something unforgettable, and yet, I was unable to recall where or in what context I had seen it before. At the time, I took this as a kind of personal failing, as evidence that I had not lived with or been addressed by the image the

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4 From Pollock (2010): “Photographs in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum W/S #17875-79 (File #431.863). Sergeant Hille gave the photographs to the Czech lawyer for whom he worked as a doorman after the war, who handed them to the Czech government. They thus entered the public domain and Hille’s statements were confirmed in 1961 by Josef Paur also of the Gendarmerie” (p. 850).
first time I encountered it. But perhaps there is also something about the striking quality of the image—that it shows much more than one is prepared to see—that paradoxically facilitates the need to forget it. In other words, its ‘unforget-ability’ is precisely what makes forgetting it necessary. My own inadequacy before the image that I have described above is not a personal failing, but rather raises a set of complicated questions about how the past is mediated through images and words, how such mediations provoke or deter response, and how our encounter with the past through images and their appearances produces knowledge and thought.

What I have described as my first encounter with this photograph was already a return to something I had seen before and yet was not seen. This paradox grounds my work here. In my thinking about that paradoxical moment of seeing what I had seen but as a forgotten, or unacknowledged scene, that familiarity came to disturb me as much as the photo had unsettled me. This project investigates inheritance by critically examining works by artists that stage re-encounters with the past. The artists examined in this study have produced works of art that engage in an artful and imaginative re-presentation of images, sounds, or texts that have already found representation in history in forms such as archival photographs, news footage, transcripts, and video documentation. In my own encounter with the Mizocz images, the choice seemed to be between two simple options: turn away or keep staring. Neither option is a response. What the works of art studied here do is insert themselves between the viewer and the representation of the past, and between the moment of first encounter and subsequent ones. The works of art studied cite fragments of a history that is already familiar. The artists have produced works that de-familiarize these representations and open the paradoxical time of encounter with historical images so that we might think about what is happening in the re-encounter rather than simply a choice to look or to not look. An example of such an artwork that takes on the Mizocz
photograph we encountered above is Bracha Ettinger’s *Eurydice* series (1994-1996), which I will discuss here, and then in more detail in chapter 4. Each *Eurydice* painting is a composite that is based on, but that does not reproduce, the Mizocz photographs. Ettinger produces her paintings by first running the photograph through a photocopier, but she interrupts the photomechanical processing before the photocopy is heat-sealed. This produces an unfinished copy, which Ettinger then overlays with paint and other traces. What emerges is an echoic, indeterminate image that promises access but holds something back, raising questions about the appearance of the past and changing the experience of encounter with this difficult image. Some of the questions that ground my work here include: What kind of relationship to the past is developed through different kinds of images? Is art a barrier or an opening to historical understanding? Can looking be practiced? How do the circumstances of viewing matter for shaping such a practice of looking? Ettinger’s paintings add texture to the photograph through layers of paint and residues; the painting that emerges from this practice also textures the moment of reception or encounter with the image in that it hides as well as reveals, gesturing to the irretrievable distance between the present encounter and the scene of the photograph.

What I want to underline in this opening chapter about Ettinger’s paintings is how they expand the possibilities of the moment of re-encounter with (difficult) historical images. The paintings themselves are composites that display their own complicated production. Through the *Eurydice* series Ettinger expands our repertoire of response to a historical photograph, refusing to be constrained to the choice to either look or not look, and instead, invites the viewer into their own looking (and hers). Like Ettinger’s *Eurydices*, the works of art examined in this study take place in the paradoxical time between the past’s original representation through historical documentation (photographs, but also videos, transcripts) and our present encounter with them.
They are artful and imaginative re-presentations of images, sounds, and texts from the past. In that they all reference historical representations, these works of art are re-tellings of familiar historical narratives. These re-tellings occasionally seek not only to tell a different story within a familiar narrative structure but also to press the narrative structure itself, challenging how we make sense of the past through history and through cultural practices. Such artful and imaginative interventions grant the viewer practice in looking and becoming responsive to the call of the past that emerges through an encounter with historical images. My project investigates how such moments of re-encounter, vectored through cultural practice, might help enlarge our capacity for attention and imagination.

**Inheritance as Cultural Practice**

Rather than the more abstract phenomena of time or a more disciplinary concern with history, my work focuses on inheritance as cultural practice. Inheritance names the set of social and cultural practices through which time and history appear as “doings” or are activated in human practices. Such practices take place in a variety of social locations and institutions, including schools, family, religion, and government, and are mediated through various forms and registers such as education, public monuments and commemorations, museum exhibitions, festivals. Cultural practices of inheritance include any of the myriad ways in which the past is given form (whether material or abstract) and is made to appear in the present and becomes a concern for the present. At the forefront of questions of inheritance, then, are questions of appearances and the interpretation of those appearances. Inheritance becomes a cultural practice when the activities I have highlighted above are recognized as social and cultural constructions rather than natural or automatic phenomenon. Likewise, modes of reception that structure our encounters with the past are shaped in and by culture. Approaching inheritance as a cultural practice opens
up questions about those activities that comprise it, so for example, we can analyze what is at stake in how the past is given form through representation rather than assuming that the representation simply gives us access to what happened.

This project focuses specifically on one manifestation of inheritance as cultural practice: historically concerned works of art. Each of the body chapters of this dissertation will take up two or more works of art that reference a historical artifact or representation. Like Ettinger’s *Eurydices* the works of art become topos for reflection on the cultural practice of inheritance and the mediation of history through art.

What I have shown so far is that inheritance is cultural. But what does it mean to suggest that inheritance is a “practice”? The idea of “practice” is central for my own method of proceeding here, and thus will be taken up in more detail in chapter 3. Here, I wish to offer a preliminary discussion of what it means to call inheritance a practice.⁵ Above I have claimed that the present’s relationship to the past is shaped in and by culture. Such shaping is often hard to discern because it forms part of the taken for granted fabric of our collective lives. Our encounters with representations of the past (such as the Mizocz photographs) are always overwritten by past encounters, by narrative frameworks, and by our ingrained habits of attention. The repetitive and habitual character of our encounters with the past can make inheritance become “practiced” (in the sense of “the habitual doing or carrying on of something; usual, customary, or constant action or performance; conduct” (OED)) rather than “a practice.”

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⁵ For further discussion of practice, see Bourdieu (1990) and de Certeau (1984). Bourdieu (1990) describes the “logic of practice” which he shows is different from that of the logician. While there is a coherence to practice, it is not the fixed coherence of formal logic. De Certeau (1984) writes of how “practice” catches materials in their “form or phrasing” (p. xviii) rather than after they have already become fixed forms.
This happens when we regard inheritance as if it was simply a natural and automatic phenomenon and the past as if it were simply a collection of fixed and stable objects whose meanings always pre-exist our encounters with them. To call inheritance a “practice” is to insist that inheritance is always a task for the present, and that the past can be given different meaning and take on different forms. In this dissertation, I strive to make inheritance available for recognition as a practice in the sense of as “an action, a deed, an undertaking” (OED) in which we are in need of practice (a “repeated exercise in or performance of an activity so as to acquire, improve, or maintain proficiency in it” (OED)).

In this dissertation, I argue that interpretive engagements with works of art can help us practice what inheritance demands. Specifically, such engagements cultivate practice in ways of looking or forms of attention, and may expand our capacity for imagining times different from our own, both those of the past and the future. In my engagement with Ettinger’s Eurydices, for example, I find that Ettinger has refused the simple choice to either look away or continue to stare at the Mizocz photographs. Through her paintings, she has disclosed this refusal and proposed multiple ways of looking. In proliferating the ways in which an image from the past can appear, Ettinger opens up an interpretive situation in which I practice looking and expand my own repertoire. Each of the works of art discussed in later chapters will complicate the production and reception of inheritance through the scenes of encounter they stage. Through the analysis of

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6 Insisting on the present tense here brings my work in close connection with Raymond Williams (1977), who writes, “(t)he strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products…(a)nalysis is then centered on relations between these produced institutions, formations, and experiences, so that…only the fixed explicit fixed forms exist…” (p. 129).
the structures and forms of specific works of art, this dissertation will propose different ways of practicing inheritance.

In recent years there has been a proliferation of works by artists that take up questions of time, history, and inheritance. Much has been written about the “archival turn,” ruins have become objects of cultural fascination, and just about everyone is re-enacting something these days. Major exhibitions from the last eight years include: History will Repeat Itself (2007/2008) at Kunst-Werke Berlin, Not Quite How I Remember It (2008) at The Power Plant Toronto, Ahistoric Occasion: Artists Making History (2007) at MASSMoCA, Boston, and Found in Translation (2011) at Guggenheim New York City. The range of artists working on issues related to history are many, including William Kentridge, Kara Walker, Jeremy Deller, Omar Fast, Mark Tribe, Deanna Bowen, Yael Bartana, BLW, Zbigniew Libera, The Atlas Group, The Otolith Group, Walid Raad, and Iris Hausler. Likewise, in recent years there has been a burgeoning interest in scholarship related to questions of time (Lim, 2009; Grosz, 2004; Grosz, 2005), queer time (Halberstam, 2005; Love, 2007; Freeman, 2010), historical memory studies (Simon, 2014; Apel, 2002, 2012; McKim, 2008), trauma studies (Caruth, 1995, Bennett, 2005), and cultural representation of all of the above (Skoller, 2005; O’Sullivan, 2005; Bennett, 2012; Schneider, 2011). In short, art and scholarship are increasingly preoccupied with the past. What

7 On historically concerned works of art, see Rothberg (2012); Mark Godfrey (2007); the special issue to Texte Zur Kunst on history (vol. 76, December 2009); Dieter Roelstrate (2009); on nostalgia see Paolo Magagnoli (2011).
8 http://www.kwberlin.de/en/exhibitions/
10 http://www.massmoca.org/event_details.php?id=77
has not been fully explored in the existing literature is the question of the temporal grounding of cultural practices of inheritance, and how those temporal grounds might be re-thought. In this dissertation, I am concerned not with the past in general but with the question of what art can offer as inheritance practice on two fronts: (1) As imaginative performances of inheritance that disclose different ways of making a relationship between the past and the present and, (2) As frames for cultivating forms of attention and imaginative capacities that expand the repertoire of how we engage with temporal otherness.

The Temporal Grounds of Inheritance

Any given practice of inheritance (e.g., a museum exhibition or a history textbook) can be analyzed so as to reveal the typically unarticulated sense of time and history that grounds its appearance, the form it takes, and its say-ability. The sense of time that grounds a given practice of inheritance shapes the conditions under which the past makes its mediated appearance in the present. The dominant sense of time in our culture is deterministic time, and thus most popularly sanctioned practices of inheritance are grounded in determinism. An inheritance practice grounded in determinism will tend to present the past as a fixed and completed object embedded in a predetermined chronology, serving to confirm the present. A recent example of such is the proposed monument “Mother Canada” that has received support from the federal government. “Mother Canada” is a monolithic statue, a towering 30-metre high Colossus of a caped female figure with her arms stretched out to sea. The figure is based on a much smaller statue of a woman with downcast eyes from the Canadian National Vimy Ridge memorial in France. In Cape Breton, this statue will be the centerpiece of larger memorial “complex”

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12 For a discussion of the “say-able” as a phenomenon worthy of study, see Tanya Titchkosky (2008).
commemorating Canada’s war dead and military. This complex will eventually include a “We See Thee Rise Observation Deck,” and “The Commemorative Ring of True Patriot Love,” a low wall featuring names of cemeteries around the world in which Canadian soldiers are interred. This is an example of inheritance grounded in deterministic time in that the statue does not challenge dominant and widely held beliefs about nationalism, patriotism, and the military. The statue and the monument complex serves to reflect back to us a story we already know (echoed in the elements of the complex named after lines from Canada’s national anthem). This proposal has prompted criticism for its location in a natural reserve and from locals, but has received enthusiastic support from Stephen Harper’s Conservative government. That the federal government so enthusiastically supports this monument to the Canadian military’s past glories and can at the same time defund Veteran’s’ service organizations demonstrates the dangerous attractions of deterministic time, and the way it can shift hearts and minds to a glorified past and draw attention away from the present.

If the past is reduced to simply confirming and conforming to the present, what is minimized is its interruptive potential, the possibility that the past in its particularity, strangeness and difference from the present might challenge or disorganize the present’s taken for granted arrangements. Inheritance grounded in deterministic logics fail to “dismantle the institutional basis of the present arrangements of human life…[and does not] ask us to rethink who we are [but rather] to accept the present as an accumulation of injuries” (Walcott, 2011, p. 346).

13 See Renzetti (2014).
14 See Taber (2014) and Brewster (2014)
The encounters with works of art that forms the heart of my dissertation provide inspiration for thinking more fundamentally about the temporal and narrative forms embedded in inheritance. All of the artists studied in this dissertation take up some archival or historical document (newsreels, archival films and photographs, iconic photographs, transcripts of speeches). Each is tied to a specific historical context: social unrest in Britain in the mid 1980s (Black Audio Film Collective) [Chapter 4], destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943 (Bak, Panov) [chapter 5], 1960s and 70s protest speeches in USA (Port Huron, BLW) [chapter 6]. What is common to all of these historical contexts is that they have all found representation in media and in mass culture such that they are familiar and have already been made material for history; they are part of a master narrative of history. The artists I engage with each take on available documents, images, texts, etc. Seizing upon fragments of that given history and using strategies such as juxtaposition, montage, re-enactment, they create a different point of view from and through that material.

I approach these works of art as expressions of inheritance that attempt to counter determinism by unsettling the temporal grounds on which inheritance is practiced. Using Hannah Arendt’s (1958/1998, 175ff) concept of natality, I show how the human always exceeds determinism, and I theorize inheritance grounded in the time of natality. Natality is important here for its temporality. As I will show in more detail in chapter 2, natality discloses a human temporality that is already our condition but that is concealed by the (often unquestioned) way that determinism infuses collective life and thinking in the present. Natality discloses a time that is fundamentally at odds with determinism and certainty, one that values contingency and multiple

\[15\] I borrow some of this phrasing from Michael Rothberg (2012). Rothberg (2012): “an inspiration for thinking more fundamentally about the narrative form embedded in…transitional justice” (p. 4).
possibilities. Natality is important not only for its challenge to the dominance of determinism; the temporality disclosed in natality also holds together a capacity for newness or beginnings and a responsiveness to what is. In other words, natality time is a time that is anchored in ‘what is’ or reality, but not in a way that takes ‘what is’ as inevitable. Chapter 2 does the work of exploring three temporal themes that inhere in natality and sets up how I use natality as a basis for reimagining a temporal ground for inheritance. The works of art discussed in later chapters disclose or manifest this sense of time and proliferate multiple notions of inheritance from their temporal grounding in natality.

**Determinism and its Discontents**

Before continuing the discussion of inheritance as a cultural practice, it is important to further contextualize deterministic time and why it is a worthy target for critique. Determinism is alive in the present and operates with many names—historical, biological, sociological, economic, and aesthetic. What is common to all of these various forms of determinism is a sense of time. Determinism is grounded in closed time that values cause ahead of all other forms of relationship. Determinism’s sense of time has been explored by Gary Morson (2010), who shows that determinisms of all kinds, including Christian, scientific, and materialist determinism, share a common chronotope. In the deterministic chronotope, time is closed, “all events are in principle knowable,” and “the world is certain” (Morson, 2010, p. 96). A reliance on determinism allows the belief in a naturalized time and a world that operates causally. Historical

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16 See Curtis (1999)

17 The “chronotope” is Bakhtin’s (2004) notion to describe the literary representation of time-space. According to Bakhtin (2004), in the chronotope, “time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, history” (p. 84).
determinism would for example arrange the past, present, and future as a casual lineage, so past actions are selectively arranged and shown to lead fairly straightforwardly to the present or by extension to an already known future. Deterministic time rationalizes the world into a series of interlocking systems governed by natural laws that need only to be discovered in order to produce totalized knowledge and certain prediction.

A recent example of such from the Canadian news media is Stephen Harper’s assertion that the death of Tina Fontaine is “not a sociological phenomenon” (Harper, as quoted in Boutiller, 2014). Fontaine was a 14-year-old aboriginal woman whose body was found in Winnipeg in the summer of 2014. Amid calls for an inquiry into the murder and disappearances of aboriginal women that would link Fontaine’s to systemic issues and to history, Harper asserted that her death was simply an isolated episode that did not require further investigation beyond its simple cause (i.e. to find the person who murdered her). Thus, in Harper’s denial of “sociological phenomenon,” I find a refusal of inheritance and a turn away from reality’s complications towards simple cause.

With respect to the past, determinism reduces the past to the cause of the present’s effect and restricts our imaginative capacity for making relationships across temporal distance. Writing against determinism and closed time, Morson (2010) insists that time must be open in order for the world and life in it to be meaningful (p. 105). When “determinism destroys uncertainty,” (p. 105), it threatens to transform life from “a process into mere product” (p. 110). Grounded in determinism, inheritance becomes into a simple act of possession that seems automatic or natural. As Morson (2010) writes, with echoes of Bakhtin: “Humanness demands a chronotope allowing for real agency and enduring that, at every moment, the next could be more than one
thing” (p. 110). Uncertainty is therefore more than an error or a lack of knowledge and becomes the condition for human freedom.18

My dissertation will engage in temporal critique (Lim, 2009) of deterministic time in order to re-think the temporal grounds of inheritance practices. Deterministic time has been critiqued by many thinkers and writers before me, including Walter Benjamin (1955/1968), Mikael Bakhtin (1981/2004), Henri Bergson (1908/1998), and Hannah Arendt (1958/1998; 1961/2006; 1954/2006). All of these thinkers saw the promise of critiquing the (often unarticulated) temporal grounding of human activities. Walter Benjamin (1955/1968) engaged in a sustained critique of historicism and the attendant concept of progress, and the idea of time that underlies both. He identified “homogenous, empty time” as the deep temporal structure that grounded and normalized the idea of progress and historicism and showed how this sense of time allowed people to turn away from the material realities of their present, evacuating the present of agency in favour of the “fairy tale” of progressive historicism. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981/2004) described the temporal features of literature, writing against “closed time” and showing how deterministic chronotopes organized time into a closed system that severely restricts possibility and human freedom. Henri Bergson (1908/1998) targeted the spatialization of time and the reductive rationalism that accompanied it, proposing through his notion of “duration” an alternative and experiential time that opens onto expanded understandings of human freedom and the relationship between past, present, and future.

18 Without uncertainty, freedom becomes equivalent to the choice between two pregiven alternatives (rather than the moment of hesitation before the unknown).
Finally, while Hannah Arendt seems not to write directly about time, her work is infused with a preoccupation with temporality and historicity as they relate to the question of the human and the ability to make meanings in and of the “dark times” in which she lived, times characterized by the shattering of traditional ways of knowing and being in the world. Like Bergson (1908/1998) and Bakhtin (1981/2004), Arendt (1958/1998; 1961/2006; 1954/2006) critiqued closed time and warned of the disaster that would result if human activity were subsumed under determinism and necessity. All of these thinkers valued the act of exposing the unarticulated sense of time that grounds thought and imagination, especially where the idea of the past is concerned. Arendt will be my most constant companion in this dissertation, but I will and have drawn on all four of these thinkers and inherited much from them in the impetus for this work. In this way, these thinkers provide the ground for my own rethinking of the sense of time that underpins inheritance practices.

To demonstrate how this is so and how the critique of closed time is significant now, I take up one example from contemporary times although there are, of course, many. Neoliberalism relies on an underlying temporality of determinism. By neoliberalism I mean the increased absorption of more and more areas of human life (education, birth, health to name a few) into the terms and values of economic rationalism. Neoliberalism depends on closed time; never has a more succinct summation of the closed time described by Morson (2010) been uttered than Margaret Thatcher’s famous slogan, “There Is No Alternative.” Driven by the temporal motors of determinism, causality, and instrumentality, neoliberalism comes to seem natural and obvious. Inevitability and cause gain ascendancy and seem to have unmatched explanatory powers for thinking anything and everything (including human affairs). To argue that there are alternatives is to contradict the logical force of Thatcher’s proclamation. Under the dominance of
neoliberalism, what is threatened is precisely what Arendt (1958/1998) and Bakhtin (1981/2004) have described in various ways as the heart of the human condition: chance, possibility, and newness. Under neoliberalism, these things come to seem like a waste of time. The triumph of cause, and a visual culture oriented to and by a belief in the obviousness of causality, results in the reduction of the human condition.

Determinism has shaped our present into a time of “reduced temporal imagination” (Rothberg, 2012). Our ability to imagine time, to think time, has been constrained by what Agancski calls “the western hour” and Hernandez-Navarro (2011) terms “chronological imperialism”: homogenizing forces of globalization and capitalism that shape time into an externalized, standardized system and then exported it to all corners of the world. The multiplicity of time has been gradually displaced by “the time of capital” (Hernandez-Navarro, 2011, p. 192), in which the multiple rhythms of human existence give way to the more regular and regulated rhythms of commodity production. The regular time of commodity production of industrialization gives way now to the instant, to acceleration. What results in both cases is “suppression of temporal distances: a suppression of waiting, of transition, of intervals of the in between” (Hernandez-Navarro, 2011, p. 192). Under such conditions, end points are valued over intervals, and we are turned away from practices and towards products.

**Inheritance as a Task**

Grounded in deterministic time, inheritance appears as if it were an automatic or natural process and loses its sense of being a practice or a task that is performed by people in a social context. What determinism covers over is the fact that the introduction of the human into history is never an automatic process; the human is “always in need of translation or mediation in order to accede its historicity” (Simon, 2000, p. 23). That there is always this gap between historicity and the
“I” who arrives belatedly to assume responsibility for it means the human is never identical to its historicity even as the historicity belongs to it and demands response (response-ability). In fact, as we will see, it is this gap or difference that initiates the possibility of response. The gap between the “I” and historicity is echoed in a series of other gaps that organize our relationship to history, such as between the past and the present, and between being given a history (through forms of mediation or translation) and coming to take on that history. The human enters a scene of history that is already unfolding and is situated in a history that is not of their own making.\textsuperscript{19} This condition names historicity, “the fact, quality, or character of being situated in history[ies]” (OED, my italics). That we are situated beings has a big meaning for inheritance, in that it suggests a fundamental gap between each individual human who arrives and the context into which they arrive, pointing to the need for “mediation or translation.”

Activities of mediation can take different forms, and art is but one. In inheritance practices grounded in determinism, the mediation is done in such a way that either that erases mediation as an activity, hence furthering the appearance of a natural or automatic inheritance, or that attempts to suture the gap and hence make a seamless continuity between the individual and history. Either way, the gap that exists between the individual and history is closed over and history comes to seem like a natural, obvious or automatic possession.\textsuperscript{20} Determinism does the work of making identical, of answering difference with sameness, and develops a relationship between past and present that is characterized by cause or by identification and projection.

\textsuperscript{19} See Marx (1852) on this point. Marx writes, “Men [sic] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living” (para. 2).

\textsuperscript{20} See Ahmed (2006).
A quite different way of translating or mediating the past would be a form of mediation that does not seek to cover over or fill the gaps, that takes the gaps as central to our ability to respond to the past. It is by acknowledging and preserving these gaps that inheritance becomes a task rather than a habitual undertaking. As Derrida (1994) remarks: “Inheritance is never a given, it is always a task. It remains before us” (p. 16). Derrida (1994) writes of the necessity to filter and sift: “If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as a cause—natural or genetic” (p. 16, my italics). This passage announces inheritance as an uncertain task, and one that requires the work and the interpretive involvement of those to seek to accomplish it. Taking this seriously means finding a temporal ground for inheritance that would preserve rather than settle the tension between the “I” and its historicity.

**Art as Cultural Practice**

Playing on Derrida’s (1994) suggestion of the “readability of a legacy” above, works of art and the potential experience they grant become particularly interesting sites for studying practices of inheritance. In this initial chapter, I want to provide some preliminary account of why I have chosen to focus on works of art. This accounting is necessary in part since the designation “art” comes with a lot of baggage. The label “art” serves many social functions, including doing the work of drawing a boundary line between certain kinds of cultural practices. This line serves the purposes of exclusion and elitism, as well as divorcing certain realms of human creative activity from social and cultural life, which has the effect of flattening out the creative and aesthetic nature of perception, interpretation, and everyday life (Williams, 1977; Bennett, 2012). I have already begun to introduce inheritance as a cultural practice, and historically concerned works of
art as one manifestation of this cultural practice. My use of the terminology of “works of art” may seem to contradict my commitment to understanding these as cultural practices. Somewhat helpful here is Barbara Bolt’s (2004) distinction between “artwork” and “works of art” (p. 5, 111-122). Whereas “artwork” is a noun and refers to the object quality of the work, “work of art” places emphasis on the verb “to work” and draws attention to the dynamic and practice-based qualities of art. In this dissertation, I will consistently use the terminology of “work of art” or “works of art” in an attempt to signal and foreground the mediated and practice-based qualities of works of art. But while Bolt’s (2004) distinction is somewhat helpful, it by no means settles the matter.

This tension between the language of “art” and that of cultural practice is an important one for my project, and one that cannot be resolved at the outset or through a simple shift in terminology. All of the works I study in later chapters come from and exist within an institutional art context. This is, in a way, my inheritance, as these works come to me already coded in specific ways and marked as “art” by those who produced them, by the public discourse surrounding them, or by virtue of the location in which they have made their appearance (art galleries, exhibitions, art fairs). Here I want to acknowledge my reservations about the designation “art” not by offering a categorical definition of what “art” is (or is not), but rather by further specifying how I am approaching art here.

The designation “the arts” is often made to function through the logic of what Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2013b) has called “the rhetoric of effects.” (p. 638). Gaztambide-Fernández (2013b) suggests, “within this rhetoric of effects, ‘the arts’ are construed as things-in-

21 See Harvard Educational Review volume 83, issues 1-4 for discussion of these ideas across several issues.
themselves that can be applied in order to modify circumstances or individuals towards a predefined or predictable outcome” (p. 638). What Gaztambide-Fernández calls the “rhetoric of effects” could also be called aesthetic determinism. Similar to the other forms of determinism I have already introduced, aesthetic determinism is grounded in a uni-linear causality that grants a prescriptive power to the art object, and determines the experience in advance. The rhetoric of effects serves to hollow out and abstract “the arts” from social practices and people, and “the arts” come to circulate as instrumental and agentive “do-ers”. Gaztambide-Fernández (2013b) reminds us that “arts don’t do,” and offers a “rhetoric of cultural production” that foregrounds the unfinished and expressive aspects of arts practices. “The arts” take place between people and in social contexts. The rhetoric of cultural production “begins from the assumption that culture is constantly being made and remade through the symbolic work that pervades people’s lives and that it is in this making and remaking that lay the prospects for social transformation” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013b, p. 639).

To begin from a cultural production approach is to move away from a definitional or categorical concern with what art is or is not, and towards questions of cultural practice. “(H)ow [do] relations evolve in the context of these projects?” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013a, p. 9). What is at stake in the work and for whom? Who or what is being addressed? Why now? What changes when we approach art as a cultural practice is the level of specificity—we become interested in specific projects, encounters, and environments. Another change is the foregrounding of relationships and modes of being together—“art” can be thought about not as an object but as social and cultural practices that are made and re-made in the midst of people. “Art” is not

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22 For a discussion of aesthetic determinism in relation to Bakhtin, see Erdinast-Vulcan (2010).
instrumental and deterministic but rather “sets up a frame within which to have experiences, within which to have relationships” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013a, p. 10). The works of art I analyze are approached here as frames that condition the public re-appearance of the mediated past. The artists, through their works, grant an experience or at least the potential of an experience. It is that experience that this dissertation examines. Taking the idea of cultural practice seriously is not only a question of terminology. It is also, and perhaps even more importantly, a question of methods or approaches, and therefore in chapter 3 we will return to the idea of art as cultural practice and what this implies in terms of the principles that animate my analysis and my ways of proceeding.

Referential Tensions

The title of this dissertation is “Referential Tensions.” This phrase too has a history; I have inherited it from Walter Benjamin via Roger I. Simon (1992), and my understanding of it and its significance has been touched by both of these thinkers. “Referential tensions” has multiple meanings that are setting the stage for my analysis of aesthetic encounters with the demands of the practices of inheritance. This phrase first signals the tensions inherent in performing a return of an image, of referencing an image or a fragment of a past image and returning it to the present in a recontextualized or reimagined form. Any form of referencing or citation, even the most mundane, involves enacting a temporal relationship between what is being cited and its re-appearance in a different context. Such a relationship can be grounded in the reproduction of the status quo or can prompt reconsiderations of what is being referenced and the circumstances of its re-appearance. For Benjamin, the formation of the dialectical image involved a double movement of de-contextualization where “historical fragments were blown free of the codifying structures that entrapped them” (Simon, 1992, p. 144) and a subsequent re-contextualization,
where these fragments were caught “up again in new sets of discursive relations” (p. 144). Of this activity, Simon (1992) says, “(t)he intent is not to collapse past and present but to hold them together in mutually referential tension” (p. 144). Doing so demands that there is a distance between them (i.e. that the past is not made identical to the present) and that the re-contextualization does not simply and smoothly integrate the past into the new context. To hold two elements together “in mutually referential tension” is to preserve the two-ness and something of the unique and specific legacy of each. Simon theorizes the “tension” as the moment that makes inheritance possible. The job of the cultural theorist is to enliven that tension as a place in which to explore inheritance as cultural practice.

The phrase “referential tensions” is also touched by Derrida’s (1994) point about the aporetic structure of inheritance, the necessity of preserving rather than resolving the fundamental tension between “a pledge of fidelity to the past and to a necessary infidelity” that would return the past through “recreative acts of interpreting and circulating the past” in a way that addresses the present (Di Paolantonio 2009, p. 132).

This study examines works of art as inheritance practices, asking after how a given moment of citation staged through art upholds or collapses the “referential tensions” that inhere therein.

The works of art I will analyze in the chapters of my dissertation insert themselves into the gap between reception and possession that Ahmed (2006) has pointed to, and insist on opening and attenuating that gap. In doing so, they put in question the natural-ness of inheritance, including the habitual ways in which we relate to and interact with visual media, image, and aesthetics. The works will also provide an opportunity think through gaps and intervals. The gaps and intervals attended to are not only between actions and their eventual meanings but also between
inheritance and social reproduction (see Ahmed, 2006), and between the work and the viewer. In addition to being grounded in a certain notion of time and history, any given practice of inheritance also involves representation and an addressee—the form of mediation through which the past makes its appearance, and someone to whom this past appears and who responds to its appearance, as well as who is imagined and invited as capable of responding.  

Gadamer (2004) writes of the centrality of address for understanding the past: “(t)he world view of the past makes a claim, via text, on the present…[and] understanding begins…when something addresses us” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305). This mediated quality of historical knowledge will make representation and modes of appearing central concerns for this project. This demands an analysis of specific artistic practices and of the terms of reception that enable us to make meaning from and act on what is inherited.

Preview of Dissertation

The next chapter delves further into Arendt’s (1958/1998) idea of natality and demonstrates what an inheritance practice grounded in the time of natality might entail. Chapter 3 is a consideration of methods. Chapter 4 examines the essayistic film practice of the Black Audio Film Collective as a way of further exploring the temporality of natality as it is manifested through the Collective’s imaginative use of images and sounds. By poeticizing and aestheticizing the Handsworth disturbances and through the insertion of a much longer history, Handsworth Songs activates natality and potentially inspires a rethinking of what grounds our taken-for-granted notions of representation and narrative. Chapter 5 considers the work of Bracha Ettinger and Samuel Bak, and their translations of historical photographs into paintings. This chapter also

23 Thanks to Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández for help with this formulation.
considers a short film by Mitov Panov that is also oriented towards animating and re-imagining an iconic photograph. All of these projects are creative responses to past images that work to dislodge an image from its previous capture in traditions. In so doing, I explore how they open up new modes of reception based in natality time and an opportunity to practice cultivating different ways of looking at historical images. Chapter 6 examines the contemporary phenomenon of re-speaking through a comparison of Mark Tribe’s *The Port Huron Project* and BLW’s respeakings. Here, I engage with how these two respeaking projects differently re-imagine politics and public space, creating a resonance between protest cultures of an earlier era and the possibility of a creative solidarity in the present.
Chapter 2
Natality, Action, and Human time

This chapter continues to engage with Arendt, here using her idea of natality as a place to begin re-thinking inheritance outside of determinism. Arendt’s writing is key in that it brings together a concern for inheritance and history as well as an interest in aesthetics. While Arendt is perhaps not the most the obvious choice for addressing works of art as inheritance practices, her writing is characterized by an abiding concern with appearance and response, and thus, following Kimberley Curtis (1999), I argue that Arendt helps us turn towards the complexity of reality that deterministic time threatens. Arendt demonstrates our capacity to make a creative response to the world, and it is precisely this that determinism curtails.24

Arendt and Processual Time

Arendt (1958/1998; 1978) diagnosed the dangers of living in a time ruled by “processual temporality,” a “fatal modern structure of temporality…that runs from the beginnings of modernity through twentieth century totalitarianism up to post-war capitalist society” (Braun, 2007, p. 5). The crux of processual temporality is the subordination of human activities to “laws of nature” or “laws of history,” a subordination which for Arendt (1951/1973) constituted the temporal underpinnings of totalitarianism and the loss of human agency, specifically the loss of what she understood as the fundamental characteristic of the human: the capacity for action. Under conditions of processual temporality, determinism rules the day. Arendt (2006) called the idea that “there is such a thing as a historical process with a definable direction and a predictable end” a “progress or doom” mentality (p. 101, my italics) and she claimed that the reliance on an

24 See Titchkosky and Michalko (2012).
idea of historical process as having a definite direction and a predictable end “can land us only in paradise or in hell” (p. 101).\textsuperscript{25} Thus “processual thought” brings together time and history under the sign of “cause” or “determinism.”

Arendt (1978) provided at least one story of how processual thought came to triumph over other ways of understanding and narrating human activities. Arendt (1978, 1961/2006) often articulated her conviction that the great Western philosophic and political traditions had been irrevocably shattered, and that the authority of these traditions could not be restored. For Arendt (1978) such shattering held great promise, which I will discuss in more detail later, but she suggests that such a shattering represents great risk. When the thread of tradition is cut, we lose our basis of authority—we lose the very framework or the set of principles that guide action and thought. This is an uncomfortable situation. When people are not prepared to live and think in this “in-between,” they seek suture and continuity by borrowing a powerful explanatory device from the realm of nature, namely, cause. For Arendt, cause is most at home in the natural realm but in times of crisis it travels to the realm of human affairs. We replace our reliance on traditions (whatever tradition) with a reliance on cause. We seek authority in cause and over time, the human world becomes saturated in cause. Occurrences are divorced from the realm of human activity and become abstracted, coming to seem obvious and self-evident.

In the human realm, including cultural practices of inheritance,\textsuperscript{26} Arendt (1954/2005b) calls cause an “altogether alien and falsifying category” (p. 319). Under conditions of processual

\textsuperscript{25} Arendt (1961/2006) argued that any image of history as “a process or stream or development” leads to a failure to discern specificities—a turning away from the present realities and a reliance on false equivalence (totalitarianism and authoritarianism) to analyze specific realities and discern differences. This image of history “as process or stream or development” (p. 101) leads both ideologies to fail to make distinctions or analyze specific realities (such as the difference between totalitarianism and authoritarianism).
thought and closed time, cause “becomes the hammer to all of history’s nails” (Giles, 2007, p. 38). Human activity, Arendt argued, was being reduced to some thing that was regarded as being fully determined by nature or fully determined by a reductive sense of history (temporal process or calendar time). In this circumstance, the human is reduced and made equivalent with the processes of nature on one hand or the processes of history on the other. Arendt vehemently critiqued this reductionism and, through her writings on natality, action, and thinking, maintained that the human can never be fully determined by nature or history.

Three Senses of Time in Arendt

At least three distinct senses of time appear in Arendt’s (1978; 1958/1998) writing. The first corresponds to what she called “labor” and the animal laborans; this sense of time is “natural time” and it is associated with necessity, cyclical flow, endless process, routine, and repetition (1958/1998, p. 7). Think of doing laundry—ceaseless repetition. The second goes by various names in her work but here I will call it “calendar time.” This sense of time is characterized by the predictable and enduring course of everyday life, by actions of continuing along a trajectory of “thoroughgoing spatiality” fixed by the calendar (1978, p. 205). Calendar time interrupts natural time’s ceaseless flow and shapes time into a continuum, where the past appears as

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26 “Although events appear sequentially in the hindsight of history, when historians relegate a specific event to its place in a sequence, as if it could be fully comprehended as an effect of preceding and a cause of succeeding events, they explain away its political significance” (Kohn, 2006, p. xiii).

27 Also characteristic of processual thought is the means-end logic and the subordination of the specific to the general.

28 Anne O’Byrne (2010): “Only when our horizons have shrunk so far that the way things are is understood as the way they have always been, only then is the triumph [of animal laborans]—and indeed history—complete” (p. 103).
“behind us” and the future as ahead (1978, p. 206), creating the present as the more or less fixed vantage point from which we can “take our bearings, looking backward and looking forward” (1978, p. 206). The present in calendar time appears as a stable, smooth middle. Both natural time and calendar time are part of human existence and are necessary for sustaining life on earth and for creating an enduring world into which we arrive and live. However, even as these two times are necessary for human survival and life, they are by no means sufficient.

According to Arendt (1958/1998), there is a third time that escapes and exceeds both natural time and calendar time. This is the time of what Arendt (1958/1998) calls “natality” and “action.” Natality is more than a temporal phenomenon, but here I want to concentrate on its temporal characteristics and how these provide the grounds for re-imagining inheritance. Natality names a contingent and unpredictable temporality that is characterized by beginnings whose ends are uncertain, by the introduction of a new-ness that cannot be expected from what came before it (even as it may have been conditioned by what preceded it), and by a belated quality that contradicts the immediacy of labor and the continuity of work. Thus, natality time interrupts the ceaseless flow of natural time and the predictability of calendar time with a sense of time that is neither expected nor predictable but is rather “a syncopated temporality” (O’Byrne, 2010, p. 13). “Syncopated” can be understood in the musical sense of rhythm and its offbeat, where the syncopation interrupts the regular beat of the musical composition, which in relation to inheritance gestures towards an interruption of the smooth flow of history. But the Greek root of the word, “syncope” suggests another layer of meaning that speaks to inheritance. Syncope [from syn “together,” and koptein “to cut”] brings together the actions of “cutting together,” suggesting both distance and proximity, a separation that re-joins but complicates as it does so.
The Promise of Natality: Three Temporal Themes

The specific aspect of natality that I wish to explore in detail here is its temporality. I show that natality discloses a human temporality that can be marshaled against determinism. Natality reminds us that humans always occupy a paradoxical temporality that exceeds determinism and cause. The promise of natality for re-imagining inheritance will only be fulfilled through this project as a whole, but it is worthwhile here in Chapter 2 to provide a preliminary thematic of natality’s promise. I do so here around three themes: (1) newness, (2) betweenness, and (3) belatedness. These themes are so intertwined that it is false to hold them apart like this; I do so not to suggest their discreteness but to be able to attend to each one of them in detail.

Newness

Arendt (1958/1998) derives the idea of natality from birth, the literal arrival of the human into the world. Natality also names a capacity that humans are endowed with by virtue of their birth—the capacity to begin. What is the character of this “newness” that Arendt derives from birth? The newness of birth, its unexpected and surprising character, is not equivalent with novelty. While a new human baby is never predetermined before its arrival, it does not come from nowhere. As Tanya Titchkosky (2003) reminds us, we are never alone in our birth but always come into the world “as a consequence of other people’s words and deeds, and our beginning in the world is marked first and foremost with what those others have already begun, already thought, and have already understood” (p. 163-164). This “already” marks newness

29 Kampowski (2008) on what Arendt considered to be St. Augustine’s greatest insight: “In order, he says, that there may be novelty, a beginning must exist; ‘and this beginning never before existed,’ that is, not before Man’s creation. Hence, that such a beginning ‘might be, man was created before whom nobody was’” (p. 190, footnote 120). Kampowski is drawing from Arendt, 1978, p. 180.
with a context, a necessary in-between, and a conditioned-ness. This conditioned-ness marks a kind of relationality and interconnection with others that is part of our condition.\(^{30}\)

Arendt (1958/1998) placed great stress on newness and the human’s capacity to begin something new through action, but this should not be understood as a radical newness untouched by what preceded it. As Markell (2014) states, “the primary way we experience action is not by finding our way to it when it is absent, but by finding ourselves in the midst of what we or others have already begin—a locution, a notice, that already implies that action has a duration; that is not just a moment, but a course” (p. 115). The experience of beginning in the middle is related to the idea of human’s historical situation that was discussed in the previous chapter and is why the past cannot simply be seen, but rather is produced and re-produced through cultural practices of inheritance. The newness of natality is not the spontaneous or instantaneous appearance of that which has never been seen before but is rather a newness that emerges through and in the midst of the words and deeds of others, and arrives into an already unfolding scene. This arrival is marked not as a repetition or reproduction of what pre-exists it but as something different and unexpected. Natality’s newness is paradoxical—new but at the same times always belated and emerging in a between space—between two or more people, between the individual and the world, and between the past and the present (Levinson, 2001).

**Betweenness**

As stated, there is always a gap between the human’s arrival in the world and the historicity that human must assume responsibility for; this gap is what inheritance grounded in deterministic

\(^{30}\) Thanks to Stephanie Springgay for help with this formulation. For a further discussion of the video essay in terms of relationality and pedagogy, see Springgay (2008).
time seeks to fill or cover over. The paradoxical time of natality calls us to take this gap and the need for mediation differently. Natality values gaps not as things that need to be filled, but rather as places of possibility from which and in which we can make a relation to what is not-me. Natality de-naturalizes our possession of the past and introduces a fundamental contingency and uncertainty into inheritance. It is never certain or necessary that the human will come to possess the history in which we are situated. Natality says there is always a gap or a space between.

Granting value to the “betweenness” or the gap connects natality with Henri Bergson’s (1908/1998) conception of duration. Bergson (1908/1998), writing at the brink of the twentieth century, harshly critiqued what he regarded as the spatialization and instrumentalization of time. He opposed spatialized time to his notion of duration. Duration names a mode of temporal synthesis very different from determinism. Duration attends to the rhythms of time and the multiple and heterogeneous coexisting temporalities that can be intuited in any given present. The idea of the interval or the in-between is central to Bergsonian duration. The interval is especially important for Bergson (1908/1998) because it functions as the “centre of indetermination,” the gap between a received stimulus and response (freedom in hesitation not in choice). For Bergson (1908/1998), disregarding the interval means that spatialized time is “concerned only with the ends of the intervals and not with the intervals themselves” (Bergson, 1911, p. 9). Spatialized time can deal with “instants” and fixed points but only duration can approach the interval. The interval is the space of relation—what joins one point to another, the in between.

31 According to Olkowski (1999), interval is “that moment between a received stimulus and an executed movement, that is, the interval of duration between affective excitation and reaction” (p. 83)
This gap or space in-between is the present, which Arendt (2006) conceptualized as a space between the “no longer” and the “not yet”—a critical space for thought rather than an empty middle as it is conceived of under conditions of processual time. When the present is conceived of as an in-between, human action undertaken in the present can be understood as interrupting the inexorable progress of time. As Braun (2007) demonstrates, action “disrupts the time of process and opens up the time of the interval. It brings the current time to a close insofar as it stops time’s race towards the future and breaks open a time span in the present, a time between limits” (p. 20). In its interruptive character, action, which operates according to the syncopated time of natality, opens “a time span in the present,” (Braun, 2007, p. 20) so that rather than being the inevitable result of a given past or the unchangeable empty time between past and future, the present is held open as the time of thought and action, where newness might potentially enter the world. In chapter 3, I expand on natality’s quality of betweenness in relation to interpretation as this pertains to the aesthetic encounter.

To bring this idea of a gap or a space between to bear on inheritance, it is helpful to turn to Ahmed’s (2006) work on the gap between reception and social reproduction. Ahmed (2006) also shows that inheritance has a double meaning: “the word inheritance includes two meanings: to receive and to possess. In a way, we convert what we receive into possessions, a conversion that often ‘hides’ the conditions of having received, as if the possession is too simply ‘already there’” (p. 126). By parsing the doubled nature of inheritance, she imagines an in-between moment of conversion between two meanings of inheritance. What Ahmed (2006) asks us to attend to is the difference within inheritance—to remember that “reception” and “possession” are two different activities. When separated, reception becomes thinkable as an activity rather than a naturalized habit where things are simply “there” or “given” to be reproduced. At stake in opening the gap
between reception and possession is the chance to re-enliven the activity of reception and the capacity to relate to it as an activity, and thus to do more with what we are ‘given’ than engage in social reproduction. That there is a gap provides a potential to turn what is “given” back into a “giving” (Kenaan, 2011). I borrow this turn of phrase from Kenaan (2011), who writes, “(w)hat we face when looking at a picture is never a given but alternatively, a giving” (p. 157).

Kenaan’s (2011) insight is key since the question of the image becomes the question of the act of viewing or “facing.” On these terms, the act of viewing matters a great deal, raising questions about what the viewer does with the image, and the circumstances of encounter. To imagine the relationship between image and viewer as one of “giving” rather than simply (or automatically) “given” opens up a gap or a distance between reception and possession. This gap or distance means that we can always question how we receive what it is we have come to possess (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed (2006) suggests that this gap between reception and possession reveal social reproduction—the carrying on of the tradition, or maintaining the status quo—is not automatic but rather can be questioned. Putting Ahmed (2006) and Arendt (1978) together, we can suggest that natality time and its stress on in-betweeness offers a way of locating the gap between reception and social reproduction as an essential feature of the human—thus inheritance becomes a human rather than a natural phenomenon.

**Belatedness**

The final quality of natality time that is central to inheritance is belatedness. Along with newness and betweenness, belatedness characterizes the temporality disclosed in natality. As
stated, the human always arrives late to the scene of history. Natality continues to found other gaps—not only do we arrive late but our arrival and our situatedness does not correspond with our knowledge or understanding of that situation (O’Byrne, 2010). There is always a gap between being endowed with the capacity to begin something new and the manifestation of that capacity in, what Arendt (1958/1998) called our “second birth.” Action, which Arendt theorizes as a “second birth” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 178) is a capacity the human is endowed with at birth, but we never manifest this capacity until “we take upon ourselves our first birth” which might be much later in life. Finally, another sense of belatedness that is alive in natality is the fact that there is for Arendt always a gap between an event and its meaning (Bhabha, 2004; O’Byrne, 2010). All action in Arendtian terms “holds open the gap between event and meaning” (O’Byrne, 2010, p. 95) as meaning is not predetermined but rather arises out of an action that is begun by someone but that only finds meaning later amid the plurality of the world and comes to pass through the story, requiring a storyteller (or a cultural theorist).

The belatedness disclosed in natality is not an occasion for sadness or melancholy. To be late in natality time means something different from being late in determinist time, where to be late would always be a failure. Patchen Markell (2014) suggests that, thought from the time of natality, “the moment of political action has always already passed” (p. 115). This is so due to the belatedness that is central to natality’s time. To say along with Markell (2014) that “the moment has passed” is not to automatically fall into a conservative nostalgia for a specific past

32 This has also been phrased in other ways. Levinas (1998) writes that each human is “already late and guilty for being late” before we begin (p. 87). See also Levinson (2001) who discusses how we experience ourselves as belated even though we are new.

33 See Titchkosky (2003) for a discussion of second birth
but is rather to say that action always awaits it meaning.\textsuperscript{34} Belatedness is thus re-valued in natality.

This revaluing of belatedness is significant for inheritance grounded in natality time. Since the human’s arrival is always “too late,” our condition is to come into a world full of situations and meanings that we had no part in making, but that we must become response/able to and for if we are to live well in the world. Roger I. Simon (2000) invites a consideration of the intractable boundary that separates the present from the past and that indexes our distance from events that are “not my fault or deed.” He writes that this boundary or distance is “not simply the limit of my social imagination condemning me to indifference, voyeurism, or an epistemological violence that renders the other in terms I recognize or imagine as my own” (Simon, 2000, p. 21). The boundary that separates us from the past is rather what “initiates the terms for the reconstruction of historical memory” (p. 21). The separation that belatedness entails becomes in Simon’s words an initiation (or in Arendt’s terms, a beginning). What this implies is that to see is not to possess but rather to enact a separation that nonetheless initiates meaning.\textsuperscript{35} The boundary is re-imagined here and shifted from “the limit of…social imagination” to what “initiates” the possibility of historical memory. It is the boundary that has been brought to us by and through our belatedness that allows for an initiation of inheritance. An inheritance practice grounded in natality takes belatedness as the condition for beginning to inherit.

The limitations, partiality, and boundedness of our historical situation become the condition of possibility for historical knowledge and meaning making. What is initiated by this boundary is

\textsuperscript{34} See also Anne O’Byrne (2010).

\textsuperscript{35} Thanks to Tanya Titchkosky for help clarifying this point
the limited and partial character of our knowledge—this tempers or chastens the present, suggesting that historical understanding (or maybe all understanding) is partial and limited rather than a quest for totalized knowledge. Our late arrival is precisely what conditions us to take responsibility for the task of inheritance. It is our distance from the past that prefigures our ability to develop a relationship to it. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I analyze inheritance as practiced in encounters with historically engaged works of art that take up what is given as an “end” and return it to us as a “beginning.” As we will see in Chapter 3, the activity of approaching “ends” as “beginnings” is not something that simply inheres in the works of art themselves, but rather also involves the viewer and the cultivation of a disposition or mode of engagement. What the works of art provide are scenes or situations in which we can enter natality time and make our beginnings from what is already given.

To approach belatedness thus is not to celebrate it uncritically. Frantz Fanon (1952/1967) reminds us is that belatedness is distributed unequally. His work powerfully shows that certain humans are more belated than others—the black man always arrives belatedly to a “human” that is already defined “you come too late…there will always be a…white world between you and us” (p. 121). In discussing this, Bhabha (2004) suggests, “it is in opposition to that ontology of that white world—to its assumed hierarchical forms of rationality and universality—that Fanon turns a performance that is iterative and interrogative” (p. 237). Between “you” and “us”, Fanon opens an enunciative space, not simply contradicting what is given, the ideas of progress or racism or rationality that are given by dominant, but distancing them by repeating these ideas. Fanon’s discourse of the human emerges from that temporal break…he speaks from the signifying time lag of cultural difference” (Bhabha, 2004, p. 237).
Re-imagining Inheritance Through Natality’s Time

These three temporal themes—newness, betweenness, belatedness—form the ground for a new narration of time, a sense of time opposed to determinism (and not only opposed but propositive). These three temporal paradoxes deepen the question of inheritance with which we began. Inheritance considered through natality time (or natal temporality of the human) becomes a paradoxical demand that takes place in a syncopated time. Re-imagining inheritance rests on our capacity for critical re-appropriation of the past and the ability to create meaning in the absence of/against tradition. This capacity is grounded on two things: (1) the human’s status as natal beings—we are beginners, we can make beginnings and (2) the excess of the past itself.

That we are natal complicates all forms of determinism, including biological and historical determinism. Grounded in the syncopated time of natality, other meanings of inheritance emerge, ones that do not rely on determinism or established traditions nor on an idea of closed time. This inheritance begins from the in-betweens or the gaps marked above and proceeds with an indeterminacy and uncertainty. Arendt (1958/1998) showed that natality/action cannot be understood through the categories of means and ends. Actions derive their meaning not from their end point but from their beginnings. That humans dwell in a syncopated time suggests that meaning does not inhere in an event or in an action but can be read only later (O’Byrne, 2010). The artists whose works form the heart of this project perform this proposition in that they function as later manifestations or readings of a prior event that has already found its place within a historical narrative. They are takes on what is given. Re-image, re-imagine. That meaning can be read only later places much importance on the present. Inheritance is a question for the present. In rethinking inheritance, we also rethink history: less of a simple story of events connected by cause or continuity, but rather new forms of relation (beyond cause).
The capacity to re-appropriate the past and make new meanings is also grounded in the important distinction between tradition and what Arendt (1978) calls “the past itself.” The past exists outside of its capture in tradition—while tradition is shattered, the past remains. Arendt regards “the past itself” as the raw materials, and these raw materials can be re-purposed, re-organized. The great risk Arendt saw in the loss of traditions is that the “past itself” might be lost along with the frameworks that collect up that past and make sense of it. In the *Life of the Mind*, and in the context of a discussion of the demise of metaphysical thought and philosophy, Arendt (1978) claims that the loss of that tradition has been unfortunately accompanied by “a growing inability to move, on no matter what level, in the realm of the invisible; or to put it another way…accompanied by the disrepute into which everything that is not visible, tangible, palpable has fallen, so that we are in danger of losing the past itself along with its traditions” (p. 12). The decline of metaphysics is here figured not only as a loss of philosophical traditions, but threatens a loss of the very abilities to attend to anything that exceeds presence. Thus the risk that we might lose “the past itself” along with tradition is here framed in the same way that Arendt (1978) framed the promise of such: in sensory and visual terms. “To move…in the realm of the invisible” expands the sense of attention given to the past. This is a different kind of looking, less aligned with the Enlightenment story of vision as totalizing mastery but rather a kind of vision that could attend to that which resists presence and visibility, a sense that would find sense in what resists visualization and materiality.

Arendt’s (1978) use of visual terms to frame the promise of inheritance suggests that inheritance is always a question of the past’s mediated appearance and how we respond to such appearances. To engage in inheritance, the past needs to be able to make an appearance, and it must appear to someone, who then responds to it. An understanding of the work must account for the one who
responds. The promise of inheritance unfettered by tradition is that we might turn to the past and “look on the past with new eyes, unburdened and unguided by any traditions” (Arendt, 1978, p 12). These “new eyes” are different from a progressive intention to make the new, and are more like a way of turning back to what is given in order to attend to it otherwise. In other words, the “new eyes” are the same eyes but taught to see differently, renewing or releasing a capacity that we already possess. What is born in the relation between the past dislodged from the prescriptives of tradition and our encounter with it through a new sensibility is natality—a capacity for renewing what has been given and acting again on that history in relation to how it has acted on us.

Expanding Capacities for Relation, Attention, and Imagination

The dominance of deterministic time erodes our capacity for attention and imagination, two activities that are central for inheritance. These capacities can be developed through encounters with works of art since an engagement with a work of art is one form of social relation that demands non-instrumental forms of attention and imagination. From an Arendtian perspective, the threat of processual thought and deterministic time “lies in the loss of responsiveness to events: the erosion of the contexts in which action makes sense” (Markell, 2006, p. 12). In Life of the Mind, Arendt (1978) describes Eichmann’s reliance on clichés: 36 “Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking

36 And here from “Understanding and Politics”: “Words used for the power of fighting become clichés. The extent to which clichés have crept into our everyday language and discussions may well indicate the degree to which we not only have deprived ourselves of the faculty of speech, but are ready to use more effective means of violence than bad books (an only bad books can be good weapons) with which to settle our arguments” (Arendt, 1954/2005b, p. 308).
attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their existence” (1978, p. 4). He was unable to respond to reality and to his context, and instead substituted genuine response for a reserve of stock phrases and clichés. The loss of opportunities to respond can be restored in natality, which restores this responsiveness through its emphasis on action as a beginning.

Borcila (2009) imagines neoliberalism impairing the sensory range of the collective body; she writes about how BLW “took this to be quite literally our abilities to visualize, to see, to speak, or to otherwise act, to form relationships or affiliations that were not determined and limited by our relation to capital” (n.p.). Neoliberalism restricts not only what we sense and how we form relationships, but also our imaginative capacities. This has been articulated by Mark Fisher (2009) as “capitalist realism”: “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but that it is impossible to even imagine an alternative to it’ (p. 2). Capitalist realism describes a social system where economic rationalism comes to “seamlessly occupy the horizons of the thinkable” (Fisher, 2009, p. 8). While I would disagree about the “seamlessness” of this occupation, Fisher’s point that “capitalist realism” impacts our capacity for thinking and imagining as well as our economic situations is a good one. Arendt (1954/2005b) often wrote of “the growth of meaninglessness” (p. 314) in the modern world, which she associated with the “replacement of common sense with stringent logicality” (p.

37 Fisher is here working from Jameson’s idea that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Fisher takes this up quite literally in his book Capitalist Realism, which begins with an analysis of science fiction films that offer catastrophic visions of a dystopian future but where capitalism thrives even after the end of the world as we know it.
This replacement levels the capacity for thought and imagination by replacing thinking with the application of generalizations and categorizations.

If determinism grounds our experience of time, then we tend to experience events not as open-ended provocations inciting our response but rather as inevitable and intractable fait accompli divorced from the realms of human activity (this is closed time as described by Bakhtin, 2004). In this formulation, inheritance becomes practiced rather than a practice. Given the dominance of deterministic time and how it contours our practices of inheritance, what is needed are opportunities to practice doing inheritance otherwise. Determinism threatens natality not primarily by enforcing routines, but in that it erodes “the contexts in which events call for responses” (Markell, 2006, p. 2). Natality time reminds us that events can be points of departure (beginnings) and that we are endowed with the capacity to begin, and thus the potential to re-new what is given to us. What history gives as an end, we can treat as a beginning (Arendt, 1954/2005b). Practicing relating, attending, and responding to the past in the indeterminate time of natality requires a learning environment or curricular structure in which we might perform such treatments. Here, that context will be works of art that express and perform inheritance. These works provide frames in which to practice inheritance.

Such a response must take place in the present, the time Hannah Arendt (1961/2006) has characterized as between the “no longer” and the “not yet.” It is from this between time that we make our response to what we inherit. That day in the Trinity Library, the photograph caught me—and still catches me—it is that in-between, a time zone when we are “no longer” in 1943

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38 In “Understanding and Politics,” Arendt borrows Valery’s phrase, who describes a “kind of insolvency of imagination and bankruptcy of understanding” (Valery, as qtd in Arendt, 1954/2005b, p. 314).
nor are we “not yet” in a different world from the one that produced and circulated such an image.\textsuperscript{39} How do we live with the past in a way that maintains a commitment to what is “no longer” and “not yet” at the same time?

The works of art are event-encounters (O’Sullivan, 2006) or frames (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013a), which invite and elicit those who hear their address to exercise themselves in the skills and arts of the activity of inheriting. Inheritance is therefore a cultural practice carried out through cultural practices that provide those who encounter them with opportunities to practice, and thus enlarge our capacity, for responding, attending, and imagining inheritance outside of determinism. Rozalinda Borcila (2009), an artist from the collective BLW whose work I discuss in chapter 5, articulates the place of beginning for her own artistic practice, and it resonates very much with my own rationale for exploring inheritance and cultural production together. Borcila (2009) says: “my work as an artist begins from the premise that our available functional repertoire is expandable—that there is a certain plasticity to our social functionality, that we can learn to develop new ‘social abilities’ conducive to radical politics” (n.p.).\textsuperscript{40}

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\textsuperscript{39} Tanya Titchkosky proposed this formulation, which is based on Hannah Arendt’s idea of the no longer and the not yet (see Arendt 1946/2005a).

\textsuperscript{40} This is somewhat similar to what Charles Taylor (2004) describes as “social imaginary” He writes, “The ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations” (p. 23).
Chapter 3
Approaching inheritance through art: methods

This project focuses on inheritance as a cultural practice, approaching this topic through analysis of historically concerned works of art and the specific kind of experience of inheritance they potentially grant. Chapter 1 put forward a sense of “practice” and showed how inheritance can be understood as a cultural “practice” in both the production of what is to be inherited and the modes of reception through which certain aspects of the past become concerns for the present. Chapter 1 also claimed that “practice” demands a consideration of the method of cultural analysis. In this chapter, my aim is to articulate my method for analyzing works of art as inheritance practices.

Method and Cultural Theory

In her influential article “Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture,” Mieke Bal (2003) addresses the problem of method in (visual) cultural studies. She points to a dilemma that plagues the articulation of method in cultural analysis, consisting of two competing ideas. The first idea of what constitutes method is that method should be defined at the outset of a project and kept separate from the objects and goals of analysis. This principle, which Bal (2003) admits is in a certain sense “undeniable” (p. 23), is problematized41 in cultural studies by a second idea of method, where “the methods most suitable for performing those tasks must be derived from those tasks” (p. 23). To address this dilemma, Bal (2003) sketches out several methodological principles for cultural analysis. Here, I borrow two of Bal’s (2003) principles:

41 Reliance on a predetermined method can have a “stultifying effect” on cultural analysis, covering over their derived character and reproducing or colluding with “the politics that sustained their establishment” in the first place (Bal, 2003, p. 23).
(1) a consideration of the object of cultural analysis and (2) the need to qualify the nature of interpretive practices. These two principles will provide the structure for this chapter. I begin with a consideration of the object of this study (works of art that reference historical representations) and my methods for approaching their analysis. I will then offer a description and analysis of a sequence from Chris Marker’s film *Sans Soleil* as a way of bringing this aspect of my approach to life. Following that, I will qualify my approach to cultural interpretation and historical interpretation and the commonalities they share. The goal of this chapter is to articulate the methodological commitments of this project. Finally, I will end by re-considering “referential tensions” as a methodological concern, furthering the discussion of the risks and promises of citation.

**Object, Theory, and Analyst: Performative Interactions**

The heart of this research is analysis of works of art that reference historical representations. In the works of art themselves, there is already more than one ‘object’ at stake, as each of the artists takes up or takes on a specific part of the past, which has itself already found representation in culture. Thus the relationship between reality and representation is refracted at least twice—once through the original representation that the past received (as news report, photograph, public speech), and again through the re-presentation of those representations produced by the artist. In chapter 4, I analyze the Black Audio Film Collective’s (1986) essayistic film *Handsworth Songs*, in which civil unrest of the previous year is approached as an opportunity to

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42 Here I am working from an understanding of ‘method’ based on Titchkosky, where method can be thought about through its etymology, as meta-ode (meta = “what stands behind” and ode = “ways of practicing”). In this way of thinking, method is not “recipe-knowledge” that spells out how I conducted my study as something that could be potentially reproduced in another study. Rather, method says ‘I am doing this, and what sort of principles animate this.’ In this formulation, method speaks in the present tense, of what I “am doing” rather than either reporting on what I have done or what I planned to do at the outset of my project.
think about the present as an expanded field haunted by “the ghosts of other stories.” In chapter 5, I explore how translating a well known iconic photograph across media (to painting and to film) elicits consideration of the familiarity and strangeness of the past, and finally, in chapter 6, I explore the contemporary phenomenon of re-speaking, and what promise the public performance of political and activist speeches from the late 1960s and early 1970s holds for politics in the present. In addition to the multiple “objects” at play in each work of art, there is the question of the experience of inheritance that each of these works of art potentially affords.

At another level, the question of how cultural analysis treats its objects concerns the relationship set up between theory and the object to be studied. Herein, the danger is that the object to be studied (here the work of art, and the experience of such) can easily become subordinated as an example or an illustration of theory or text. To do so here would be to analyze works of art as if they simply illustrated the idea of natality time, as I have theorized from Arendt (1958/1998), or as if they were simply examples of inheritance rather than inheritance practices in their own right. Rather than applying natality to the works of art or analyzing the works of art as examples of a pregiven theory, I instead analyze how the works of art operate as disclosures of the time of natality. Natality time emerges from and is elicited by the works of art themselves in the way in which they stage an encounter with the past, and in the cultural theorist’s encounter with the works. Rather than a straightforward application of theory to the object or vice versa, the encounter becomes a “performative interaction between object, theory, and analyst” (Bal, 2003, p. 24). The ‘object’ here is complicated, and the work of these artists is granted a status of active participant in the analysis in the sense that the works “enable reflection and speculation…contradict premises and wrong-headed interpretations, and thus constitute a theoretical object with philosophical relevance” (Bal, 2003, p. 24).
Understood as performative interaction, the status of the object changes from a fixed and stable
*thing* that pre-exists our encounter with it to a scene of encounter. This approach to the object
refuses to reduce it to mere example or illustration of something outside of itself, and opens the
possibility of a less hierarchical and dichotomous relationship between the object and theory.
Likewise, this approach also refuses to treat theory as something “to be applied.” These shifts
allow for a certain movement between theory and its objects (and between theory and practice)
that refuses a categorical approach that would fix and objectify both, and then seek to apply these
finished products to each other. The problem this poses has been articulated by Raymond
Williams (1977), who writes that “(t)he strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural
activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products…
(a)nalysis is then centred on relations between these produced institutions, formations, and
experiences, so that…only the explicit fixed forms exist” (p. 129). For Williams (1977), what is
needed is a way of doing cultural analysis that is faithful to cultural as a set of unfolding
practices. Recall the discussion in Chapter 1 of what Gaztambide-Fernández (2013b) termed the
“rhetoric of cultural production,” which denotes a ground and a way of proceeding with cultural
analysis that refuses to treat “the arts” as abstracted things-in-themselves and instead begins with
the principle assumption that “the arts” are social and cultural practices that take place between
people in specific contexts. To approach art as cultural production or practice demands a method
of analysis that takes account of the *modes* of appearance, *ways* of looking, *modes* of reflection
and response that structure our engagements with art.43 This expands and textures the areas of
inquiry for cultural theory, and broadens the work of the cultural theorist.

43 See Rose (2011) and Bal (2003) for further discussion of a “practice oriented methodology” for cultural analysis.
Image as Relation

Understanding the works of art analyzed here in terms of encounter and performative interaction also presses towards a different understanding of image. My understanding of image follows a genealogy that begins with Sartre’s (2004) contention that “an image is nothing other than a relation” (p. 7). In *The Imaginary* (1940/2004), Sartre theorizes image and the imagination in unexpected ways. Even 70+ years later, Sartre’s (2004) claim that an image is “nothing other than a relation” (1940, p. 7) still astounds in that it contradicts the very familiar and habitual way we usually think of images as images of something, as more or less accurate reproductions of reality that are then re-presented to us in visual form, either in pictures or in the mind’s eye.

What does it mean to orient to the image as “a relation?” For Sartre (2004), the image is a type of consciousness, a particular way in which consciousness relates to its object. Understanding an image as relation and relational emphasizes the intertwined nature of image and consciousness.

How does understanding image as relation speak to a method for cultural analysis? First, this sense of image implies that an image cannot be understood solely by understanding what it represents or as a reflection of reality. What image as relation also implies for method is a more active and participatory role for the viewer and the cultural theorist. Rather than more or less accurate depictions of things in the world, images (whether mental or visual) are “modes of

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44 Sartre (2004) writes, “The word ‘image’ could only indicate therefore the relation of consciousness to the object; in other words, it is a certain way in which the object appears to consciousness, or, if one prefers, a certain way in which consciousness presents to itself an object” (p. 7).
appearing of the object,” and images always appear to someone in a specific context.45 Thus the image can be understood as more than simply representational, and the work of the cultural theorist becomes reflexive.

Many thinkers since Sartre (2004) have taken up the idea that representation is a reductive discourse for theorizing the image.46 Roger I. Simon (2014) suggests that what these various positions share is that “rather than focusing on images that can be said to be about the world, they address the manner in which images are encountered as in the world” (p. 15). The shift in focus here from “about the world” to “encountered as in the world” gestures most obviously towards the importance of context in cultural analysis and echoes Rose’s (2011) insistence that “images do not happen on their own, ever” (p. 554). Images are not simply reflections of or references to “the world” but rather images are part of the world and draw our attention to the world. Likewise, the same can be said about the cultural theorist, whose is also in the world rather than an objective observer writing about the world.47

The focus on image-as-relation allows for different lines of questioning in cultural analysis, shifting focus from the formal properties, discursive contexts, and meanings of images to a wider consideration of images as “located, social, affective and economic events” (Rose, 2011, 547)

45 Note that the full quote is “modes of appearing of the objected imagined”. Sartre (2004) is mostly concerned with mental images, but I wish to generalize what he says, so I have removed the last word of this quote. I will take up the imagination in more detail later in this chapter.


47 On this point see Iris Marion Young (1987): “The positioning of a subject able to perform intellectual operations that give it information about the social world but owe nothing to its involvement in the social world has a corollary in the desire to objectify society” (Young, I.M., 1987 p. 60). See also Deutsche (1996, 2010).
that take place in specific contexts. Rose (2011) suggests that this allows for a more nuanced understanding of the objects of visual cultural analysis and how they are visible: “not simply as objects to be interpreted but as remarkably complex objects that came into being only through the participation of numerous actors, both human and nonhuman” (Rose, 2011, 547). Hagi Kenaan (2011) has elaborated on the “built in relational structure” of images; he suggests that “images are never just there, present as inert objects, but always show themselves in a manner that is intricately tied to the condition and circumstances of being viewed” (Kenaan, 2011, p. 157).

Understanding the image as relation places focus on the contextual encounter with the image as a relational field where the image and the viewer enact a relation beyond what the image represents and that relation becomes “something predicative…transactive and hence a movement which is potentially an entry, a force that may initiate a trespass into the sphere of the ego” (Kenaan, 2011, p. 154). In this understanding, the encounter with the image holds the potential to implicate the viewer, and to unsettle the viewer’s taken for granted performance of the present. This potential introduces a form of relationality into the encounter with the image that cannot be determined in advance, and that, in relation to historical images, opens the possibility that the encounter with historical images can do more than confirm what we already know about history and ourselves. The image as relation points towards understanding the image not only as reflective or imitative of what already exists, but also as a mode of appearing of something originary, and a type of consciousness of that appearance. The image is an “entering and exiting, this is what makes the image: appearing and disappearing. Not first representing, but first being or making ‘a time, une fois’ a first and last time, the time [temps] of making or taking an image, the time of time itself, which opens the eyes” (Nancy, 2005, p. 98).
Between Images

Thus far, this chapter has described the premises that guide my approach to cultural analysis in terms of how I will treat the works of art that are the objects of this study. I have indicated my commitment to approaching the encounter with work of art as a scene of performative interaction between object, theory, and analysis, and to understanding image as relation rather than as reflections or reproductions that are subordinate to reality or to text. I wish now to turn to an encounter with a work of art that brings these points to life, the opening sequence of Chris Marker’s (1983) essay film *Sans Soleil*.

Here I will describe and analyze the first 30 seconds of Marker’s film. An unconventional beginning, the sequence enlivens the idea of performative interaction and image-as-relation. I intend Marker’s film not as a simple example of such theories but rather as a doing that not only illustrates the points that Kenaan (2011), Sartre (2004), and others have made above but that actively furthers these ideas.

*Film begins.* The viewer expects image and sound, what appears is a black screen and silence. A woman’s voice punctuates the stillness: “The first image he told me about was of three children on a road in Iceland, in 1965.” As if conjured by her words, a soundless, moving image then appears of three blonde children on a road in rural Iceland. The screen flashes back to black and the woman’s voice returns, “He said that for him, it was the image of happiness, and also that he had tried several times to link it to other images…[Flash of an image of fighter jets being lowered] … but it never worked” [The black screen returns]. “He wrote me,

48 Then a quotation from T.S. Eliot’s “Ash-Wednesday” (white text, black background): “Because I know that time is always time/And place is always and only place…”.


One day I’ll have to put it all alone at the beginning of a film with a long piece of black leader.\textsuperscript{49} If they don’t see happiness in the picture, at least they’ll see the black.”

This sequence is an unconventional beginning in that it asks the viewer to attend to what usually goes unnoticed: both the black screen (that is usually read as non-image/nothing), and the work of cultural production. In this opening sequence, Marker disrupts the diegetic or continuous flow of images that viewers expect to see when they watch a film, bringing attention to the interval between frames. Marker asks the viewer to see the stuff of film and not simply the image.\textsuperscript{50} The viewer realizes belatedly that she has not seen the black even though it was on the screen at the beginning of the film, that she has read the black screen and silence as a non-image rather than as an image of the in between space that must be hidden for a film to proceed. In this sense, my belated seeing of the black allows me to re-read my previous seeing of it; rather than read it as nothing or perhaps as an error, it becomes as a gap between images, a gap that indexes and potentiates the imaginative process of the filmmaker.

Kodwo Eshun (2011) has argued that this opening sequence dramatizes “the basic operation of cultural production,” namely, following one image with another (Eshun, 2011, n.p.). The gap is the space-time of the basic operation of cultural production, a place of reaching for the image that will follow the first image. Marker attenuates and draws attention to the interval, asking the viewer to look again at what has already been seen (the black). This serves to make visible the “editorial imagination,” inviting the viewer to take on “an editor’s gaze,” to become “one who

\textsuperscript{49} Leader is the material of film, a length of film attached to the head or tail of the filmstrip to assist in threading a projector.

\textsuperscript{50} This is essayistic in Adorno’s (1984) sense of the term—he begins “The Essay as Form” with the quotation from Goethe: “destined to see the illuminated not the light”
looks again, and again, and who looks at her looking” (Eshun, 2011, n.p.). The editorial imagination is a kind of comparative looking, not comparison in the service of adjudicating a value judgment that would rank two terms, but rather a looking that anticipates what is coming, that looks both forward and back. This is a doubling that is between two images but also that introduces a double-ness into the image itself, such that no one image is every only one image, but instead, in the editorial imagination, all images are Janus-ed faced, looking both backwards and forwards (either to the image that will have preceded it or that will follow it, and thus change it in this relation; or more specifically with respect to historical images or images of the past, looking back to its previous contextualization within a given historical narrative and forwards to its re-contextualization and the future meanings thus sparked).

In the previous chapter, we encountered Hannah Arendt as a thinker of the gaps, and natality as disclosing a time characterized by gaps; here, we encounter the need to find ways to work between images, in the gaps in time and space that represent interpretive quandary of the inheritance of cultural meanings. Marker makes cultural production evident as the production of meaningful gaps. Marker shows us two gaps: the gap that inheres in the activity of cultural production (the leader joining one image to another) and the gap that inheres in the correspondence that the voice over narrates. Marker’s opening prompts a third gap that arises

51 See Eshun (2012) for a further discussion of editor’s gaze.
52 I borrow this idea of history being Janus-ed faced partly from Eshun (2012). For further discussion of Janus in relation to Arendt, see Kohn’s (2006) preface to Between Past and Future, the cover of which is a visual depiction of Janus. Kohn figures Janus as connecting the past and the future (but not through continuity or filling the “gap” that Arendt (1961/2006) identifies between past and future).
53 This short clip also features another in-between, and that is the gap between the woman who speaks and the “he” who has written to her; as a viewer, “I” am at a remove from this “he” who produces the images and whose failed reaching for an image to follow the initial image of the three children
when the viewer encounters the film. This gap is between the viewer’s expectations of a film and what appears on screen. My expectations, which were unarticulated and taken for granted (like the black) now emerge from the background and become available for thought. As a viewer I am given pause to think not only about the images I am encountering, but my own habits of attention, and the gap between the film, my reception of it, and my response to both. Marker discloses the relational structure of images through associative editing (rather than sequential editing) shifts the focus to a different form of relationship between one image and another. The viewer is not offered a smooth, processual continuity that isolates or individualizes the images as completed objects, but rather a form of relationality where one image reaches for another or reaches back to a previous one, where this relationship is marked by a fundamental uncertainty as to what image will follow another, and the possibility that in the making or staging of relation, something will emerge that the images did not previously contain.

Marker also attempts to show the viewer something that resists visualization and yet inheres in the visual: what happens when an image follows an image and it “works,” when two (or more) images “kind of give each other their power or their forces…so that an opening is made” (Eshun, 2011, n.p.). To show this, the film narrates “his” failure to find such correspondence. “His” reaching for an image that is not yet at hand, is for Eshun (2011) a making visible of the

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generates the drama of this opening. A woman’s voice mediates what “he” has already written to her and the belated time of their correspondence finds an echo in my own belated reception of her words. Correspondence—a word that denotes both connection or equivalence and a distance to be bridged by the exchange of letters—is also marked by a belated temporality, a contingent time-zone when images and thoughts can be joined without collapsing the distance between them.
“drama and the hazard and the risk of what it means to follow one image with another” (n.p.).

The drama and the risk of cultural production does not inhere in the overt content of the images, but in their relational appearance and uncertain conjunction with other images. To make an opening is to put two (or more) images together in a way that preserves the gap or the distance between them. It is ‘his’ failure to do this that makes the work of cultural production and image-as-relation appear on screen.

Marker’s opening sequence brings to life many of the theoretical insights discussed above; the film serves not only as an example that illustrates or confirms what I (and the theorists discussed) have already said, but rather becomes in itself a philosophical working through of the questions of the object of cultural analysis and understandings of the image. My analysis of this sequence from Marker demonstrates the complexity of the location of the ‘object’ of analysis for cultural analysis. This complexity can be felt in the notion what it means for two images to be put together such that they “work” or make an “opening.” What precisely this means is difficult to specify in words. In dramatizing his own process, Marker shows us that putting images together to find this kind of “opening” is a practice involving trial and error (the images ‘work’ or they do not ‘work’). While ‘he’ intends to find this kind of relation, the work exceeds his intention—what it means for two images to ‘work’ is not something that can be articulated at the outset, but rather emerges through practice. What this points to that is significant here is that the work of art is never fully determined by the artist.54 The other important aspect of Marker’s clip is how it discloses the power of ambiguous address. Mario Di Paolantonio (2011) has suggested that art

54 Kodwo Eshun (2011) articulates this relative to his own practice as an artist (as a member of The Otolith Group) by making an analogy between the work and a baby. He describes the moment the work of art begins to “work” as when the image “begins to look back at you” (n.p.). This suggests a kind of potential agency for the image that I find fascinating but that it is not in the scope of this dissertation to delve into.
has a special facility for eliciting and sustaining “extended visual concern” (p. 750). He argues that “artwork…demands a particular time and attentiveness since it withholds telling us directly what it is about and what it wants” (p. 750). Through this ambiguity of address, the viewer is drawn away from “our usual instrumental way of viewing the world” and drawn towards or prompted to give “time to what during this time cannot be totally comprehended, to what cannot be fully revealed, to what is fleeting and in danger of disappearing in the strictures of our own time” (Di Paolantonio, 2011, p. 750). While such ambiguity is certainly not unique to encounters with works of art, and not something that all works of art do, this particular clip from Marker demonstrates the special promise of ambiguous address. The promise is that in the interpretive encounter with ambiguity, we can tolerate and proliferate complexities and contradictions, holding multiple interpretations at once. Practice in doing this is central to developing the capacity to attend in non-instrumental ways, providing an entry into natality time.

Interpretation: Situated, Dialogic, and Capacious

Thus far, I have discussed the first of Mieke Bal’s (2003) methodological principle for cultural analysis, namely, the need to consider the object of cultural analysis. Now I will turn to her second principle: the need to qualify the nature of interpretive practices. In chapter 1, I claimed that interpretive engagements with works of art can help us practice what inheritance demands. The analysis of Marker’s clip has already begin to demonstrate how this is so. Historically concerned works of art become frames in which to encounter the past and our interpretive relationship to it.

In the previous chapter, Simon (2000) provided a theorization of the boundary that separates the present from the past as not simply the “limit” of social imagination but rather as what “initiates” (or in Arendt’s language, begins) the possibility of historical memory. The boundary or the
separation between past and present, the difference and temporal distance between our time and a past time is highlighted in each of the works of art I analyze. Each one maintains the boundary or the difference between past and present but also creates forms of connections. The difference between the works of art studied here and other forms of historical representation (including the “original” representations—the media accounts, archival images, and transcripts—they take up) is that the works foreground their mediated quality, drawing attention to how they work as frames. In this way, they invite the viewer to encounter not only the past as re-presented but also to encounter and attend to the act of encounter and the interpretive situations through which we make a relation with inheritance.

Hans George Gadamer (2004) draws a parallel between the human’s situation in history and the hermeneutic situation. He writes:

Consciousness of being affected by history…is primarily consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. To acquire awareness of a situation is…always a task of peculiar difficulty. The very idea of a situation means that we are not standing outside it and hence are unable to have any objective knowledge of it. We always find ourselves within a situation, and throwing light on it is a task that is never entirely finished (Gadamer, 2004, p. 301).

Consciousness of how history has acted on us is an interpretive act that proceeds from within an unfolding situation. Interpretation is partial not due to a deficiency in our modes of attention or to our lack of knowledge, but to our status as historical beings. Thus, incompleteness and partiality is a principle character of the human as historical being, and our immersion in history (as shown in chapter 1) becomes the bounded space from which we begin to enact a relation with the otherness of the past. Our situated-ness in history means that history is not all see-able nor all
seeing, and this resonates with my discussion of natality time in Chapter 2, which through its three temporal themes of newness, betweenness, and belatedness, offers a way of valuing our partiality and boundedness. Works of art such as those that I analyze can help us encounter the demands of inheritance, part of which is that we do not know and cannot see everything we are responsible to and for. This project makes the principle assumption that meaning is dialogic and arises through interpretive encounters rather than existing prior to interpretation.

Our immersion in the very situation we seek to interpret creates a paradox. Interpreting sticky categories (such as history and time) that fundamentally shape and order our existence and ways of making sense of the world is no simple task. The difficulty of this task increases when one is motivated by dissatisfaction and a wish to critique such categories. The paradox or perplexity of this task finds an echo in a question posed by Robert Young (2001) in the context of how a postcolonial literature or history might emerge, given that our very notions of history and narrative are imbued in colonialist logics. Young asks: “How to rewrite history when the very model of history was so much the product of the history that I wanted to rewrite?” (p. 412).\(^{55}\)

The pretense of some kind of outside perspective reinforces the very modes of objectifying knowledge Young (2001) wishes to critique. The challenge is not to find an outside perspective but to take on what is given as ‘history’ by working through the same logics and objects differently. The challenge of thinking about inheritance is that we are always situated (interpretation-consciousness of history: hermeneutic situation). Natality answers this challenge by making the middle into a place to begin (Simon (2000), boundary is initiatory), and in this

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\(^{55}\) In a difference context, Patel (2000) asks a question that resonates with Young: “How can we think subjectivity through other possible times, given that subjectivities in the ‘modern’ are inseparable from particular ways of narrating time?” (p. 47).
project, it is these works of art that furnish this middle, and that makes gaps appear as a call for response.

My work as a cultural theorist responds to Young’s (2001) question. This project is animated by a desire to critique deterministic time and history and to express discontent with the forms of media and representation through which the past is represented. This critique is directed not only at opposing or refusing the logics of determinism but is committed to thinking through the very logics that organize our relationship to time and our relationship to representation. I mean this “through” literally. The “through-ness” is a methodological commitment to interpreting in situ. Animated not by a desire to point at what is wrong with representation or with the temporal logics that underpin history and then to suggest a new framework, this project proceeds by using the stuff of history and representation in order to express possibilities that show how what is given has already been contained, and to unleash the possibilities of the past. Thus interpretation becomes the work of thinking through what is given in order to reveal what has been concealed by how that given has already been interpreted. Thinking through what is given and coming up with a different meaning is possible because meaning always acts in excess of its capture. This is true of both the meaning of works of art, and also the meaning of any given fragment of the past. As Gadamer (2004) writes, “(n)ot just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well” (p. 296).\(^5^6\) Another way of saying this is to say that interpretation is never complete, and thus texts require our self-conscious involvement.

\(^{56}\) Jean-Luc Nancy (2006) suggests that interpretation, like inheritance is a task that remains in the future anterior: “the sense of ‘poetry’ is a sense that is always still to be made” (p. 4).
Many of the artists studied express a desire to work with the “radical promise” of media (and the constituent elements of image, sound) that is curtailed in the present economy of representation. Such dissatisfaction with both history and media fuel their desire to engage in a different way. Thus, for example, the artist collective BLW, whose re-speakings I explore in chapter 6, express discontent with forms of media. Their discontent is expressed not through an exposure of what is wrong with the media, but rather through “engaging with something by just assuming that it is other than itself” (Borcila, 2013, n.p.). In other words, they begin from a place that refuses the taken for granted and given definitions and limitations of how image, sound, speech can appear and proceed from this assumption in order to expand the given repertoire of uses it has been put to or given. Likewise, the Black Audio Film Collective, whose essayistic film Handsworth Songs I analyze in chapter 4, expresses discontent with both the uses that sounds and images have been put to in TV news reporting, and with the way in which archival images circulate. They bring both these scenes of discontent together and enact an imaginative practice that becomes the film, which is shown on TV and incorporates archival images.

Kodwo Eshun (2011) names this discontent “essayistic,” and elaborates a sense of the “essayistic” not as a genre (the written essay, the film essay), but as a “discontent with the expectations of what it is we expect, what it is we think an image should do in the name of the political, a dissatisfaction of what a sound should do, but a discontent that is registered through the image, through sound” (n.p.). The essayistic does not name a category of expression but is a kind of a practice-based force that can “emerge in all kinds of projects and all kinds of practices” (Eshun, 2011, n.p.).

Thus cultural practices become ways of registering this discontent, “our distance from duties, expectations” (Eshun, 2011, n.p.) and of expanding the capacities of images, sounds, texts
through their appearance. Discontent with images can be expressed through images, discontent with sounds expressed through sounds. This kind of “through-ness” recalls our concern with history and with art’s capacity to make something new from what is given. This is natality. To seek the new through what is given is not to forge a new tradition or to cover over the gap that separates the past from the future, but to take up the present as a time when a response is possible. This newness is not novelty—it is not that we throw everything away and start fresh, but rather make attempts to re-see and create new points of view from the same material, to find the “poiesis in mimesis” (Ricouer, 1974, p. 109). It is the idea of taking a received system, way of working, what has already been made of x (whether x is time, image, sound, etc.), expressing a dissatisfaction with some aspect of what is happening but rather than throwing it out, to use the limitation or the boundary as an opportunity to press or ex-press that which has been previously blocked or unused.

The Risks and Promises of Citation

All of the works of art I study here stage an appearance of a fragment from the past. Thus all engage in acts of citation. Each instance of such citation can be understood as a form of re-imagining and re-imaging the past. Such re-imaginings can obviously take many forms and have many disparate results. There is no doubt that citation is fraught with risks. Given that ‘history’ is always summoned through inheritance practices and fragments of the past always appear in a selective and highly mediated manner, what matters a great deal is an analysis of specific appearances, the ways in which a particular appearance is mediated. There is obviously no guarantee that such re-imaging will be in the name of social justice or responsibility to the past.
Citation can easily serve to justify the “weight of the facticity of existing being,” simply confirming that the present arrangements of social life are just and sufficient and stimulating credulity in the status quo.

To distinguish between the risks and the promises of citation involves asking questions about specific practices of citation. What my work promises is a detailed analysis of aesthetic works for how they practice inheritance through citation. What is the history that is being returned to and what are the terms on which the return is carried out? What specific histories are being cited, and to whom is the work addressed? What is being called upon or called up?

The promise of citation is that the re-appearance of a fragmented and crystalized past might unsettle the taken for granted modes of inhabiting our present situation and what is already known and understood about the past. Works perform a return—to return, to return with, and to bring to consciousness that which allowed us to perceive the world “such as it is”. The promise of citation is it might help us think and feel differently; it might expand our capacity to attend to otherness in time and space and might enlarge our imaginative capacities for social justice.

The concept of imagination has been watered down through its habitual use in everyday life. Imagination often appears in the vernacular as a kind of flight of fancy, an escape from reality into a realm of make believe that has little to offer to social justice or to intellectual scholarship. Imagination has a difficult time being taken seriously as a theoretical concept and is often dismissed as out-moded or retrograde. However, there is also another genealogy of imagination.

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57 Comment on my original proposal for this project from Roger I. Simon
58 This genealogy can be traced through the writings of Paul Ricoeur (1974), Maxine Greene (2000), Charles Taylor (2004), Georges Didi-Huberman (2008), and Ariella Azoulay (2008).
that reaches back further, perhaps to Sartre (2004) and his insistence on “image as nothing other than a relation” (p. 7). Paul Ricouer (1974) claims that imagination is “the capacity to let new worlds build our self-understanding” (p. 110). This conception of imagination is very different from “the faculty of deriving ‘images’ from our sensory experiences” (110). Ricouer (1974) shows that literary works disclose a “new world” rather than merely reflecting an old one. This points to the propositive energy of creative and literary works; they display or disclose “possible ways of being-in-the-world,” and interpretation consists of a “grasping of the world propositions opened up by…the text” (Ricouer, 1974, p.110). The disclosure of the text, the world it proposes, calls to the reader to encounter this world and to open oneself to the possible ways of being disclosed therein. This encounter is where interpretation begins, and interpretation for Ricoeur (1974) is always an imaginative act. Interpretation is not a synthesis between reader and text achieved through projection or identification, but rather an ability to be before the world disclosed and “the capacity to let new worlds build our self-understanding” (p. 110).

With respect to historically concerned works such as those I take up here, Ricoeur’s (1974) thoughts on disclosure and possibility help us understand how the past appears differently in imaginative works than in more instrumental forms of history. If we can act as readers and open ourselves up to the “possible ways of being-in-the-world” disclosed and displayed in the text, there is a possibility of re-thinking history and also a different sense of historical knowledge. Historical knowledge is not about projecting oneself into the past (as text), but rather to encounter the past as disclosing a world which we do not have access to, and allowing that world to interrupt our taken for granted sense of the present. In order to do so, the referential tensions between the past and the present must be preserved. Framing imagination as a capacity suggests
that it is available to be expanded, that practice in interpretation can expand our “capacity to let” our selves be open to understanding ourselves and the world we inhabit on different terms.

Imagination also describes a capacity to see things from multiple perspectives; Arendt tied imagination to thinking. “To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains ones imagination to go visiting” (Harwood, 2010, p. 363). In imagination, thought of in Ricoeur’s (1974) terms of letting new worlds enlarge our self-understanding and in terms of Sartre’s (2004) understanding of the image as relational, what is stressed is the idea of the “self” in relation. When we go visiting, we go somewhere else temporarily, but we take ourselves with us. And, as Gadamer (2004) reminds us, historicism has traditionally assumed that doing history means “that we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity” (p. 297). Against this kind of relationship that would objectify the past and destroy our ability to think our own thoughts, Gadamer stresses that in order for the past to make a claim on the present, “into this other situation, we must bring, precisely, ourselves…” (p. 304). Historicism and its quest for objectivity leaves the self behind as it makes a conquest of the past; the inheritance practice esteemed in this project seeks not to conquest or assimilate, but rather to go visiting and to take ourselves with us.

Gadamer (2004) shows that “temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding” (p. 297). To recognize and preserve temporal distance in our encounters with the past means to resist the hasty assimilation of the past to our own expectations of meaning. This distance is necessary if the worldview of the past is to be heard and in order that it might register a claim on the present. But at the same time, if the past is too distant, we would not be able to form a relationship with it at all. This necessary tension between distance and proximity
structures every engagement with history. Inheritance practices must find a way to navigate that tension, cultivating a perspective or way of seeing that brings things close while at the same time preserving distance.  Imagination has a special capacity to navigate these tensions between distance and proximity. As such, imagination has a role in historical knowledge. What this role is will be explored in great detail in later chapters, including in chapter 4, where I take up the work of Georges Didi-Huberman (2008) on the role of photographs in historical knowledge.

Arendt (1954/2005b) aligns imagination with understanding, and both activities have to do with creating a “proper perspective.” She writes:

Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to be strong enough to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This distancing of some things and bridging of the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding, for whose purposes direct experience establishes too close a contact and mere knowledge erects artificial barriers. Without this kind of imagination, which actually is understanding, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world (p. 323).

The works of art hold the promise of citation in that they take on what is given by history as an “end” and treat it as a “beginning” (Arendt, 1954/2005b):

59 See also Harwood (2010): “Added to this, the imagination is indispensible in assisting the activity of thought to do what Foucault (1997) describes, to ‘step back from this way of acting or reacting’ (p. 117). Such a stepping back is a motion within the mind that can create the space pivotal to dialogue with oneself” (Harwood, 2010, p. 364).
…to the eye of the historian, the illuminating event cannot but appear as an end of this newly discovered beginning. Only when in future history a new event occurs will this ‘end’ reveal itself as a beginning in the eye of future historians…only in action will we proceed, as a matter of course, from the changed set of circumstances that the event has created, that is treat it as a beginning (p. 318).

In the body chapters that follow, I will engage in a detailed analysis of how each artwork inserts itself in the gap between the past and its present re-appearance and treats what is given as a beginning. The idea that the re-citation of the past could produce something originary has also been beautifully expressed by Roger I. Simon (2000). He writes:

The central project of remembrance is not contained in the melancholy mimesis of the relation between an original text and its memorial translation, where performative problems are understood as ontological (I wasn’t there) and epistemological (I cannot understand), in which every translation is in principle a failure, every remembrance a forgetting. Rather… a practice of historical memory must be, literally, a re-saying, a further bearing of witness to one’s own witness, this re-saying is not merely a recall, but always a renewal of the possibility of the past, which may innovate and interrupt the performance of the present (p. 23).

Roger I. Simon’s (2000) work insists that the past, under the right conditions, could be felt as an interruptive force that addresses the present. In the chapters that follow, I will analyze what kinds of conditions encounters with works of art can provide. How do these particular artists furnish the conditions for cultivating forms of attention and imagination that might prepare us to inherit on non-deterministic terms? How do encounters with these works of art potentially disclose natality time and provide entries into an experience of that temporality that is already
our condition? These works will challenge dominant modes of inheritance and the deterministic time they are grounded in, offering instead opportunities to re-think and re-imagine an inheritance practice grounded in the time of natality, a time that is always indeterminate, uncertain, and that requires our response. In so doing, these works ask us to confront and question our traditions of inheritance, the terms on which we receive or “come into” relationship with the past/our historicity.
Chapter 4:
The ghosts of other stories: the syncopated time of the essay film

_In time we will demand the impossible in order to wrestle from it that which is possible...In time I will be right to say: ‘there are no stories...in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories.’_

Black Audio Film Collective, _Handsworth Songs_ (1986)

This chapter further explores natality through the aesthetic and temporal form of the essay film. We have already seen in Chapter 2 how Arendt’s (1958/1998) concept of natality and its syncopated time might provide a new temporal ground for re-imagining inheritance practices. This chapter will do the more concrete work of showing how natality is manifested in cultural practices, in this case an essay film. The focus of this chapter is _Handsworth Songs_ (1986), a film by the Black Audio Film Collective, and how the essayistic form of the film manifests natality as its temporal ground. It is the natal temporality of the essayistic that allows the Black Audio Film Collective to re-imagine inheritance and to expand the register of historical representation.

**Handsworth Songs**

_Handsworth Songs_ (1986) is a 60-minute essay film made by the Black Audio Film Collective that originally aired on Britain’s Channel Four on July 6, 1987. The film circles around a series of disturbances and confrontations between police and community members that took place in Handsworth, England and nearby communities in the fall of 1985 and that became known in the popular media of the day as “race riots.” _Handsworth Songs_ is made from newsreels, still

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60 Handsworth/Birmingham: September 9, 1985 was the first disturbance, followed by civil unrest and violence in four other nearby communities: Brixton, September 28; Tottenham/Broadwater Farm, October 5-6, 1985; Liverpool’s Toxteth district, October 1, 1985
images, footage shot in Handsworth and surrounding areas in the aftermath of the disturbances, archival footage and photographs, and disparate voice overs that range from the accusatory to the poetic. The experience of watching *Handsworth Songs* is different from the experience of watching an expository documentary. While one might expect a film addressing the disturbances to begin in or around 1985, the film begins instead with a prolonged shot of a uniformed black man, attending to a vast Victorian flywheel apparatus. As the oversized and outmoded cranks and wheels of the flywheel turn, an ominous clanging sound is heard. The audio track is non-continuous with the visual shot, but nevertheless the attendant seems to hear the sounds. As he slowly raises his gaze as if to locate the source of the dreadful sound, the image switches to a clamor of birds in a tree top, then abstract lights appear and sirens are heard, then a clown head appears, slowly turning.

As I watch this opening sequence, I experience a contradiction between my expectation (to learn about what happened in Handsworth, or to gain a different perspective on the disturbances) and the film I encounter. As I watch, the sense of dread and confusion grows. The first shots of the 1985 disturbances only appear after about two minutes into the film, and when they do appear they are chaotic and shaky shots of police in uniforms and overturned vehicles. The clown head returns, and the audio track repeats, “this day remains, this day remains, this day remains.” This description of the first three minutes of the film is an attempt to convey a sense of how the filmmakers thwart conventional expectations of focus, coherence, and the relation between images and audio. The experience of watching *Handsworth Songs* is, from the outset, an

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61 Some of the footage from 1985 is of disturbances and their aftermath in Handsworth and the nearby community of Bridgewater Farm, as well as from the funeral of Cynthia Jarrett, a 49-year old woman who died of a heart attack after police raided her home, and whose death is often cited as a catalyst for the Bridgewater Farm riot.
experience of a disjointed and non-chronological time. The flywheel scene that begins the film signals to viewer that this film will take up the disturbances and their representation as an occasion to explore a much longer history. *Handsworth Songs* brings together still and moving images from past and present in order to produce a protracted present still haunted by much longer histories of immigration, racism, and colonialism.

At the heart of my analysis of *Handsworth Songs* is an exploration of the film’s temporal workings. The filmmakers expand the surface area of the present in order to show that the 1985 disturbances are not simply isolated episodes that took place over several weeks, but that they contain a much longer history. The film removes the ‘riots’ from their previous emplacement (by the news media) as “race riots” and undermines the authorizing function of the documentary clips that originally appeared in news reports. Using the same images (and more), the film crafts a different point of view or perspective from these images and inserts a longer and different history into the disturbances. The Black Audio Film Collective expands the time of the present and then re-enters that scene of the expanded present in order to express a discontent on two levels. The first is at the level of representation or media. The filmmakers express dissatisfaction with how the disturbances were shown on television, and the conventions that structure media reports and representation (documentary). That discontent is expressed precisely through the same elements (image, sound, television). The second level of discontent is a dissatisfaction with simplistic ways of understanding history, and the version of the smooth present that historicism constructs. These two levels of dissatisfaction are articulated temporally through a disclosure of natality time.

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62 The flywheel that is shown in the opening shot is from the Birmingham industrial museum.
*Handsworth Songs* refuses conventional temporality as a ground of its production, and in so doing, offers a mode of historical understanding different from determinism. The filmmakers’ interweaving of past and present happens literally and obviously in the film through their cinematic montages of archival and present day images, and this effects a larger displacement of historicism and the epistemological structures that accompany it (such as explanation, determinism, cause). This chapter will analyze the temporal underpinnings of the film. I seek to demonstrate here how the Black Audio Film Collective manifest and release natality time through their use of non-corrective logics and the juxtaposition of images and sounds. The filmmakers expand the register of historical knowledge through their expansion of the register of representation. In so doing, the film provides a material instantiation of an inheritance practice grounded in natality.

**The Ghosts of Other Stories**

The quotation that begins this chapter, “there are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories,” is repeated twice in *Handsworth Songs*, and is a strong theme in the film. The first time it is heard, the voice over recounts a story of an exchange between a journalist and an elderly woman from the Handsworth community. As the elderly woman surveys the debris of her community in the aftermath of the disturbances, a journalist pesters her for a comment on the ‘cause’ of all of this destruction. By way of response, the woman says, “there are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories.” To meet a demand to explain “cause” with this statement is to complicate the temporality that makes understanding possible.

The “ghosts of other stories” cannot be sensed or understood through the logic of cause, but rather demand attention to more complex forms of temporal relation. *Handsworth Songs* can be read the Black Audio Film Collective’s attempt to approach the “ghosts of other stories” that
shadow the more overt and readily available stories of the riots (of which there are many, most of them seeking simple cause or a single perpetrator or alternatively dismissing the violence as “senseless,” and “out of nowhere”). The filmmakers reach for the “ghosts” of stories, the more ephemeral forces that shadow and press upon the immediate happenings of the days of the disturbances and their re-telling in the media. The “ghosts” of other stories are that which cannot be given simple presence within the narrative frameworks prescribed by dominant modes of representation (news media) or by history. In order to hear, see, and touch the “ghosts of other stories,” we must break or syncopate those frameworks that saturate us in cause. The film can be understood as an attempt to evoke a sense of these “ghosts,” but to do so demands an interrogation of those temporal frameworks that insist on cause. Through an analysis of the film’s complicated temporality and arrangement of images and sounds, I will show how the film prepares the viewer to attend to the “ghosts of other stories” that emerge when conventional narrative frameworks of historicism are disassembled and reassembled in an imaginative work.

1985: Context of the Film

The mainstream media’s representation of the ‘riots’ is a key hinge for both the film and for critical responses to it. An extensive discourse analysis of news reporting on the Handsworth ‘riots’ is outside the scope of this project, and so here I simply rely on two short articles for a critical synopsis of the disturbances and the un-imaginative way they were shaped in the British media of the day. The first is a short article by John Sutherland (1989). He summarizes how the story developed over the initial three days of reporting:

The front page of Monday’s Times [the day after the ‘riot’] was dominated by the headline: ‘HUNDREDS OF POLICE BATTLE WITH MOBS IN BIRMINGHAM RIOT’. A subhead added: ‘Petrol Bombs Thrown, Shops Looted, Vehicles
Overturned, and Firemen Stoned’…The Times called the conflict ‘a ‘spontaneous’ clash between West Indian youth and uniformed authority. The spark for the outbreak was vaguely cited as a ‘policeman giving a black driver a parking ticket’…[The following day,]…. prominence was given to accounts of blacks of all ages looting stores and serenely carrying off their booty in supermarket carts. The background to the riot was now cited as a police ‘crackdown’ on West Indian ‘drug pushers’ in previous weeks…[and by the third day of reporting]….the blacks had been demonized and the Sikh shopkeepers cast as passive, law-abiding martyrs to the mob’s ‘rampage’ (Sutherland, 1989, p. 1043).

What this summary of the first three days of this news story’s life demonstrates is the general mood of the reporting, the framing of the disturbances as isolated episodes brought about by “problem” people, who appear in most of the headlines as unidentified actors, as an undifferentiated “mob,” who commit “group” acts of destruction and violence. The disturbances are called “spontaneous” but are quickly attributed to a cause: the spectacle of black people looting, the black or west Indian figure that is called up as a figure of blame—either for a parking ticket or for pushing drugs.

An article by Nancy Murray (1986) that appeared in the journal Race & Class provides a discourse analysis of press clippings from 1985. She found that coverage of the disturbances downplayed systemic inequalities including high levels of youth unemployment, and police brutality and racism. Such realities were often dismissed as “liberal handwringing naiveté” in favour of a narrative that inscribed “causes more conducive to the spirit and strategies of Thatcherism: the criminality, greed, racism, and innate love of violence of the Afro-Caribbean community” (1986, p. 86) [“blacks of all ages” referred to above]. When the press did place the
riots in a larger historical context, Murray (1986) argues that it was to point to the fundamental “problem” that caused the riots, namely, immigration.

According to Murray (1986), immigration was “perhaps the most fundamental ‘cause’ of all dredged up by the right-wing press [and was represented as] the ‘colossal blunder’ which opened the door to ‘massive immigration’ without ‘the people’ being consulted”63 (86—she is quoting from the Telegraph). “The people” here frames a definition of the human that excludes immigrants. The press shaped the riots into “an immigrant lead phenomenon, new to the 1980s” and represented urban communities with large black populations as “‘a ticking time bomb’, not because they are economic wastelands, but because they are ‘alien’ and hence threatening: the foreign territory within” (Murray, 1986 p. 87, and quote in the middle is from The Sun). In Murray’s (1986) summary, black and West Indian Britains are objectified and dehumanized, figured as “ticking time bomb” or as “aliens;” when they are figured as humans, it is only as de-valued humans. When racism was mentioned in these articles, Murray (1986) points out that it was used to refer to “the ‘racism’ of ‘bitter blacks’ who ‘hate the Asians’” (p. 87, and she is quoting from The Sun). As this narrative became entrenched, parts of the disturbances were edited out or ignored, and blame for the riots was securely placed on the West Indian blacks. In this way, the disturbances are de-humanized just as the people are de-humanized as mobs, time bombs, or aliens.

The Black Audio Film Collective stage an intervention into these disturbances and their representation in mainstream media, aiming not only at a critique of their depiction in

63 “The potential of West Indians and to a lesser extent the Asian Indians as revolution-fodder, as a lever by which they can be used to overturn our society, has been obvious ever since they began to arrive in this country in large numbers” (Daily Telegraph (3 October 1985), as quoted in Murray (1986), 88).
mainstream media, but more deeply at the narrative economy that makes such occurrences meaningful. By narrative economy, I mean the ways in which stories are conventionally managed within a given genre. For example, news reports would have a different narrative economy than, say, a fictional film. This narrative economy can be seen here in the mainstream media accounts of the ‘riots,’ but also is part of a larger epistemological system that organizes history into a progressive narrative.

**Natality and the Essayistic**

Key to understanding the temporality of *Handsworth Songs* and its significance is the complicated idea of the essayistic. This idea was introduced in the previous chapter through Kodwo Eshun (2011), who suggests that the “essayistic” is best understood not as a genre, but rather as what he calls, “a discontent expressed through” (n.p.). Eshun (2011) argues that the essayistic can emerge in “all kinds of projects and all kinds of practices” and its central feature is a discontent expressed through the very thing one is discontented with. In calling *Handsworth Songs* an essay film, I am referring to the film as an expression of discontent with the limitations placed on images and sounds in representations of the ‘riots,’ and with the larger sense that is then made of the disturbances by dominant media practices and also by dominant forms of narrating history.

Eshun’s description of the essayistic as discontent resonates with Adorno’s (1958) description of the written essay. Adorno (1958) writes, “the law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy. By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, *something becomes visible in the object* which it is orthodoxy’s secret purpose to keep invisible” (p. 171, my italics). Thus, the essayistic takes on
the given in order to make visible what the object has been made to hide through the use it has been put to. An example of this from *Handsworth Songs* is Black Audio’s use of archival material from the Pathe Film Library. Once particular clip, of a smartly dressed black man who is identified by an interviewer as “Lord Kitchener, the king of calypso singers,” is taken from the deck of a ship. Lord Kitchener is surrounded by other people (immigrants?) in travelling clothes; he is cajoled by the interviewer into singing “London in the place for me.” The placement of this clip in the film—amid talk of police brutality, social inequality, and streets in ruins—complicates this clip, revealing what is hidden in such propaganda but also dramatizing the real hope and promise of arrival. “The essay is always concerned with *something already formed*, or at best, with something that has been; its is part of its essence that it does not draw something new out of an empty vacuum, but only *gives new order to such things* as once lived” (Lukacs, as quoted on Adorno (1958/2004, p. 151, my italics). The essay turns to what is given, to what is already formed (in this case the archival clip of Lord Kitchener), and engages in a process of re-assembly in order to produce new meanings through what is given. This movement can be read through Ahmed’s (2006) work on opening the gap between inheritance and social reproduction, between reception and possession, complicating how we take on what we inherit. The essay, as a take on what is given, inserts itself into this gap between receiving the past and coming to possess it, and it is from this gap that new meanings can be made.

64 Georges Didi Huberman has recently expanded on this idea in a lecture entitled “Image, Lament, and Rage: Pier Pasolini’s “La Rabbia,”” which was given at the University of Toronto in 2013. He discusses Palolini’s *La Rabbia* as an “essay which invents forms” and shows how Pasolini releases the hidden promise of news reel images through cinematic montage. Didi-Huberman (2013) suggests that this type of montage only has value if one can make the essay a poetic gesture and not just an expository one.
The essayistic names a movement “through” its object—using image to register a discontent with image, and so on. Adorno also writes of this in relation to the written essay:

> to use concepts to pry open the aspects that cannot be accommodated by concepts, the aspect that reveals, through the contradictions in which concepts become entangled, that the new of their objectivity if merely subjective arrangement. It wants to polarize the opaque element and release the latent forces in it. (Adorno (1958), trans by Corrigan, qtd on Corrigan, 2011, p. 23)

Thus the essayistic names a way of taking on what is given in order to express discontent with the status quo, and, through creative expression, reassembling those objects to show what is usually hidden. In Eshun’s (2011) words, the essayistic is “a discontent that is registered through the image, through sound.” (n.p.). This “through-ness” expresses a kind of fidelity to the potential capacity of image and sound. The essayistic does the work of using images and sounds against themselves, in order to “register our discontent, our distance from duties, expectations” (Eshun, 2011, n.p.). This revelatory aspect of the essayistic is its expression of discontent.

The temporality of the essayistic is natal. The essayistic takes on what is and uses what is given in order to register discontent. Recall Arendt’s (1958/1998) discussion from Chapter 2 of the *vita activa* and the particular quality of newness disclosed in natality. As discussed, natality’s newness is not equivalent to novelty or innovation, but is rather a newness that is conditioned although not determined by what precedes it. Like Adorno’s sense of the essay as making something visible that was previously invisible, and Lukacs’ idea that the essay “gives new order” to “something already formed,” the newness of natality emerges through what preexists and conditions its arrival, but is nevertheless an unexpected surprise that cannot be known in advance. *Handsworth Songs* is made of what has already been given (archival footage and
photographs, news clips, video footage of neighbourhoods), but what is given is put together such that the latent forces within what is given are released in a new way. The given footage is used in a way that exceeds or escapes its prior usage. This new usage is conditioned by previous usages but it exceeds the intentions of both those who produced the original images and perhaps even the intention of the BAFC themselves (as it travels to us and is viewed 25+ years after it was made).

In the next three sections, I will analyze how the Black Audio Film Collective produce and disclose the natal temporality of the essayistic by examining their use of montage, their removal of certain structuring devices that open up gaps between events and their meanings, and their movement through what is given.

The natal temporality of the essayistic: montage

There is an affinity between the conventional logics of documentary representation and the conventional logic of historicism. By “documentary representation,” I am mostly thinking about news reporting or documentary film practice, the main genres through which news of the Handsworth ‘riots’ circulated. In news reporting or documentary, a story is shaped into a chronology, with the primary purpose of offering an explanation of some episode that has occurred by tracing its causes backward in time. A continuity is created that appears smooth, but that is made through the selection and combination of often disparate sources. Whereas cinema usually converts a discontinuity (frames) into a continuity (viewing experience), Black Audio Film Collective does the opposite—the way the film is made allows the discontinuity to rise to the viewer’s notice. In documentary film, the economy of time is usually that of a diegetic flow, where time is the ordering device that structures plot or narrative but is absented from the foreground. The movement is flattened into a continuity and the primary operating logic is cause
and effect. The interval or gap between images is erased as a constitutive feature of filmmaking. The gap or interval is covered over in films that seek to effect “realism,” which as Lim (2009) points out, is derived from cinema mimicking our perceptual capacities and not from the image’s relationship to reality. The Black Audio Film Collective, through their use of montage, allows this discontinuity between frames to be noticed, and time becomes focus or a question rather than background.

Through the formal structures of the film (image, sound juxtaposition; still and moving images; voice overs; re-combination of newsreels, etc.), the audience is confronted with and invited into multiple gaps between past and present, between presentation and reception as well as reception and possession; between image and viewer; and between event and meaning. This gap is what the film gives to the audience. I have already described my experience of watching the opening sequence of this film. The juxtaposition of images and sounds in that sequence shifts my perception and thwarts my expectations. This affords a chance to expand what is expected, and returns my interests to me, yet in a new way. Unlike the more conventional uses of image and sound in the newsreel images, where image and sound is used to create a more or less accurate depiction of what is going on, a kind of continuity between the viewer and the “real time” of events, in the syncopated time of the essay film, a distance is given, a gap is made intelligible. This gap punctuates time and extends the uncertain interval between an event and its meaning.

In Handsworth Songs montage not only foregrounds time and allows time to potentially rise to the viewer’s notice, but the filmmaker’s use of montage also complicates how the disturbances can be understood. The film is made from a combination of still and moving images—reaching back to archival images and footage from the 1950s and 1960s to footage shot in Handsworth in 1985 by the filmmakers, by media, etc. The disjointed and non-chronological sequencing of
shots is complimented and complicated by the multiplicity of voices that speak of and to the riots, including community members and representatives from Birmingham’s Afro-Caribbean, Sikh, and British-Asian communities, journalists, politicians, and a range of unidentified poetic voice overs. As T.J. Demos points out, the film “underlines the heterogeneity of its sources” as people “reframe the city’s riots from several different perspectives” (Demos, 2007, p. 269). The film combines poetic voice over with audio from media reports, as well as multiple interviews with community members including the Asian youth movement, Sikh community leaders, the Handsworth and Asian welfare association and multiple on the street interviews with people. What results is not an investigation that seeks to find the thread of truth amid this plurality, but rather a “dialogic retelling” (Demos, 2007, p. 269) of the past, an opening of the disturbances to multiplicity of perspectives and meanings.

This expansion of perspectives on the riots is visually and audibly expressed in the expansive use of audio and visual sources in the film; the audio track is often out of sync with what appears on screen, and the sounds of the film span from interviews to poetic voiceovers to interruptive mechanical noises. Here is Akomfrah (1989):

The central idea, which overrides all kinds of aesthetic considerations in Handsworth Songs, is to put across a multilayered text which at least hints at the possibility that there is no single origin to the disturbances; and that if there were, it is so bound up with a multiplicity of issues to do with housing, policing, etc., that it would have been incorrect to isolate one and say this is the cause of it. What you see here are endless reruns of the same thing, in the sense that the frustrations that came out on the streets then had already been written into other chapters in the protracted engagement between black communities and British society over the last four
decades. The events of 1985 had, written into them, metanarratives, ghost stories, other events, and in a way these were the most significant things. (p. 261)

There is no single story that could “explain” the riots; Akomfrah (1989) frames this multiplicity of stories in a specifically temporal way. The hidden and occluded histories that have been “written into other chapters” of the history of race in Britain emerge in “endless reruns of the same thing,” namely “frustrations” that come out on the streets in part because they have nowhere else to go. Thus, the project of complicating the story of the riots so as not to ascribe a simple “cause” to the riots is not only a comment on the complexity of interlocking structural inequities and social problems in Britain, but rather is equally a problem of temporality and return. The “ghosts of other stories” are written into the history of “protracted engagement between black communities and British society over the last four decades”. Akomfrah (1989) suggests here that these histories will return; in the case of the riots, they return as a repetition of the same, an “endless rerun”. The project of Handsworth Songs is not to redeem this history or to domesticate it such that its return can be more peaceful, but rather to provide and create a space for this return to become a repetition of difference rather than an endless rerun—to offer such returns to the viewer and to create a space in which it might be possible for such returns to be thought rather than ceaselessly repeated.

It is not only that the filmmakers complicate the question of the origin or cause of the riots or suggests a kind of relativism that would amount to saying that there are so many issues at play it is impossible to make sense of the disturbances; rather, by aestheticizing the them and by disclosing a complex mode of temporality through the film’s form and structure, what Black Audio does is to offer the audience an experience of being in time that discloses something akin to Arendt’s natal temporality—a syncopated time that extends the gap between the event and its
meaning in order to open the possibility that we might make new meanings from the riots, that there is something other than endless reruns of the same thing.

The natal temporality of the essayistic: structuring devices

Through *Handsworth Songs*, The Black Audio Film Collective take aim at the structures of representation and narrative that underlie historical representation, disclosing that the temporal underpinnings of our conventional modes of representation and reception are structured by the same logics that structure master narratives of colonialism and progress. In a later interview, Akomfrah (2011) states this boldly. He says, “just giving people access is not enough. You need to extract the images and the narratives and the stories out of a certain preformed chain” (interview with Power, 2011, p. 62). Akomfrah’s “certain preformed chain” is what is already given to us in an unquestioned way, what underpins our conventional ways of relating to images, narratives, stories. Images and stories are easily assimilated and absorbed into “certain preformed chains”—the metanarratives that collect up specifics and shape them into a whole. What Akomfrah is reaching for here is not simple access to a place within these preformed chains for what has previously been occluded or unrepresented, but rather that cultural production can be done in a way that breaks and/or draws attention to the chains themselves, to the certain preformed chains that collect images and stories.

The formal experimentation of the Black Audio Film Collective’s films is in large part an experimentation in how to “extract” the images from their “certain preformed chains” and to re-arrange them such that the already formed images (such as newsreels, archival images,

65 Akomfrah’s articulation bears a striking semblance to the practice of historical memory engaged in by the “Testimony and Historical Memory project” at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) lead by Dr. Roger Simon. See Farley (2006) for a description of the group’s methods and approaches.
documentary footage, historical photographs) can be made to show something else. In their resistance to realist filmmaking and conventional documentary, Black Audio stage an intervention at the most basic level of cultural production. Their practice opens up the question of how images can be made to articulate other histories and other stories. This is not an additive logic but a propositional one, a formal practice that interrupts taken for granted forms of representation and modes of address. To call this a “propositional” logic gestures towards the energy of the work—the film seeks not to call for inclusion in a given history (additive logic), or to critique the structure or content of that history (critical logic), but rather to make new propositions that re-make the logic of how that history is given through a cultural practice (propositional logic).

More specifically, in *Handsworth Songs* and other films by the Black Audio Film Collective, this “critical interrogation” happens through the removal of the dominant narrative voice of the archives in order to allow the images in the archives to be re-circulated as raw materials rather than being tied to an official narrative of history. Again we turn to Akomfrah, who points to a method for using archival materials against official narratives of historicism:

> One of the important ways of doing this is to remove the narrative voice. Once you remove the voice, nine times out of ten the images start to say something…If you remove one of the key structuring devices from archival images, they suddenly allow themselves to be reinserted back into other narratives with which you can ask new questions” (Akomfrah, in Power 2011, p. 62).

Removing the narrative voice here amounts to removing a key part of the structuring and straightening devices of the archives—the narrative voice that smooths out the past into a familiar narrative of historical progress that we already know before we enter the archive. If we
enter the archive with this voice intact, then we will find that which confirms what we already know about the past and history. Akomfrah articulates the removal of the narrative voice as a possibility of renewing the images contained in the archive, of disjoining them from their already given relationship to other images and to an official story and creating a space where those images can be seen anew: “It’s reformulating the premise by which certain things exist and letting them function instead in erasure as what they always were, but as something new” (Akomfrah, in Power, 2011, p. 62). Seeing the images anew and breaking them from their place in an overarching narrative structure is a very different way of treating the archive from the idea of access that Akomfrah speaks of above. The question of the archive is not simply one of access, of either gaining access to hidden or erased histories or including these histories within an official historical narrative, not that “what the archival memory bank needs is just to be let loose on everybody and then we’ll understand.” (Akomfrah, in Power, 2011, p. 62). Instead, the Black Audio Film Collective invites viewers to consider how to approach the archive and re-circulate images of the past in a way that breaks the frames and the structures of historicism.

Through *Handsworth Songs*, the Black Audio Film Collective syncopates the time of the present that the mainstream media accounts rely on, and produces gaps in systems that we usually take for granted as natural, smooth, as determined, and as having no gaps. Syncopating the rhythm of immediacy allows Black Audio Film Collective to work within and to disclose to viewers a different temporal rhythm that is characteristically natal. Recall in chapter 2 the idea of syncopation as syn-cope (to cut together). Just as Arendt (1958/1998) tells us that natality means the human is conditioned but never fully determined by what pre-exists its arrival or its entry into the world, The Black Audio Film Collective show us that the meaning is conditioned but never fully determined by what is given; there remains a capacity or an excess in the disturbances and
their representation that is not exhausted by determinist explanations. In unleashing that capacity, Black Audio Film Collective make visible and audible a natal temporality that is already our condition.

As already discussed, the story of the ‘riots’ was made in the news media of the day, and this story was shot through with explanation. Unlike Arendt’s sense that neither nature nor history determine the full meaning of human actions, these reports attempted to achieve the opposite, suggesting that the ‘riots’ can be fully explained by recourse to familiar racist narratives of naturally inferior people (unhuman). The news accounts attempt to fill the gap with explanation, to “cover” the riots. In opposition to this coverage, the Black Audio Film Collective seeks to proliferate the time of the disturbances and inject into that present a much longer and more complicated history. Rather than closing over the interval between the event and meaning, they attempt to extend it through the insertion of a variety of interruptive sequences, including of still and moving archival footage documenting local histories as well as immigrant arrivals. In this way, the film both discloses a natal, syncopated time and produces an encounter with such for the viewer. As Akomfrah says, “We needed to slow it down, open it, stretch it out. Because although you might say this happened in one afternoon, actually what happens in one afternoon has decades in it. We were going to open it up and show you how there are five decades in it” (Akomfrah, in Power, 2011, p. 61). In slowing down this event time and making space for a plurality of histories within the ‘riots,’ and within the media representation of the ‘riots,’ the film bestows on the audience a gap between the event and its meaning.

66 I borrow this formulation from Walter Benjamin (1968a).
A key feature of the film in relation to temporality is the recurring “non-narrative sequences” (the clown head, the factory worker). One example that occurs repeatedly in the film is of a camera panning through a darkened, abstracted space that is punctuated by a series of enlarged still photographs that appear to be floating. The photographs are mostly portraits; one of a boy astride a Chopper bike, a Union Jack pendant on his handlebars, and another of a formal wedding party posed for the camera. As the camera pans around these images, the audio track disrupts the tranquility with “grinding stabs of inharmonic noise that intrude awkwardly at odds” with the visuals (Eshun, 2004, p. 42). Eshun (2007) calls these “ceasuras” and argues that these breaks halt the films “topical temporality” of the film, serving as spaces for the audience to catch up, slow down, think through what they have seen so far (p. 82).

In *Handsworth Songs*, the Black Audio Film Collective interrupt our certain knowledge of the story of a confrontation between police and people of colour that resulted in the destruction of property and the loss of lives. Rather than claiming a position on the disturbances that would find the truth of them or that would properly assign blame to one side or the other, the filmmakers ask viewers to re-see the unrest, to slow down an immediate rush to incorporate this story and these images into a familiar narrative. And in so doing, the filmmakers recast the familiar narrative and shows it as part of a history we have inherited,67 shows that our way of thinking about what constitutes an “event” and also our ways of connecting such into causal chains, forward progressions, and means-end thinking are themselves constructions that have been passed on to us, often in an unquestioned way, through historicism. Historicism, this certain way of doing history is itself a construction that is not free from the very histories of

67 See Ahmed (2006) on inheritance
colonialism and racism that we struggle with in the present. The filmmakers inject the present event with a much longer history in order to ‘pause’ the viewer’s ability to absorb the present into a familiar narrative. This pause activates the questioning of historicism itself, including the relationship between past and present prescribed therein, as well as the treatment of image, sound, artifact in conventional historical representation.

The natal temporality of the essayistic: expanding the register

The film is in part a response to the reductionist representation of the disturbances in the mainstream media, but rather than a corrective, the filmmakers attempt to articulate a dissatisfaction with representation as such, and, through poetic and aesthetic strategies, to show how representation might be done differently. It is significant that this film was originally broadcast on television, as it performs a critique of media representation through and against itself. Through the imaginative recombination of images and sounds in *Handsworth Songs*, the filmmakers reveal the performative capacity of given images and sounds. It is not simply that the images and sounds are “about” discontent with the topic at hand (in the case of *Handsworth Songs*—with the representation of the riots in mainstream media for example), but also that the Black Audio Film Collective use images and sounds to register this discontent, so their film becomes a doing or a practicing (or a performance) of their discontent at the same time as it is showing that something is missing from the way we conventionally use images and sounds. To “register” discontent implies a kind of making material, to record or make sensible but “register” in music also suggests the range of a voice or an instrument. So we could make a double meaning out of Eshun’s (2011) notion of the essayistic as a discontent with

68 Also, register as verb: to record in one’s mind, heart or memory; to become aware of, to notice properly (OED). To produce a response in or to be detected by an instrument or device. To indicate or convey.
images/sounds that is “‘registered through’ the image, through sound”, in that in the practice of creating the film, they expand the register of images/sounds (n.p.). What Eshun (2011) is suggesting is that this register is limited and that we can be discontented with such limitations, and that we can register our discontent with the register of images through the image. This amounts to a use of the image against the limitations of the “register” of images and constitutes the possibility of an expansion of that register. This expansion potentially promises the expansion of the viewer’s repertoire for attending to the past.

What should be clear from my analysis of *Handsworth Songs* is that this film does not operate as a “corrective” to the given media accounts, nor does it demand representation for under- or mis-represented groups or to correct the media’s mis-representation of the riots. The film expands the register of representation and the register of history, making a different kind of sense than incorporation or correction. Conventional documentary and news reporting is grounded in a closed, deterministic time and in such, images are absorbed into the diegetic flow of the storyline and time becomes an imperceptible backdrop. The essayistic refuses to subordinate time to the background and instead allows the syncopated time that grounds it to rise to the viewers’ notice. What emerges is a natal temporality. The specific image is not sacrificed to the overall flow, but rather the discontinuity is emphasized and the singularity preserved. In this way, the film complicates the sense that can be made of a given “event” and opens the present to the ghosts of other stories.

The film’s resistance to offering clear explanations or correctives to the racist representations found in the mainstream media press at the time resulted in criticism of the film. This criticism most notably played out in a series of letters that appeared in *The Guardian* newspaper in January 1987, beginning with a letter written by Salman Rushdie (1987), who criticized the film
on the grounds that it failed to tell the stories that are occluded from mainstream media, that it fails to represent the people of Handsworth in the style of documentary realism. Rushdie (1987) references the central refrain that is repeated throughout the film: “there are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories,” and Rushdie interprets this sentiment as suggesting that the “real” stories of Handsworth that have not been told in the mainstream press should be represented in order to remedy the misrepresentation and to correct the gap that currently exists in media coverage. Rushdie (1987) understands Handsworth Songs as failing to find a language in which to “tell untold stories, to give voice to the voiceless” (para. 2). The “trouble” he says, with the film, is that the audience is not “told the stories…we don’t hear about their [the people of Handsworth] lives, or the lives of their British-born children. We don’t hear Handsworth’s songs” (para. 5). Rushdie (1987) goes on to provide some examples of such stories, of interesting people and places of Handsworth, that he assumes would do the work of showing mainstream British culture the value of the lives and places that have not been heard/told. Rushdie’s (1987) self-proclaimed impetus is to correct the representation of Handsworth in the press by offering a positive example of the good people of Handsworth. The basis of Rushdie’s (1987) criticism of the film and his corrective desire is the assumption that the film is valuable only insofar as it is equivalent to including the previously occluded, telling the untold, etc. What Rushdie (1987) seems to hope here is that inclusion will be enough.

What Black Audio Film Collective wager here is that this is not enough. Rather than tell the untold, they want to inquire into the question of telling itself. And they do this through the poetic register.

Speaking to their process in making the film, Akomfrah says, “we knew that you can’t just ‘tell it like it is,’ that it wasn’t just an ethnographic issue of finding hidden stories and making them
available. That’s what television had mainly done—to see race as the dark continent of our media culture, so that anything about black people becomes like a voyage of anthropological discovery” (Akomfrah, 1989, p. 261). The anthropological or ethnographic impulse that Akomfrah describes dovetails with the representationist demand (a la Rushdie) for more inclusive or better representations of black people as a remedy to racism. To “tell it like it is” assumes that the problem of representation is simply one of access, and ignores the complicity of the circuits of knowledge organizing representation. This assumption to represent the un- or under-represented does not challenge or question representation itself, but rather leaves it in tact and unchanged, as if the problem consisted only of a not-extensive enough cataloging of human experience. Common sense renderings of politics often fall into this trap, the idea of including the excluded, representing truly the un- or mis-represented and other simplified either/or’s—as if we could simply decide to include everyone and then be done with it without questioning the idea of inclusion, human, representation.

In addition to Rushdie’s indictment of the film, it also received criticism from political and activist groups, mostly on the grounds that the aesthetic or poetic treatment of the Handsworth disturbances “alienated the activist demand for transparency” (Eshun, 2004, p. 40). Eshun (2004) argues that such readings are unable to account for, or ignore, “the will to aestheticize that is central to any aesthetic project” (p. 74). Reece Auguiste (1988) articulates the collective’s will to poeticize like this: “In order to bring emotions, uncertainties and anxieties alive we had

69 For a nuanced discussion of the question of access, and inclusion as not the unquestioned goal but the starting point for inquiry or practice, see Titchkosky (2011).

70 Black Audio Film Collective’s work is characterized by what Eshun (2004) calls a “persistent agnosticism towards…forms of certainty” (here in terms of certainty about racialization. The “Black” in their name is not an “ancestral imperative” but rather “a question of the unthought, as a dimension of potentiality” (p. 75).
to poeticize that which was captured through the lenses of the BBC and other newsreel units—by poeticizing every image we were able to succeed in recasting the binary oppositions between myth and history, imagination and experiential states of occasional violence” (p. 6-7).

“Poeticizing every image” allows the image to be torn from its place in a pre-given narrative structure of linear historicism; the aesthetic space is the space between those oppositions that govern the dominant narrative structures of history and representation. The space created by Handsworth Songs is not “the totalizing space of information” but rather “an aesthetic space of reflection” (Fisher, 2007, p. 30). “The result is a narrative that is not ‘given’ through any totalizing or transcendental perspective, but emerges as a virtuality in the interstices between its different registers and in engagement with the imagination of the spectator” (Fisher, 2007, p. 20).

What is key here is the aesthetic nature of the film, the poetic, that the collective does not simply seek to offer a straightforward corrective or criticism of the media representation but rather to come at the disturbances from different angles and in a different register. The kind of sense that Black Audio Film Collective seek, then, is an aesthetic sense, a poetic sense rather than the logical sense of an explanatory project. Through Handsworth Songs, the Black Audio Film Collective makes a different kind of sense of the disturbances, a “poetic knowledge [that] is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge” (Cesaire, 1972, p. 17). And as Arendt (1954/2005b) says, explanation and understanding are not the same projects, or aims. The will to aestheticize is desirous of a sense that is different from an expository desire or an explanatory project; rather than cause, aesthetic sense is a more oblique sense. Desiring differently from a corrective history that aims for including the excluded, the poetic register of the film demonstrates the complicity of expository sense making impulse with the colonialist mentality. Handsworth Songs, then, read not as a film that grants access or critiques representation but as an aesthetic project that
changes the kinds of questions we understand the film to be asking. Not corrective nor seeking to remedy what has been previously missed in representations of the riot, but rather to ask what can the aesthetic do differently, what do aesthetic modes of representation have to offer to our understanding of the past and the present?

The film attenuates the immediacy of the present inserts a much longer history into these circumstances; in a sense, this is a film that invites history into the understanding of the disturbances in a much different way than mainstream media does—not seeking cause or origin, but rather seeking to place the riots in a web of meanings that reaches backwards and forwards in time, that oscillates between the past and the present, that is not reducible to cause. The film shifts the disturbances in Handsworth from an episodic event to an emergent historical environment. “We are directed to see not an event but an emergent historical environment that can now be sensed atmospherically, collectively. To be forced into thought this way is to begin to formulate the event of feeling historical in the present” (Berlant, 2008, p. 5, my italics).

The space outside the sentence

The formal logic of the Collective’s practice is a desire to evoke thinking and feeling through the present. The film therefore functions as a response to the complicated question posed by Young in Chapter 3, which concerned how to re-write/re-film history when the very model of history is so much the product of the given history that one is discontented with. The formal logic of the essayistic is a temporal logic akin to natality that involves the disruption and re-configuration of temporal and aesthetic underpinnings of representation. The film takes what is given and make a new beginning from it, replacing the romantic notion of “originality” with what Said (1985) has articulated as the problem of “beginnings,” which always start from somewhere. In this way, my analysis of *Handsworth Songs* and the syncopated temporality of the essayistic have allowed for
an expanded understanding of natal temporality as discussed in Chapter 2. Through *Handsworth Songs*, the filmmakers demonstrate how “newness” can be produced through an engagement with what is given.

The Black Audio Film Collective have thus produced a space outside of what Homi K. Bhabha (2004) refers to as “the sentence of history,” the predicative syntax that structures events into an already completed narrative. For Barthes (1975), the space outside the sentence marks “a definitive discontinuity,” in which predicative syntax falls away and it becomes possible to re-compose the elements of the sentence such that sense breaks down (p. 49). In the space outside the sentence, language becomes “lined with flesh” and “the grain of the throat” (Barthes, 1975, p. 49) can be heard. The ‘stuff’ of the sentence comes out of order and appears to us rather than simply appearing as an indicative and sensible sentence (and end point). Moodley (2009) suggests that the place “outside the sentence” offers for Barthes “the possibility to be free of the representations of history, culture, and pain” (p. 299). Bhabha (2004) also discusses the space outside the sentence as freeing. He frames it temporally, as a “time-lag” in which “the ‘subalterns and ex-slaves’ who now seize the spectacular event of modernity do so in a catachrestic gesture of reinscribing modernity’s ‘caesura’ and using it to transform the locus of thought and writing in their postcolonial critique” (p. 246). The space outside the sentence is a place where the sentences we are given become undone and reveal to us their constituent parts. In this fragmentation, sense is up for grabs. Fanon (1967) remarks that “it is not I who make meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there…waiting for me…waiting for that turn of history” (as qtd in Moodley, 2009, p. 305). While our meanings no doubt await us, the space outside the sentence reminds us, “that turn of history can be over turned or turned over” (Moodley, 2009, p. 305).
The Black Audio Film Collective turn what appears in media as simply ‘how it is’ or ‘how it was’—(as a “given”)—back into a “giving” (Kenaan, 2011). This turn provides an opportunity to begin questioning how we receive what we come to possess (Ahmed, 2006), begin to question our inheritance. We have seen above that this inheritance is not only occurrences, narratives, the grounds of narratives, and the ghosts that haunt them, but also in demands or invitations about how we “should” already live with what has happened, including demands to include, or to tell history in a certain way. What is held in the promise of this baring again in a new or unexpected way is the possibility of a second birth. 71

The filmmakers syncopate the rhythm of the story that is told, introduce complexity into the smooth link between event and its eventual meaning that is constructed in media representations and refuse this smoothness in favour of a syncopated time, in favour of complexity and attenuating the interval or the gap. And also importantly, showing that this is being done, that this is being done through image and sound. Via archival cinematic montage that weaves together past and present, the Black Audio Film Collective create a work of imagination, a visual essay that expands the response that can be made to the ‘riots’ through images and sounds. Black Audio Film Collective—take upon ‘what is’ already given and reveal the capacity that is there but hidden (in the news reporting) and the capacity that is there in, for example, the archival newsreels. Handsworth Songs discloses a syncopated time that is replete with gaps, and invite the audience to dwell in those gaps between event and meaning, between the past and the present, and between the diversity of perspectives that exist in the present. These gaps constitute the human in natal time: “a natal way of being in time that sets us at a remove from

71 I want to acknowledge Tanya Titchkosky for help with this set of ideas
ourselves (thus keeping open the question of meaning) and also sets us with others (thus making the work of finding meaning an effort that happens in the midst of human plurality)” (O’Byrne, 2010, p. 13).

In disclosing or making material a natal way of being in time, the Black Audio Film Collective makes certain forms of natality available. The experience of viewing this film is akin to being invited into the syncopated time of natality. As a viewer, I am shown how new meanings can be made from what is given, and in attending to the film, I attend too to my experience of syncopated time. The film provides the material that allows for this form of attention to rise to my notice. In this way, the filmmakers ready the viewer to take upon ourselves the naked fact of production and our relationship to it, asking for attention to this gap. The Black Audio Film Collective thwarts conventional expectations of film, interrupting the taken for granted temporality of film and refusing diegetic flow in favour of a syncopated time in which the gaps between presentation and reception, event and representation, reception and possession, image and viewer, and being and knowing are opened up and attenuated. Through an analysis of their film, we have encountered the essayistic as disclosing a natal temporality and explored how this film expands both the register of cultural production and the register of history through its grounding in natality time.
Chapter 5
Still Moving Images:
looking between the no longer and the not yet

The last chapter investigated *Handsworth Songs* and the Black Audio Film Collective’s use of archival cinematic montage to undo the imperial archive and to propose a different form of historical relation that allows the ‘ghosts of other stories’ to be sensed in an expanded present. The Black Audio Film Collective do not simply reconfirm or reproduce the given nor demand inclusion; rather, they select from the archive those “fragmented residues of histories” that present “new possibilities of deconstruction and simultaneously the construction of both past and present” (Auguiste, 1988, p. 3-4) and produce an essay film that invites engagement with natality. In this chapter, I turn to a consideration of artistic translations of iconic historical photographs across media (from photograph to painting, or from photograph to film). This chapter explores how these artist’s translations open possibilities for interrupting habitual modes of attending to the past and invite an entry into natality time. I will show that historical photographs are conventionally treated as documents or icons—as objects that conform to a known history or encapsulate history into a ‘foregone conclusion’ that confirms present arrangements. In the works of art analyzed here, document-images and icon-image are creatively transformed into scenes of encounter that invite creative response. Such encounters are occasions to practice different ways of looking and to cultivate a regard for the past as a potentially interruptive force that can challenge the present, thus opening inheritance to natality.

**Mizocz photographs again**

At the beginning of this dissertation, I described my encounter with a photograph of women taken in 1943 in Mizocz, Russia. That encounter sparked many questions for me about habitual
ways of looking at historical photographs, the role of the visual in historical knowledge, and the pedagogical possibilities and limitations of disturbing photographs. As perpetrator photographs, the Mizocz images were produced as part of a scopic regime that made a spectacle of the women’s suffering. To begin this chapter, I return to the Mizocz photographs via the imaginative work of visual artist Bracha Ettinger.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Ettinger has created a series of paintings, entitled the *Eurydice* series (1994-1996), which imaginatively responds to the Mizocz photographs and the questions they raise. Through the many *Eurydices* (she has painted over 40), Ettinger creates a frame that facilitates a different kind of encounter with this past. The women we encounter in the *Eurydice* paintings do not resemble the women in the photograph, even as they are based on those images. What we see in the *Eurydice* paintings are explosions of colour and blurred outlines, half realized figures combining with shadows and streaks that seem to evoke figures that appear and then fade into the background. They have an unfinished quality, like photo negatives drained of their focus. Ettinger’s paintings are easier to look at than the photographs, easier to spend time with; at the same time, it is harder to discern what is going on in the images. Thus, Ettinger distances the viewer from the horror of the photographs, obscuring the naked bodies that are so easily available to our sight in the photographs, but at the same time Ettinger’s *Eurydices* also ask the viewer to come closer, to draw near in order to make out the obscure figures and shadows.

To create these paintings, Ettinger treats the photographs from Mizocz as found objects, which she then translates across media. In her hands, the photographs are rendered as paintings through a very specific practice that involves photocopying the photographs, but interrupting the photomechanical processing before the photocopy is heat-sealed. This produces an unfinished copy, a copy that Brian Massumi (2006) describes as interrupting the relationship between
original and copy, catching the image in the midst of its (re)appearance. Massumi (2006) writes: “The image has degenerated. But it hasn’t disappeared. You might say instead that it has been caught appearing” (p. 200). To orient to the image as a mode of appearing resonates with Sartre’s (2004) notion of image as relation and Nancy’s (2005) notion of the image as originary. Ettinger manifests Nancy’s (2005) suggestion that the image is “not first representing, but first being or making ‘a time, une fois’…the time [temps] of making or taking an image, the time of time itself, which opens the eyes” (Nancy, 2005, p. 98). In her interruption of the timing of the machine before the copy has developed, Ettinger catches the image in an in-between moment-of-appearing (continuous), so even though the images Ettinger produces are still, they retain a moving quality, they do not erase their appearing-ness. Ettinger then overlays this interrupted image with other traces and uses the technique of over-painting to finish the process. This complicated procedure produces an echoic, indeterminate image, an image that hesitates before our eyes, that both promises an appearance yet holds something back, that does not quite give us access to the scene depicted in the photograph.

Ettinger’s paintings are a fitting introduction to this chapter in that they demonstrate an artist’s engagement with archival photographs that releases natality. The form of natality is different than the natality discussed in relation to the Black Audio Film Collective’s practice in that there is more focus on betweenness and belatedness, on the temporal interval between 1943 and the 1990s (when Ettinger produces her paintings). In her paintings, Ettinger emphasizes and mobilizes a series of betweens—between appearing and disappearing, between presence and absence, between distance and proximity, and between then and now—these betweens are held in tension. Ettinger manifests natality time in her focus on belatedness and temporal distance not as a gap to be closed over (which would grant us access to the scene) but as an interval that
conditions and initiates our capacity to become responsive to the past. It is Ettinger’s (and our own) belatedness that conditions the possibility of upholding these tensions. Ettinger’s work also serves as a fitting introduction for this chapter in her invocation of the Orpheus myth in the title of her work. The Orpheus myth is perhaps the ultimate cautionary tale of the perils of looking back and the desire to hold the dead in our gaze once more. The paintings take their name from Eurydice, the wife of Orpheus. Recall that Orpheus, so grieved by Eurydice’s death, enters the underworld and gets permission to bring her back to the world of the living on the condition that he walk in front of her on the way up and not look back until both have safely reached the upper world. Eurydice dies a second death when Orpheus turns and looks back at her. In many ways this myth is about the dangers of looking. It also stages a scene of looking that takes place in an in-between space, not yet in the upper world but no longer in the underworld. Arendt (1961/2006) wrote of the space between the “no longer” and the “not yet,” and the importance of this in relation to natality will be taken up later in this chapter. By recalling Eurydice, Ettinger brings awareness to the complicated nature of looking back, and her paintings propel the space between the “no longer” and the “not yet” into sensibility, so that through an engagement with her paintings, the viewer is invited into that in-between space. Such complications are animated in her paintings in the tension between distance and proximity, original and copy, appearing and disappearing staged therein.

The perils of looking back

The women in the photograph are of course, like Eurydice, already dead (Pollock: “the inhuman death which awaited them in the ravine in 1943 (after the photograph was shot)” (p. 857)). However, Griselda Pollock (2010) frames the mass circulation and exposure of these images as tantamount to a violent Orphic gaze; she argues that our gaze can place the women in jeopardy
again. The photographs do not bring the women back to life, but like Eurydice in the space between under and upper worlds, the women are brought back to our sight. They are made to appear to us, and the Orpheus myth reminds us that this appearance and our response to it can also be a moment of danger and violence. Pollock (2010) characterizes the usual way of encountering the Mizocz photographs as a “looking back that kills a second time” in the reproduction of the voyeuristic, murderous gaze of the perpetrators who took the original photographs (p. 857). Pollock (2010) reminds us that the photographs must be understood as not only capturing a real scene of suffering and immanent death, but also that the images are themselves implicated in such; the impulse to capture these images in the camera’s frame reproduces the violence and suffering, adding a layer of voyeurism and humiliation. With perpetrator photographs, the question becomes how to look at these images in a way that does not reproduce the logics that produced them; in the words of Pollock (2010), “how can looking back not kill? How can we meet Eurydice, but not with Orpheus’ deadly retrospect?” (p. 857).

My concern in this chapter is the in-between space, where the past re-appears and is given to our sight. The encounter between viewer and a historical photograph is charged with the promise and danger of turning to look back. Can this look be accomplished without killing again? What role does temporal distance play in how we look at images? What do works of art like Ettinger’s Eurydices offer in terms of practice in attending and responding to the past? Orpheus looked back in order to reassure himself that Eurydice was still there, but that anxious look, seeking knowledge is what condemned Eurydice to a second death. Do works like Ettinger’s stage an opportunity to look on different terms than reassurance or knowledge? How do such practices proliferate the ways in which we look at the past? Proliferating the look here signals that we can potentially look in a way that seeks something other or more than knowledge that confirms what
we already know. Can looking back be accomplished in a way that resists such reassurance and allows what we look at to challenge us? Can visuals educate us not just about what happened in the past, but also contribute to what Wineburg (2001) calls the “education of our sensibilities” (p. 23)?

Natality, born in the relationship between a past dislodged from tradition and our encounter with it through a new sensibility, is both produced and disclosed in the interpretive encounters I discuss here. This chapter will analyze works of art as opportunities to practice forms of attention and imagination that do more than confirm our present arrangements and perspectives. Returning to the Orpheus myth, what I want to suggest is that these artists provide scenes of practice where the look does more than confirm that Eurydice is still there.

**A photograph and its two traditions**

A well-known photograph shows a group of people being forcibly removed from the Warsaw Ghetto. A small boy with his arms raised occupies the foreground of the frame. This photograph—along with fifty-two others—originally appeared in “The Stroop Report,” a bureaucratic document produced by Nazi forces in 1943 to document the eviction of people from the Warsaw ghetto to higher officials. Photographs were included in the report to illustrate and confirm the dehumanization of the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto; this photograph’s original caption, “Pulled from the Bunker by Force,” grants no subject to the frame. This points back to

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72 Wineburg’s (2011) full quotation: “Coming to know others, whether they live on the other side of the tracks or the other side of the millennium, requires the education of our sensibilities. This is what history, when taught well, gives us practice in doing. Paradoxically, what allows us to come to know others is our distrust in our capacity to know them, a skepticism about the extraordinary sense-making abilities that allow us to construct the world around us” (p. 23-24).
the document-image’s status as propaganda and sign and service to dehumanization of the inhabitants of the frame, and announces the image as no more than a document that re-confirms dehumanization. The document-image constrains the photograph (and the eviction it documents) as a means to a certain end\textsuperscript{73}--the image is “no more” than a document that confirms that the “Warsaw ghetto [and its inhabitants] is no more” (as the original title of the Stroop Report read).

In the years since the Nuremburg trial, this photograph has been widely circulated, appearing in whole or in part in a variety of poems, novels, films, plays, and museum exhibitions, and has become known by its central figure.\textsuperscript{74} The photograph is usually displayed according to certain

![Figure 4.1: Photograph of the boy with his arms raised](image)

\textsuperscript{73} In \textit{The Human Condition}, Arendt (1958/1998) says that means-end thinking applied to the realm of human affairs is always a disaster. She writes “murderous consequences inherent in a line of thought that forces one to admit that all means, provided they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end” (1958/1998, p. 229).

\textsuperscript{74} See Raskin (2004).
conventions of visual display that foreground the innocence of the boy, sometimes even to the point of cropping the figure of the boy and the figure of the soldier from the frame, as is done on the cover of the book *The Holocaust for Beginners* (see figure 4.2).

Every return of this photograph attempts to contravene the original terms on which it appeared by granting it a different context and meaning. Those who call on the photograph attempt to break it free from its capture in tradition, and to produce a new context of display in which the photograph is no longer seen as the document-image of The Stroop Report. Through its many re-appearances, however, this photograph has been captured in another tradition: it has become iconic. This icon-image has come to encapsulate and represent increasingly general swaths of history, not just The Warsaw Ghetto in general or the Holocaust in general, but also has become a symbol for various social and political issues. Through its many re-appearances and wide circulation, this photograph has created its own tradition that is separate from the first tradition of which it was part when it appeared in *The Stroop Report*. This second tradition converts the “no more” of the report-image into an “everything image” (Didi-Huberman, 2004).

Figure 4.2: Book cover, *The Jewish holocaust for beginners*
Historical knowledge between document-image and icon-image

Described above are the two traditions the photograph is emplaced within: document-image and icon-image. Both of these orientations to the photograph—as document and as icon—present challenges or barriers to inheritance in that they both function to over-determine the image and prescribe a set range of responses to it. Both of these traditions are in line with and reproduce conventional ways of understanding the relationship between photography and history, where history is regarded as a pre-given narrative and a photograph as a more or less accurate depiction or illustration of that narrative (confirmation, evidence).

These two traditions amount to what Georges Didi-Huberman (2008) describes as two ways of asking “too little” or “too much” of historical images. For Didi-Huberman (2008), asking “too little” of a historical image reduces the image to “no more than a document,” in other words, regarding it as if it is simply a mimetic copy of the scene it depicts and nothing more. This is aligned with the document-image of The Stroop Report and the photograph being instrumentalized as a depiction of “no more” than dehumanized people. Asking “too much” of a historical image, on the other hand, amounts to taking the image as a clear and adequate representation of truth and of subjecting “the image to hypertrophy, in wanting…to make it an icon” (p. 34). This is aligned with the icon-image, with the image as a “prophylaxis” that “enables us to ingest monumental catastrophes—the cleansing of the Warsaw ghetto, the Shoah

75 Photography is the most privileged visual medium for the representation of historical truth. On this point, see Fudge-Schormans (2014) and Derrida (2001).
itself—as an iconic capsule, a prescription that buffers us from the important effects of such incomprehensible suffering and loss” (Fewell and Phillips, 2009, p. 4).\textsuperscript{76}

While I am not trying to equate the aims and desires of those who circulated the report-image with those who circulate the icon-image, I want to argue along with Didi-Huberman (2008) that both traditions amount to “being inattentive” (p. 33) to the force of the image and the “education of our sensibilities” (Wineburg, 2001, p. 23) that an encounter with the past can potentially generate. Any return of a historical image involves enacting a temporal relationship between what is being cited and the moment of its reappearance. Such a relationship can be grounded in the reproduction of taken for granted understandings of the image (as document, as icon) or can prompt a reconsideration of what is being cited, the moment of its reappearance, and the role of the visual relative to history. The icon-image often circulates in a way that translates the specific historical moment of this photograph to an encapsulation of the horrors of war, or that generalizes the figure of the boy and the soldier to a kind of mythical battle between good and evil.\textsuperscript{77}

**Prevailing Modes of Reception: Evidence, Knowledge, Spectacle**

The two traditions of document-image and icon-image constitute two different ways of being inattentive to the photograph in that they conform easily to prevailing modes of reception. These modes of reception organize the relationship between the past and the present and structure our ways of attending to the past as it makes its mediated appearance in the present. In a way, these

\textsuperscript{76} For a further discussion of the “enormous cultural attraction” to the photograph and the problems this presents, see Hirsch (2012).

\textsuperscript{77} See Hirsch (2012).
dominant modes of reception are forms of determinism, in that they provide frameworks or structures that are determined in advance that then contain or constrain the encounter with specific images, sounds, or artifacts. What appears is then over determined by the available modes of reception that structure our response to that appearance. This produces a closed circuit between appearance and response, and by extension between the past and the present, in a way that limits or curtails the opportunity for creative response or surprise. In this way, the dominant modes of reception function as forms of determinism that restrict or curtail natality. What appears then appears not as an open-ended provocation demanding response, but rather as a *fait accompli* that confirms and conforms what we already know and believe about both the past and the present.

The three prevailing modes of reception for understanding the past are evidence, knowledge and spectacle (Simon, Clamen, Di Paolantonio, 2002 and 2005). If our relationship to a historical photograph is structured by the evidentiary mode of reception, we relate to the photograph as a more or less accurate depiction of ‘what happened’ at a particular time in the past. On these terms, the photograph is reduced to an illustration that supplements a given narrative of the past. Evidence values what can be made evident, and thus takes the photograph at face value, privileging what is given presence in the frame. Oriented to as evidence, the past is stripped of its interruptive capacity since the past is gathered up in a way that conforms to the terms of the present’s already assumed narratives and ends.

To receive the past as “knowledge” makes the past into the object of knowledge for the present. Like evidence, this reduces the photographic image to a more or less accurate depiction of a pregiven narrative. The Orphic gaze that Pollock (2010) speaks of is organized by a search for knowledge. As Judith Butler (2004) writes of the Orpheus myth, “We lost Eurydice because we
sought too quickly to know that she was behind us, and the look which seeks to know, to verify, banished her yet more fully in the past” (p. 99). A knowledge-seeking gaze banishes the past because it reduces the past to the epistemological horizons of the present. As de Certeau (1988) has shown, the quest for knowledge of the otherness of the past “denies loss by appropriating to the present the privilege of recapitulating the past as a form of knowledge” (p. 5). On these terms, historical consciousness becomes a project of recovery that involves the incorporation of those parts of the past that ‘fit’ and the replacement of the alterity of the past with the “expression of a ‘will to know’” (de Certeau, 1988, p. 6). The past becomes a cipher that waits only for the deciphering provided by historical interpretation.

Once the past is secured as the object of knowledge, knowledge can be produced about the past, but only on the condition that the radical alterity of the past is hidden.78 Made present as the knowable object of study, the past becomes comprehensible because its alterity is not admitted; this is a violent relationship in which knowing is premised on the exclusion or entombment of the difference of the past. As Simon, Clamen, and Di Paolantonio (2002) argue, referring to de Certeau (1988), the past is given “presence and discursive completion…in order to bury its radical (non-present) alterity” (Footnote 7). Knowing here is a form of deadening; the construction of a knowing subject in a way that emphasizes the “rational pursuit of universal, objective truth about what happened in other times and places….and)…the transmission of that knowledge” (Chinnery, 2011, p. 128).

78 De Certeau (1988) suggests that the project of historiography “aims at ‘understanding’ and, through ‘meaning,’ at hiding the alterity of this foreigner; or, in what amounts to the same thing, it aims at calming the dead who still haunt the present, and at offering them scriptural tombs” (p. 2).
Even more than evidence or knowledge, most contemporary forms of attending to the past are structured by “spectacle.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines spectacle as “a specially prepared or arranged display of a more or less public nature…forming an impressive or interesting show or entertainment for those viewing it…set before the public’s gaze as an object of curiosity or contempt, marvel or admiration” (OED). Spectacular modes of reception and attention have been written about by many theorists interested in visual culture and historical memory. Mario Di Paolantonio (2009) writes that ‘spectacle’ describes, “an economy of representation in which stories and images are compressed into readily recognizable forms: quick encapsulations and units of information that can circulate smoothly through the channels of mass mediation” (p. 130-131). He calls spectacle a contemporary condition that structures our mode of “attention and our manner of receiving and transmitting, compressing and refiguring, learning and teaching about past events” (Di Paolantonio, 2009, p. 130). The speed and smoothness of the circulation of the past in the present within an economy of spectacle is also notable: since the past is reduced to the terms of the present, there is no ‘static’ as the story or image of the past is quickly assimilated and circulated in the present.

The problem with spectacle is that it “denies the loss of loss, denies that there is anything that is radically beyond the recuperative power of the present, [and] ends up accumulating and circulating all things through the principle of identity” (Simon, Clamen, Di Paolantonio, 2005, p. 141). Di Paolantonio (2009) adds depth to the notion of spectacle by further specifying two forms of spectacle: hyper fidelity and hyper relativism. The former takes the past as self-sufficient and adopts an extremely reverential attitude towards the past, deferring to it all authority. Under such conditions, images of the past “speak not only for themselves, but also on behalf of the present” (Di Paolantonio, 2009, p. 133). In relation to the photograph of the boy
with his arms raised, hyper fidelity would dictate that the photograph is sacrosanct. Hyper fidelity is already at play in the document-image of *The Stroop Report*, where the image needs no further caption than “Pulled from the Bunkers by Force.” But we can also find hyper-fidelity in the icon-image that expands the image into an everything-image. Hyper relativism, on the other hand, “depicts a mode of attention and identification that strips the particularity of the past so that it smoothly enters, without disruption, into the present terms of exchange” (Di Paolantonio, 2009, p. 133). So the representation of the past becomes “exchangeable and expandable” in the market of information (Di Paolantonio, 2009, p. 133). In relation to the photograph of the boy with his arms raised, hyper relativism conforms to the icon-image, the image that can travel freely without fidelity to its historical situation. Both of hyper relativism and hyper fidelity produce the engagement with the past through spectacle, and fail to hold up the referential tensions between the past and the present.

**Prevailing modes of reception and natality**

These three prevailing modes of reception of evidence, knowledge, and spectacle structure a relationship between the past and the present in a way that does not invite or require the creative response of us in the present. That the photograph of the boy with his arms raised has been circulated so widely is owing in part to how the image operates aesthetically to communicate a particular view of the past that confirms and conforms to the prevailing modes of reception, particularly the first two. The photograph is so easily incorporated into a pregiven historical narrative because it already visually confirms those tropes through which that narrative operates. The boy with his arms raised is easy to assimilate into a universalized ‘victim,’ one who is not marked by any distinguishing features that designate him as a member of a specific cultural minority, nor any visible signs of violence or distress (which was a common feature of a lot of
the other children pictured in The Stroop Report photographs that have not been taken up in the same way as this one has).

Di Paolantonio (2009) characterizes this diminishment of responsiveness engendered by the prevailing modes of reception like this: “critical engagement, the work of facing our present choices, is annulled by a form of thinking that endows the past with an infinite power which takes possession and forecloses human potential (that is, our ability to read, think, learn, and transform our relation to the past)” (p. 133). When the appearance of the past adheres to prevailing modes of reception, it comes to us as “given” and as already read. In other words, the relation is determined in advance of an encounter. What is annulled in such encounters and forms of relationality is the possibility for natality, which shines through the “human potential” that Di Paolantonio mentions. The prevailing modes of reception contour certain forms of attention, which are clarified in Gadamer’s (2004) assertion of the difference between the “cultivated consciousness” of the spectator, who gives themselves over to what they are watching in an act of public self-forgetfulness, and “someone who merely gapes at something out of curiosity” (p. 122). Curiosity in Gadamer’s formulation is aligned with ‘spectacle’ as described above, a form of attention that draws the one attending away but without implicating them. This form of attending becomes a means of private self-forgetfulness, a consuming but ultimately vacuous entertainment.

On the terms given in the dominant modes of reception that treat the past as evidence, knowledge, or spectacle, our response to the meaning of past is given in advance of our encounter with it, structured as it is by these familiar modes. Prevailing modes of reception place both the possibility of natality and the specificity of the past at risk since the past is in danger of
being subsumed “into that which facilitates the operations of the present economy of representation” (Di Paolantonio, 2009, p. 131).

What Di Paolantonio (2009) describes above as “human potential” is what I have called natality. Natality discloses a way of imagining and relating to time that is opposed to determinism, and from the temporal ground of natality, it becomes possible to re-imagine modes of reception outside of these three dominant frameworks. What is lost when historical photographs are constrained to prevailing modes of reception is the opportunity for creative response. If the appearance of the past simply confirms to our expected modes of reception, that appearance invites no response other than a stock one. Under these three dominant and habitual modes of reception, we in the present are not called upon to make a unique response to a given image because our response is already constrained and determined before our encounter with the image. When we as viewers take on prevailing modes of reception (and naturally slip into these), we acquire a viewpoint that fails to attend to our situatedness in history; our response becomes prescribed, standardized, necessary rather than new and contingent on the specific encounter. When the past is made identical to the present, what can be valued and attended to is only that which conforms to our present modes of reception. Recall the discussion in chapter 2 of how determinism threatens natality and Markell’s (2006) contention that determinism erodes “the contexts in which events call for responses” (p. 2). What is lost in such an economy is the difference of the past and the ability to attend to what Arendt (1978) has articulated as the “treasure” of the past, that which exceeds and potentially interrupts our present, that which is not easily rendered “visible, tangible, palpable” (Arendt, 1978, p. 12).
Photography and Creative Response

The discussion of prevailing modes of reception as a form of determinism that curtails natality raises a question for photography. If a photograph is understood only as a more or less accurate re-presentation of what has occurred, it makes little sense to suggest that a photograph could do anything other than reconfirm what it depicts. In this way of thinking, a photograph would provide no entry into natality time since it simply serves as an index of what happened. How can a photograph be understood to invite creative response? Can a photograph be a potential entry into natality? On the terms given by representational discourses of the photograph, the image is understood as a visual re-production of what happened, as a medium through which the “‘has been’ of facts” (Arendt, 1978, p. 7) is recorded and re-presented. In recent years, many theorists have provided the grounds on which to think about the photographic image as something more than representational.79 I discussed some of those theorists in Chapter 1 in my discussion of image as relation. While it is outside the scope of this chapter to give a detailed accounting of such theories, it is helpful to explore this idea here through the work of Ariella Azoulay (2008; 2012).

Azoulay (2008; 2012) approaches photography through the language of “event” and “event-ness.” What Azoulay calls “event-ness” resonates with what I have been calling the creative response that is potentiated by natality time. Azoulay (2012) provocatively suggests that the photograph might be oriented to as “an additional unfolding in the event of photography (not of the photographed event)” (p. 23). What this means is that the “event-ness” of the photograph is not exhausted by the event it depicts (and therefore is not a property of the image-as-object).

79 See Mitchell (2005).
Azoulay (2012) re-locates the “event” of the photograph and refuses the tacit assumption that a photograph is an end product of an event that has occurred. To encounter a photograph as “unfolding” rather than a record or a product of an event that has already taken place suggests that photographs can be understood as having a fundamental incompleteness, and that the photograph can be understood as a “social space,” in Azoulay’s (2012) words as a “singular point whose reservoir of actions may be reactivated and may return to life” (p. 54). To say that the event of the photograph is not given in the image-as-object implies that something more is at stake in our encounter with historical photographs than a re-confirmation of a familiar historical narrative. An encounter with a photograph can on these terms be understood as a potentially productive moment where the agencies of those involved in the production, circulation, and analysis of the image might be reconfigured. In relation to natality and inheritance, this means that the photograph of the boy with his arms raised, under the right conditions, can be understood and approached on more complicated terms than simply as a record of what happened one day in 1943.

**Samuel Bak’s *Icon of Loss***

*Icon of Loss* (1995 to 2008) is a series of seventy-five oil paintings by Samuel Bak. Each one features a rendition of the figure (or multiple figures) of the boy with his arms raised. Done in a classical “old masters” style and rendered in oil, the paintings transport the figure of the boy into a variety of landscapes, ranging from vast allegorical panoramas to more mundane scenes of brick walls and alleyways. In many, the figure of the boy is composed from scraps of debris or seems to emerge from the ruins of the landscape, or from the exposed brick walls of deteriorating buildings (see Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4). The constructed quality of the figure injects into these paintings a tension between presence and absence; the boy is not simply given or reproduced as
an exact likeness, but rather, the paintings “advertise their own handmade quality, their dependence on human labour” (Fewell and Phillips, 2009, p. 5).

Bak explicitly situates his project as a response to his own felt sense of dissatisfaction with the tradition of the photograph’s circulation, such that it has become “a sort of logo of the Holocaust,” and frames his paintings as a desire to “reinvigorate” the figure of boy, who, Bak says, “has never stopped questioning me” (Raskin, 2004, p. 74). In exhibited and publications of these paintings, the Warsaw ghetto photograph of the boy with his arms raised is reproduced.
When I attended an exhibition of Bak’s works in 2012, the starting point of the exhibition was clearly marked and the first image displayed was a very small reproduction of the photograph. That Bak prefaces his work with this photograph demonstrates his effort to position his paintings as in dialogue with the photograph, and to make sure the viewer knows and remembers the photograph.

Bak’s approach to his desire to “re-invigorate” the figure of the boy is paradoxical in that in his multiplication of an already massively reproduced image, he risks falling into the same spectacularizing modes of reception that structure our relationship to the icon-image, a kind of hyper-relativism that allows the photograph to travel freely and become a reference not only for the Holocaust but for social justice more generally. For Bak, the massive exposure of the image through its many reappearances entails a loss of the image’s confrontational force. Why then should Bak seek to further multiply the image? I want to suggest that something different is going on in Bak’s multiplication of the figure of the boy than a simple repetition of the same (icon-image). Through his multiple renditions of the figure, Bak confronts viewers of his work with the legacy of this photograph all at once, pressing recognition and familiarity to the limit. When I viewed the images at an exhibition, at some point in the series, questions of reproduction—of whether or not Bak has captured a fitting or accurate likeness of the boy—faded away, and figure took on a slightly menacing or confrontational aspect, seeming to await my engagement. When confronted by Bak’s multiplication, I am brought to thought about what it means for an image such as this to have become recognizable, and what this recognizability implies for how we look at images and how we attend to the past. Bak’s iterative renditions

80 “Icons of Loss: The Art of Samuel Bak” was an exhibit that took place at the Joseph D. Carrier Art Gallery in North York, Ontario from March 1-April 30, 2012.
paradoxically take up an image that has already been massively reproduced and widely
circulated, and, by echoing such, they turn this reproduction against itself and work against the
easy transmissibility of the photograph. The paintings dramatize Bak’s felt sense of being
addressed or questioned. When I view the multiple iterations of the figure, I move past a kind of
comfortable recognition of a familiar image and am instead confronted by a seemingly ceaseless
re-appearance of the figure. In this way, the boy begins to look back at the viewer in a way, to
question us.

The title of the series, *Icon of Loss*, also points to the paradox of presence and absence, distance
and proximity that characterizes the legacy of this photograph and that Bak evokes through his
works. The photograph of the boy with his arms raised has become an icon, and is often
deployed and circulated in a way that makes the image ameliorate the loss. Bak’s title returns us
to loss, offering multiple re-appearances of the figure in manner that “does not refute the loss or,
indeed, ameliorate it.” Rather, the figure is “given a strange sort of presence, but this presence
does not deny the loss; it gives its present life, it shows how it continues to contour life in the
present” (Butler, 2004, p. 96).

The multiple renditions and the constructed quality of the paintings highlight Bak’s struggle to
respond to the questioning figure of the boy and make visible his feeling of being addressed or
questioned. The structure of questioning and response requires that a distance be preserved
between the two interlocutors such that a response could take place. Bak’s work can be read as a
visual retelling not simply of the photograph but of his own ongoing engagement with it. The
way the paintings demonstrate their constructed quality and the sheer number of them preserve
Bak’s response to the photograph and make that response material. What Bak does through his paintings is expose the viewer to this own exposure to the photograph,\textsuperscript{81} opening up a dynamic of historical relation and inheritance that is more complex than identification. Bak’s paintings are not attempts to faithfully reproduce the figure of the boy with his arms raised nor are they attempts to hide the figure from sight. Rather, Bak works in and through the photograph’s legacy, creating a frame that exposes the viewer to the demands the photograph has placed on him, preserving his feeling of exposure in the multiple renditions of the figure. Bak re-inivigorates the photograph’s ability to address us by showing his own felt need to respond; the creative act is a response.

It is interesting to read Bak’s images together with Ettinger’s \textit{Eurydices}. There are important similarities across these two projects, in that they both begin from a relationship with a perpetrator photograph that was made for the purpose of documenting or spectacularizing dehumanization and death, and which subsequently became iconic through its re-circulation. Both Bak (1995-2008) and Ettinger (1994-1998) also work in series, proliferating the images or figures and offering iterative renditions based on their own encounters with the photographs and the legacy of such. There are many important differences between these two projects. Both projects interrupt the smooth transmissibility of these icon-images and inject a distance between the viewer and the image, but they do this distancing in very different ways.

As stated, both artists are working with a photograph or a set of photographs that have been reproduced in keeping with the prevailing modes of reception of evidence, knowledge, and

\textsuperscript{81} Simon, Clamen, and Di Paolantonio (2005) suggest that the work the one remembering is called to do with testimony is “to keep it from disappearing as testament—and this means responding to its call, performing this response by exposing others to my exposure to its demands” (p. 151).
spectacle. Bak (1995-2008) and Ettinger’s (1994-1998) projects both work through the creation of distance between the viewer and the photograph. In Bak’s *Icon of Loss*, this distancing is done through his use of an “old masters” oil painting technique, so that the familiar figure of the boy is rendered in unfamiliar and almost epic landscapes; certain painting seem to come from a much earlier time. Bak also does this distancing through the constructed character of his paintings, where his own work and the process of making both the figure and the painting seem to emerge from the painting. In a way, the paintings show us the time it took to make them, make the editorial imagination appear on the canvas. Bak takes the figure of the boy, who Hirsch has called “consummate space of projection” and injects strangeness into him, such that he is less available for identification and projection, less the prototypical innocent child victim.

Ettinger works through the legacy of the icon-images from Mizocz by literally interrupting the exposure of the photograph and refusing its smooth duplication. She interrupts the smooth ability to reproduce the image that Pollock (2010) aligns with the Orphic gaze. When Ettinger jams the copier and then further manipulates the resulting image by over-painting, she produces a composite image that draws out attention differently, not giving us the women to be seen again from the perspective of the perpetrator photographer, but rather distancing the figures from our gaze. This distance is paradoxical in that it also draws us towards the painting; the obscurity of the figures and its failure to resemble the familiar photograph draws the viewer literally closer in order to see the figures.

Both Ettinger’s *Eurydices* (1994-1998) and Bak’s *Icon of Loss* (1995-2008) are serial projects that translate a well-known photograph to painting. Both and in different ways interrupt the easy relationship between the photograph and the viewer and stage a series of questions about recognition, familiarity, and how we look at historical images. The focus in both series is shifted
from one of reproduction, or the relationship between an original image and a copy—Massumi (2006) writes that Ettinger puts such questions “on pause”—and the focus is shifted to the in-between space of appearance and translation. Massumi (2006) suggests that Ettinger opens up “the suspension itself” (p. 201), shifting the focus from end points (original image—reproduced likeness) to the interval in between, where the practice of cultural production takes place as a scene of creative response.

Bak’s *Icon of Loss* series takes on the photograph of the boy with his arms raised in order to distance the viewer from habitual ways of viewing the photograph. From the two over determined traditions of this photograph (document-image and icon-image), Bak makes a response-image that preserves his own exposure to the photograph and invites his audience to regard the boy in a new way, materializing inheritance as a creative practice inviting response.

In the next section, I will analyze a short film by Mitov Panov (1985). Like Bak, Panov returns the viewer to the photograph of the boy with his arms raised. While Panov also plays with recognition and distance, I will here analyze his film as an aesthetic work that injects contingency back into the scene of the photograph, and in so doing, challenges our habitual ways of looking at photographs as products or outcomes.

**Mitov Panov (1985), *With Raised Hands*: Between Two Cameras**

*With Raised Hands* (1985) is a 5-minute film written, produced, and directed by Mitov Panov. Shot in black and white, it has the look and feel of a 1940s film, including visual graininess and auditory noise. The film opens with a shot of the face of a WWII-era fixed camera and the hands of an otherwise unseen camera operator preparing to take a picture. The perspective is then switched to this fixed camera. Figures slowly take shape on screen: a German soldier, a
woman’s hand held up, a crowd of people pushed from the frame. A scuffle occupies the front of the frame as the soldier fixes the cap of an unruly boy and attempts to get him to stand still in front of the camera. After a few attempts, the soldier places the boy in front of the crowd. A recognizable scene—the one captured in the iconic photograph—begins to take shape. We are watching a moving image that reconstructs the social space depicted in the photograph. At around two minutes into the film, the scene is complete and there is a brief 5-second pause (almost a shutter click) to mark the moment of the photograph.

The film continues after the moment the photograph is taken, exceeding the moment of the image’s capture and providing the viewer with an afterword to the storied shot. After the pause, the perspective changes to that of a moving camera and we no longer see the crowd from the point of view of the fixed camera operated by the soldier. Through his use of two cameras, Panov opens up a space in between what is captured in the still photograph and the unfolding social space of the scene. We see the photographer, still winding the camera, and the crowd of people, who still stand in place. Everything is motionless but for the wind, which has picked up and can be heard billowing, disturbing the hair and scarves of the women. A sudden gust of wind comes up and blows the boy’s cap off his head. After some hesitation, the boy slowly steps off to retrieve his cap, lowering his arms and walking away from the scene. Each time he tries to pick up his cap, another gust of wind blows it further away; each time this happens, he turns to look back at the scene from progressively further away, and we see the scene from the point of view of the boy. It looks like a film set (see Figure 4.5). He finally retrieves his cap, by now so far away from the scene that he can only see the camera, not the crowd of people it films. A figure emerges from around a corner to look for the boy. The camera flashes back to the last place we have seen the boy, but he has disappeared from view. In the final scene, we see the boy
from the back as he walks away. Once he leaves the frame of the film, his body obscured by a low fence, the last evidence we see of him on screen is the cap, which he throws into the air twice in a celebratory, carefree gesture.

Figure 4.5: Still from Mitov Panov, *With Raised Hands*

Panov translates the still photograph to a moving image. Doing this is a great risk; such translation could easily fall into a spectacularizing mode that pretends to grant unfettered access to the past. Panov manages this risk through his emphasis on the ‘stuff’ of cultural production—the multiple cameras, etc.—and also through a kind of fantastical ‘what if’ mode.

One way of understanding Panov’s work is through the tropes of foreshadowing, backshadowing, and sideshadowing theorized by Bernstein (1994) and Morson (1994). These are literary tropes that depart from the realm of literary or narrative analysis and become powerful explanatory devices for interpreting history and biography. Both Bernstein (1994) and Morson (1994) show that historical understanding is heavily constrained by narrative tropes. Foreshadowing is grounded in a closed sense of time. The most familiar and recognizable of
these three tropes, foreshadowing “involves backward causation, which means that, in one way or another, the future must already be there, must somehow already exist substantially enough to send signs backward” (Morson, 1994, p. 7). Backshadowing names a “kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by a narrator and a listener is used to judge the participants in those events as though they too should have known what was to come” (Bernstein, 1994, p. 16). As viewers of the photograph from a historical distance of 40+ years, our own knowledge of what happened to the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto shapes our reading of it. From the epistemically privileged position of the present, it is easy to project back onto the past and judge participants with “the enormous condescension of posterity” (Thomson, qtd. in Bernstein 1994, p. 23). Backshadowing and the more familiar narrative trope of foreshadowing constrain the present-ness of the past and construct the past as if it were identical to the present; what is missed is any sense of open time, of the multiple possibilities that existed in any given moment for alternative outcomes. To view history through the tropes of backshadowing and foreshadowing is to foreclose the possibility of natality. With respect to photographs such as the boy with his arms raised, a lens of backshadowing takes the photograph as an end point, a foregone conclusion.

What the Panov’s film and its use of moving images allows for in a way that photography arguably does not is an exploration of what Bernstein (1994) calls “sideshadowing.” Unlike foreshadowing and backshadowing, which are grounded in a deterministic, closed time, 

82 Another example of backshadowing is discussed in the writings of holocaust survivor Primo Levi, who in speaking to students about his experiences of the camps is confronted by a boy in fifth grade who, using the description of the camps Levi has provided, suggests to Levi that there was a simple way to escape and admonishes him for not doing so. In this example, backshadowing prevents the student from perceiving the experience of others and reduces the past to the terms of the present.
sideshadowing is premised on an open time, where contingency and multiple possible outcomes characterize any given moment. The moving image allows Panov to dramatize the photograph as a moment amongst other moments. This is not a revisionist history, but rather a change in tone through the insertion of a kind of prosaic quality of present-ness that has been stripped from the photograph. Panov returns us to the in-process present moment. Working with the point of view of two different cameras—the fixed camera that is operated by the soldier and the moving camera that is operated by the “narrator”—Panov returns us to the scene of the image capture in a way that shows it as an in-between moment: between two cameras, between what has happened and what is going to happen, between reality and fantasy. The scene comes alive as the present of those who occupy the frame, as indeterminate, open to chance, and alive with other possibilities.

Sideshadowing involves “a gesturing to the side, to a present dense with multiple, and mutually exclusive, possibilities for what is to come” (Bernstein, 1994, p. 1). As I watch the boy chase his hat, I become seized with an awareness of the contingency that that present moment possessed, that there could have been other outcomes. This complicates how I relate to the people in the frame, and therefore complicates the way I understand the photograph. The inhabitants of the frame become less and more—they become people/humans, caught in the in between of the present. Humanizing people means placing them in between the dehumanization (the “no more”) of the report-image and the hyperbole (the “everything) of the icon-image. In Panov’s film, the boy becomes just a boy—not a symbol of innocence (icon-image) or a dehumanized “vermin” to be forced out (document-image), but a boy playing pick-up with the wind.
Sideshadowing shifts how we attend to historical narrative in that it introduces contingency and opposes determinism. It places emphasis and value on the singularity of the present moment as one that always contains multiple possibilities: “the point of view of any single moment in the trajectory of an ongoing story has a significance that is never annulled or transcended by the shape and meaning of the narrative as a (supposed) whole” (Bernstein, 1994, p. 28).

Sideshadowing connects to natality in that it values the contingency and uncertainty of the present moment and insists on the fundamental openness of time. In this way, sideshadowing can be understood to disclose a natal temporality.

To understand more fully how the contingency that is introduced through sideshadowing works to shape how the viewer regards the photograph and the film, I want to place another project in conversation with Panov’s. This project is an exhibition proposal by Amish Morrell (2006). This project is quite different from the other discussed. Unlike the other works, Morrell’s (2006) project is not publically available, nor is it a fully realized project. It is, rather, an exhibition proposal that Morrell (2006) wrote as part of his doctoral dissertation, “The Dialectics of Affection: Trace and Temporality in the Restaging of Historical Images.”

My description and analysis of his project is based on the last chapter of his dissertation, which takes the form of an exhibition proposal. Morrell’s (2006) dissertation includes a DVD that contains the visuals that I describe below.

83 This dissertation is available through the Proquest database, but here I want to acknowledge that this dissertation and the DVD I am describing is not publically available in the same way as the other works of art discussed here. The DVD accompanies the hard copy version of the dissertation, which is only available at the libraries of the University of Toronto and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
In his exhibition proposal, Morrell (2006) was working on a way to juxtapose images in order to shift the viewer’s attention to the interval. After experimenting with several different ways of combining images, he arrives at a particular form of juxtaposition. As part of his project, he produced a DVD that contains an example of this form of juxtaposition. Here, I am describing the images that Morrell (2006) has included as part of that DVD.


Picture two images, side by side (figure 4.6). On the left is “Willie Ross feeding the deer,” a photograph taken in 1950 in rural Nova Scotia. On the right is another photograph, taken in 2005 by Morrell on the same spot. At first glance, this appears to be two still images, the one on the left of a man feeding deer and the one of the right of a field. Despite the absence of the buildings, the man, and the deer in the image on the right, there are similarities in the contours of the landscape between the two shots. As a viewer, my first impulse was to engage in a kind of “spot-the-differences” or “spot-the-similarities” game between the two images, my eyes moving
back and forth between them to find the pivot points and what is missing. But as time passes, something else becomes apparent, gradually: the image on the right is not a still image but a moving one, and I hear an audio track of outdoor sounds (insects, rain, wind) and the photograph begins to come to life in small ways. The moving image does not contain much “action” but is rather a simple shot of the trees and the clouds shifting in the wind, drops of precipitation on the camera lens, fog appearing and disappearing, clouds forming and dispersing. These prosaic movements become surprising in the context, where the viewer at first assumed that the image was a still one. I become interested in watching these small movements of the world. I am awakened to the difference between looking at a still image, which I thought I was doing, and watching a moving image. The sense of expectation that accompanies watching a moving image awakens a different form of attention. As my gaze shifts back to the image on the left, of Willie Ross and his deer, I find myself watching it, extending my expectation of aliveness into this still image. Thus, Morrell’s (2006) juxtaposition elicits a different form of attention, and awareness of that attention.

The image on the left becomes infected with potential—the image of the man and the deer no longer seems like a flat surface for my wandering eyes, but rather something that could become animated. I am alerted to the potential of something unexpected emerging or emitting from the image. Morrell (2006) describes experimenting with a number of ways of juxtaposing image in an attempt to elicit or facilitate attentive awareness towards the subject matter of the photographs and to the past more generally. He is specifically concerned with the question of how the juxtaposition of image might “imaginatively open up time to help the viewer discover different terms by which to understand our relationship with the past” (Morrell, 2006, p. 176).
In my encounter with the images, my first impulse was to take the two images in as a comparative “before and after” kind of relationship. Morrell (2006) argues that juxtaposition that elicits such a reading allows the viewer to stay on a level of cognition or descriptive comparison and to orient to the images as texts to be read or understood. This for Morrell (2006) is a way of making a relationship between images that stays comfortable within conventional viewing practices and conventional structures of historical time (these conventions are deeply involved with each other). Within these conventions, the viewer is not addressed or called to attend to her practices of attending to images, and the past is given as an object. I can read these two images from different times (1950/2005) and the changes in the landscape between the two times according to previously held facts about the local history of the area, more general economic or social forces that moved people out of rural areas and into cities. Likewise, if I was not familiar with rural Nova Scotia, I could easily take these images as a general commentary on the differences or similarities between the past and the present. In both these approaches, images are little more than visual confirmation of what I already know or hold to be true, and the more general narratives of progress or historical change that I already hold. Morrell (2006) calls this “semiotic interpretation” where the relationship between the past and the present, myself and the images is not shifted beyond shifting “knowledge of the past as expressed through a reified image” (p. 177).

Morrell (2006) seeks to challenge automatic viewer responses and dominant ways of understanding image and history and to do so by altering the form of presentation. He articulates his desire to find a way of juxtaposing images that would “de-emphasize the signifying function of the images upon which they are based, and instead draw attention to their temporal character” (p. 179). He also articulates this as “unconceal[ing] their representational character” (p. 179).
In the juxtaposition described above, where the moving image juxtaposed with the still one shifts how we attend to both of them and to ourselves in the act of attending, addresses the viewer not as information about the past but rather as a felt experience of perception that unsettles us. No longer does the viewer simply compare the two images or project himself or herself back in time to wonder who Willie Ross was or to imagine what his life was like. Rather, the image becomes the relation, not just what is depicted but also a way of attending to the past.

I have engaged in this extended description of Morrell (2006)’s proposal because his work allows for an expanded understanding of Panov’s. In Panov’s film, he stages the viewer’s familiarity with the photograph (as dramatized in the pause/ “shutter click”). The click is not the end point (photo as product) but simply a moment between other moments. The ‘click’ draws our attention to the limitations of what and how we know this familiar image and says there is more. As with Morrell (2006), when we return to look at the photograph after seeing Panov’s film, we return to it with a kind of watchfulness that is new. Whereas Morrell’s (2006) juxtaposition places a still image beside a moving one and thus heightens the sensation of looking versus watching, Panov’s film works as a kind of protracted version of this. As we will no doubt encounter this photograph again and again, once we have watched the film, we see the photograph differently. Hence, Panov returns presentness to the frame of our future encounters with this image. Here, the act of seeing becomes part of the production of meaning.

Panov explores the photographic scene through a mode of fantasy and imagining that invites the audience into the “what if” mode, so that the familiar photograph becomes a moment among other moments. When we watch the film, we re-enter the scene as it is unfolding. Panov brings “present-ness” back into this scene. By “presentness” I mean a certain prosaic and open quality that the present possesses. Bernstein (1994) and Morson (2010) have written about this in
various ways: “sideshadowing,” “prosaics,” “eventness.” Morson (2010) here ties “eventness” and “presentness” together:

Not all events have eventness. An event has ‘eventness’ only if presentness matters, only if the present moment is something more than the automatic result of prior moments. Only then can the present moment have real weight, can it actually constitute a force of its own (Morson, 2010, p. 94).

Presentness demands an open time in which more than one thing can happen. Morson’s (2010) description of presentness and eventness resonate with my own description of natality, in that they both demand a commitment to time as open. Morson (2010) shows that “closed time” and determinism depend on a chronotope in which only one thing can happen. Deterministic time restricts the possibilities of the present moment to the certain terms of cause. Under deterministic time, if we have a sense that more than one thing could happen, “our sense of alternative possibilities simply reflects our lack of knowledge of causes” (Morson, 2010, p. 96). Against this deterministic and causal time, Morson (2010) proposes (via Bakhtin) a “casuital” time in which the “particular case contains a surplus that exceeds the rules” (p. 98). In the realm of case unlike that of cause, uncertainty and contingency reflect more than ignorance; rather than error or pitfalls to be avoided, uncertainty and contingency become the very conditions of possibility for the task of inheritance.

Sideshadowing is both a mode of narration and a mode of attending. It is resistant to totalizing or authoritarian frameworks, those modes that Walter Benjamin might have called the “kind of transmission that is a catastrophe” (Benjamin as qtd in Cadava, 1997, p. xxiv). As Cadava (1997) describes, “(t)his catastrophic transmission would be the one that works to articulate a
single thing...It would be one that, mobilized in order to ensure the continuity and transfer of this single meaning, aligns itself with what Jean-Luc Nancy has called the phantasms of immediacy and revelation” (Cadava, 1997, p. xxiv).

Still Moving Images: Image, Appearance, and Response

Bak (1995-2008), Ettinger (1994-1998), Panov (1985), and Morrell (2006) work with historical photographs in different ways. Bak excerpts a figure from a photograph and renders it repeatedly in oil, while Ettinger catches the image in the midst of appearing and then adds layers that draw the viewer in while at the same time hold something back. Panov animates the entire scene of the photograph in order to imagine the present-ness of the photograph, and Morrell juxtaposes a still image with a moving one in order to catch the viewer between looking and watching. What they have in common is a grounding in natality time, which is materialized by the way in which each artist values and foregrounds the three temporal themes that inhere in natality, namely, newness, betweenness, and belatedness. The past appears not as a recovery, incorporation, or entertainment. Neither does the photograph appear simply as a “document-image” or an “icon-image.” These works of art stage an appearance of the past that exceeds the three dominant modes of reception of evidence, knowledge, and spectacle and the two traditions of document and icon that both these photographs already exist within. In the work of these artists, the photographs become something more and less at once. They stage a form of appearance (or appearingness) that maintains fidelity with the partiality and uncertainty of our knowledge of the past.

In rendering photographs as having present-ness, these works of art signal the cultural surplus of past images, the capacity for new readings and new meanings of old images. These works of art manifest this capacity. Even as an image is caught up in a certain tradition that shapes how we
look at it and how we attend to it, there is always something that exceeds this capture. When Ettinger catches the image in the midst of appearing by interrupting the copier or when, in Panov’s film, the wind catches the boy’s cap and leads him away from the scene we are so familiar with, what is gestured towards is the excess of appearance. “what is true of every new event or state of affairs: because they exceed established frameworks of understanding, we have to come up with new interpretive narratives in order to give the new events a place in the worldly space of human affairs” (Vasterling, 2011, p. 142).

Arriving belatedly at the scenes their works address, these artists creatively respond to those scenes in the boundary space between past and future. The work of these artists provides entry into natality time. In this movement from the prevailing modes of reception (grounded in determinism) to more hesitant and hesitating modes of reception staged in these works of art (grounded in natality) the viewer is invited to practice responding. The objectifying viewpoint given by the frameworks of evidence, knowledge, and spectacle for a more participatory perspective that “allows one to be addressed by what one sees and hears” (Vasterling, 2011, p. 137). To be addressed and to be responsive to what appears lacks the “compelling force of necessity” and instead re-introduces contingency into our interactions with fragments from the past (Vasterling, 2011, p. 139). Words and deed evoke responses and reactions, and hence action is imbued with a necessary indeterminacy and open-endedness. To be addressed and to become aware of contingency is to experience natality time.

Referential tensions and the space between the no longer and the not yet

Bak and Panov deliver us back to the referential tension between the photograph’s original appearance in The Stroop Report (document-image) and its many subsequent re-appearances in
museum exhibitions, popular culture, and history textbooks (icon-image). In their works of art, the image hesitates and refuses to be confined to a document or to be expanded to become an icon. Rather than these two conventional modes of appearing, the image in both Bak and Panov’s works hesitates between the “no longer” and the “not yet.” In hesitation, what is preserved is the tension between the past and the future. If the photograph is received and attended to simply as a document-image, we might rightfully feel good that it is “no longer” 1943 and the present’s superiority would be reinforced through this distancing mechanism. On the other hand, if the photograph is received and attended to as an icon-image, we might move too quickly to re-humanizing the boy, and exempt ourselves and the present from a relationship with that history and the dehumanizing forces that made that scene possible. We stop seeing the image as it tried to call on us and we do not experience our historical location as related to the reception of a report that includes this photograph. Instead of ‘us,’ we see another ‘them’—the evil ones that perpetrate, disjointed from history, and cut off from the particular and long-standing tradition of hate that is part of this image’s legacy. If we forget the tension and move too quickly towards the icon-image where the boy represents an innocent child victim of non-contextualized brutality, we see the scene as depicting only the rightful target of justified hatred, and the image ceases to have anything to do with us in the present, other than a kind of confirmation that we are too are innocent. Both document-image and icon-image risk collapsing the tension between the no longer and the not yet.

The “no longer” and the “not yet” are terms Arendt (1946/2005a) used to describe the perplexity of inheritance in dark times. In a review essay on a 1945 novel by Hermann Broch entitled The Death of Virgil (a context that will become significant momentarily), Arendt writes that at certain turning points in history, “the decline of the old and the birth of the new is not necessarily
an affair of continuity” (p. 158). At these critical points, the chain linking the past and the present is broken, and the gap between them is no longer covered over by tradition. What “comes to the surface…can only be described in terms of the ‘no longer and not yet’” (Arendt, 1946/2005a, p. 158). The gap is non-negotiable and serves to initiate the possibility of the birth of the new. Within the gap between the no longer and the not yet, “a new space of experience opens up, an empty space in which the relationship between the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet’ has not yet ossified into legibility—and therefore predictability” (Richter, 2011, p. 201).

It is significant that Arendt (1946/2005a) described the no longer and the not yet in a review of a novel, in that, as the philosopher Gerhard Richter (2011) points out, “Broch’s lyrical prose serves her as the rhetorical condition of possibility that propels into thinkability certain aspects of the empty space or no-man’s-land of the no longer and the not yet” (Richter, 2011, p. 202).

Following from Richter (2011), I want to suggest here that the works of art analyzed in this chapter by Bak, Panov, and Ettinger condition the possibility for thinking about inheritance between the no longer and the not yet—foregrounding betweenness in the present. They do not seek to grant access to 1943 nor do they absolve the present of a relationship to the forms of violence and dehumanization that created the photographs they take up. Rather, they invite the viewer to stay between the no longer and the not yet and in so doing, they value the betweenness and belatedness that is central to natality. These works of art invite the viewer and the cultural theorist to think inheritance outside of the modes of reception given by dominant historicism.

What the works of art by Bak and Panov (as well as by Ettinger) do is to demand that we stay in the space between the “no longer” and the “not yet.” This space between does not allow us to forget that the image was originally a perpetrator photograph. The space between tells us that while the photograph no longer has the original meaning (not the document-image), we are also
not yet free from the world where such an image appeared as part of a report that dehumanized people for a lot of other people.

In order to be faithful to the in-between space of the “no longer” and the “not yet” and to uphold the referential tensions that inhere in the appearance of an image such as this, the works of art take the risk of committing a kind of infidelity—manipulating the image, extracting a figure from it, animating a still image. Their returns of and to this photograph adhere to what Derrida (1994) calls the “aporetic structure” of inheritance. Derrida “advocates not just the repetition of a legacy, but a repetition that does better justice to the aporetic structure in question” (Haddad, 2005, p. 3). Bak and Panov refuse the prevailing modes of reception of evidence, knowledge and spectacle and instead offer contradictory returns that attempt to be faithful to the in-between space of the no longer and the not yet.
Chapter 6
Fugitive Speech: Re-speaking Politics Across Time and Space

If history is to be creative, to anticipate a possible future without denying the past, it should, I believe, emphasize new possibilities by disclosing those hidden episodes of the past when, even if in brief flashes, people showed their ability to resist, to join together, and occasionally to win. I am supposing, or perhaps only hoping, that our future may be found in the past's fugitive moments of compassion rather than in its solid centuries of warfare. (Zinn, 2010, p. 11).

I want to tell you something that nobody else could tell you, they haven’t lived long enough to be here today to tell you… (Queen Mother Moore).

This chapter examines the contemporary phenomenon of re-speaking. Re-speakings are public performances of past speeches based on archival transcripts or video recordings. Speeches tend to be re-spoken verbatim and in full, creating a durational public performance that is documented and circulated as video. Given the specificity of this practice, it is surprising how many contemporary works of art fit this description. The range of examples that take up speeches from the late 1960s and early 1970s alone reveals the ubiquity of this practice as well as the art world’s more general fascination with protest culture from that era. Examples of re-speakings of radical speeches from the late 1960s and early 1970s include: Mark Tribe’s The Port Huron Project, BLW’s re-speakings of Queen Mother Moore, Carlos Motta’s Six Acts: An Experiment in Narrative Justice, Kirsten Forkert’s Art Workers’ Coalition (Revisited) 2006-, and Howard Zinn’s The People Speak.

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84 The fascination that late 1960s protest culture holds for artists is by no means confined to re-speaking. While not re-speakings, work like Sharon Hayes’ In the Near Future (2009) and Sam Durant’s Electric Signs (year) also work with language from the 1960s and 70s protest movements. Mary Kelly Circa 1968. John Malpede, Lana Lin and H. Lan Thao Lam, Kirsten Forkert’s Art Workers’ Coalition (Revisited) 2006-, Subrin’s remake of the film Shulie
In this chapter, I stage a direct comparison of two re-speaking projects: Mark Tribe’s *The Port Huron Project* (2006-2009), which consists of actors re-speaking protest speeches from the Civil Rights/New Left era, and BLW’s (2004) re-speaking of a 1973 Queen Mother Moore speech. These projects differ markedly in their approach and thus rely on and produce different understandings of what constitutes a re-speaking. These projects also differ as to representations regarding what a re-speaking is responsible to and for, and how a performative encounter with re-spoken words potentially activates political imagination in the present, and what such political imagination might entail.

How might re-speakings be understood as inheritance practices that activate or release the promise of natality time? All re-speakings involve the direct re-citation of words that were spoken by someone else at an early time and space to a specific audience. Any given instance of citation requires the one making the citation to account in some way for what they are responsible for or responding to; such accounting can take place explicitly (such as in an artist statement) but much more importantly is also registered in the performance itself. In re-speakings, speeches are removed from their temporal context, but a certain aspect of context is preserved through the performance of entire manuscripts rather than of aphoristic quotations excerpted from those speeches. This chapter will consider how encountering a past speech as an embodied and durational public performance changes the conditions on which we hear, feel and make sense of words from another time. I will also consider what happens to the meanings of words—especially those urgent elicitations and imperatives that characterize political speech after a 30- or 40-year time lag. How are spectators in the present addressed by these words? In both projects discussed here, re-speakings involve literally taking on someone else’s words and persona, and this raises issues of appropriation, of a subjective displacement as well as a
temporal one. What does it mean to take on other speaking positions across time, place, and identity? How do these interwoven displacements shift the terms on which the speeches are received and responded to? What sort of response is possible to an untimely speech? How does re-speaking elicit understandings of community and publics, and solidarity with publics of previous eras? Finally, this chapter will explore the idea of politics that each project puts forward. Both of the projects in question in this chapter are respeakings of political or protest speeches. In addition to anchoring them to a certain and very specific time and place (of their original enunciation), the political nature of these speeches also raises the question of what sort of politics the re-speakings evoke or seek to manifest. A key question emerges for both projects: given that each of the artists responsible for these works articulates a desire to invigorate or innervate political activism in the present, why attempt to do this by re-speaking old words? What does this indirection offer to politics and for an understanding of what constitutes politics? This question of the political will return us to natality time, and I will explore what understanding of politics might emerge from a grounding in natality.

In order to investigate how these two specific instances of re-speaking potentially act as inheritance practices disclosing natality time, I will examine the constituent elements of each project: a text, a speaker, and documentation. The differences between the two projects will reveal the specific ways in which a temporal relationship is made—what kind of relationship to the past is staged, how do the projects stage the tensions between fidelity and license, and what to what aspects of the past are the works faithful? I will then turn towards a larger investigation of the “time zone” of re-speaking and how these projects potentially release the promise of natality time, expanding our individual and collective capacity to imagine new ways of being together in the present.
1960s in the 2000s

Before describing the two projects, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the question of why protest cultures of the 1960s and early 1970s appear so frequently in art projects from the early to mid 2000s. What is the substance of the attraction to protest cultures of this particular era, and what forms of resonance or relationality exist or are being staged between these two times? In artists’ statements about their work, what is often articulated is a felt sense of dissatisfaction with contemporary politics and opportunities for the public expression of radicalism. Such dissatisfaction can be expressed in a number of ways. I pause to consider this here because the form such dissatisfaction takes matters greatly for how any given project addresses itself to the present.

One form dissatisfaction can take is a conservative critique of the present that holds up the past as a lost ideal. The desire to re-enact is here animated by a fantasy of wholehearted return to an earlier time. This often slips into simplistic nostalgia to recapture what has been lost or what is missing. Such forms of dissatisfaction set up a relationship between the past and the present that is structured by what Walter Benjamin (1931) called “left wing melancholia,” where the hollowed out and idealized forms of previous political formations are held on to so tightly that the realities of the present escape from view. Organized through left melancholy or conservative nostalgia, the culture of the 1960s is reified and objectified. Left melancholy is immersed in deterministic time in that it holds fast to an idealized past moment, and thus creates a kind of closed circuit between the past and the present, where the present is already understood

85 Not all forms of nostalgia are this simple. See Magagnoli (2011) for a rich discussion of what he calls “critical nostalgia.”
86 On left melancholy, see also Brown (1999), Sarlin (2009).
as a failed or a lesser version of the past. Thus, left melancholy refuses natality as its temporal ground in favour of a fidelity to the past.

Dissatisfaction with the present can fuel different returns to the past. Much of this depends on how the past is positioned. The past can be positioned not as an idealized and completed “lost state of plenitude” (Deutsche, 1996, p. 285), but rather as a resource that has not yet been exhausted by its incorporation in history. Such a return is not a desire to “return to” the past but to turn to those “fugitive moments” that Howard Zinn (2010) writes of in the quotation that begins this chapter (p. 11). For Zinn (2010), “fugitive moments” represent those “brief flashes” that might illuminate new possibilities in the present. In this kind of positioning, the past becomes not a didactic prescription that tells us what to do or how to think, but becomes provocative of thought about and in the present, inciting us to question our present arrangements and how things could be otherwise.

Whether the two projects analyzed in this chapter evoke a conservative desire to return to a lost past, or a more uncertain turn towards the past in order to address the present can only be discerned through careful attention to the dynamics of the projects themselves. What can be considered at this early point in the chapter is how the artists responsible for the projects articulate their sense of dissatisfaction with contemporary politics in published articles and artist statements. Both Tribe and BLW frame their projects as redressing a paucity of public opportunities for protest speech in contemporary culture, and both also draw documents to re-speak from the same subculture of the late 60s and 70s. Their re-speakings attempt to manifest radicalism in the public speech of the present, “this moment in which it is so difficult for radicality to have any sort of foothold” (BLW, 2007, p. 6). Both also explicitly and implicitly act on a feeling of connection between the 1960s and the early 2000s, the strong sense that the
radicalism of that earlier decade and its anti-war protests in particular have something to say to the early 2000s.

In a “project description” on his website, Mark Tribe frames *The Port Huron Project* as addressing what he calls the fracturing of the Left and the diffusion of radicalism into a “multitude of micro-movements” (n.d., p. 1). He laments that although the analyses of the New Left are just as applicable today as 40 years ago, “the revolutionary solutions the New Left imagined are beyond us; tactics such as marches, sit-ins, and civil disobedience are no longer effective” (n.d., p. 2). Tribe’s framing of the “problem” of contemporary activist culture refracts through the decisions he makes around staging the *Port Huron Project* re-speakings in ways that I will elaborate on in great detail later in this chapter.

BLW frame their re-speaking much differently. While they are also motivated by and desirous of expanding the repertoire of political actions and imaginations, they do not frame the present as a loss or bemoan the fracturing of the Left. BLW are both more ambivalent and more material in their description of the aims of re-speaking. BLW ask: “How does the act of re-playing activist video recordings both instill the current moment with the spirit of resistance and possibility, while simultaneously elucidating the impossibility of such optimism now? Can we, through embodied recitation of this radical speech, give this act of ‘play-back’ a different outcome?” (BLW website). Holding together possibility and impossibility, distance and proximity, they position re-speaking as an uncertain activity. They also explicitly tie the lack of opportunities for radical speech to manifest in the present to an insufficiency of media, and frame their work as an

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87 This recalls the quotation from the Black Audio Film Collective’s (1986) *Handsworth Songs*: “In time we will demand the impossible in order to wrestle from it that which is possible”
expression of dissatisfaction with media that attempts to speak that dissatisfaction back to itself (Borcila, 2013). Their approach resonates in many ways with the idea of “thoroughness” discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the Black Audio Film Collective’s approach to using images and sounds to expand the register or the repertoire of how we make meanings from worldly events.

This brief discussion of the two works begins to hint at a major difference between them. The detailed comparison staged later in this chapter will reveal that although Tribe’s project opens up many fascinating questions about performance, he ends up maintaining fidelity with the past in a way that reinforces deterministic time. Tribe’s and BLW’s articulation of the substance of the resonance between then and now emerges in more powerful and also more nuanced ways through their projects, in terms of the elements they emphasize, the terms of their address, and the different risks they take.

**Project Descriptions**

**The Port Huron Project**

*The Port Huron Project* is a series of filmed public re-speakings of Civil Rights and New Left era speeches performed by hired actors at their original locations to audiences of invited guests and passers by. Mark Tribe is the artist behind *the Port Huron Project*. Altogether, six re-speakings took place between 2006-2009 and were commissioned by Creative Time.  

Speeches included: Howard Zinn (original 1971, reenactment 2007), Cesar Chavez (original 1988).

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88 According to its website, Creative Time is a nonprofit organization that commissions and presents public arts projects of all disciplines. See: http://creativetime.org/
In all, six re-speakings were staged in public space as performances, and speeches were given in their entirety and based on transcripts or audio recordings. The actors are cast to resemble the original speakers, maintaining a kind of surface fidelity based on racialization, gender, etc. At each performance, there are two different speakers, each of whom perform a re-speaking of the same material; both are recorded in a straightforward documentary style and Tribe selects one of these two circulate as video. Tribe claims not to have made attempts to “theatricalize the performances,” but it is worth noting that the hired actors who perform the re-speakings are well versed in the arts of rhetoric and deliver the speeches with much passion and conviction. The speeches are delivered with minimal context; they are advertised as re-speakings rather than as commemorations—they do not mark the anniversary of the original speech and no information is provided to contextualize the speech within the New Left/Civil Rights era. The name of the project is taken from The Port Huron statement, a 1962 manifesto written by the student activist movement Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in Port Huron, Michigan.

At the performances, no effort is made to disguise or naturalize the constructed nature of the performance—cameras, crew and recording equipment are made present and obvious, and Tribe has described the recordings as being part “of the overall spectacle” (n.d., p. 4). However, the videos that are produced from these performances are very sleek and professionally presented,

such that they do the work of erasing or at least downplaying their constructed character. The videos produced are then circulated in a variety of contexts, including on the Internet through Tribe’s website (which is the context in which I saw them), in galleries and exhibitions, and on large screens in Times Square.

**BLW’s Re-speaking of Queen Mother Moore at Green Haven**

The next re-speaking project I describe is of a speech originally given by Queen Mother Moore to inmates at the Green Haven Federal Prison in 1973, re-spoken by artist collective BLW at the Pilot festival in Chicago in 2004. BLW is an artist collective made up of Rozalinda Borcila, Sarah Lewison, and Julie Wyman. Queen Mother Moore was an African American activist, black nationalist, and civil rights leader who did early work with Marcus Garvey and founded the “Republic of New Afrika,” as social movement that agitated for reparations for slavery and sought to secede from the United States. She passed away in 1997 at the age of 97. The archival text for BLW is a 17 minute video recording of Queen Mother Moore’s speech at Green Haven, documented by the People’s Communication Network, a production collective founded in 1971. Queen Mother Moore was invited to speak at the prison by Think Tank, a self-organized group of prisoners, and the speech was recorded for public access cable television in 1970.

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90 *The Port Huron Project* was exhibited as part of the “Democracy in America” exhibit organized by Creative Time at Park Avenue Armory in 2008. *Port Huron Project* videos and installations have been also been exhibited at SITE Santa Fe, Marginal Utility in Philadelphia, Museo de Antioquia in Medellín, the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore, LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions), the National Center for Contemporary Art in Moscow, the Aspen Art Museum, Southern Exposure (San Francisco), the Chelsea Art Museum (New York), Pixilerations (Providence), Pace Digital Gallery (New York), the Cranbrook Art Museum (Michigan), the Arlington Arts Center (Virginia), and Trinity Square Video (Toronto).

91 For a discussion of Queen Mother Moore’s legacy, see McDuffie and Woodward (2013).
New York City (her speech was the first time an alternative video collective was allowed to film activities inside a prison).\textsuperscript{92} I will say more about her remarkable speech later.

BLW describe how they first encountered the video of Queen Mother Moore at the beginning of a week long festival; they felt unsettled and compelled by what they heard, and their response took the form of a re-speaking, which they staged at the end of the same festival.\textsuperscript{93} In the video documenting their 2004 performance, they re-speak Queen Mother Moore’s words in a monotone, studied tone—they each in different ways seem to be struggling to remember the words (they often look at cue cards/paper) and visibly struggle to find a tone appropriate for the occasion. They come across like young students doing a presentation that they have attempted to memorize but not quite mastered. Unlike \textit{The Port Huron Project} speakers, BLW do not emulate the impassioned delivery of Queen Mother Moore’s speech.

Their 2004 performance is documented in an 8 minute 54 second video.\textsuperscript{94} The video is an edited version of their re-speaking, consisting of a split screen, each one showing one of the speakers reciting the speech. The audio tracks are syncopated such that the voices of the two speakers on each screen overlap and echo each other, heightening the disjunctive quality of the re-speaking. At times one of the screens shows a shot of the audience, a small group of people who appear to be young, white, bored. Around five minutes into the video, footage from the original Queen Mother Moore video appears on one of the screens. Queen Mother Moore speaks with passion

\textsuperscript{92} For an extended description of the video’s production and circulation in the context of early video collectives, see Hill (2011)

\textsuperscript{93} They later performed the re-speaking again and invited members of the audience to speak along with them (see Wyman, 2009 for discussion of this).

\textsuperscript{94} Video is available here: http://vimeo.com/45375258
and excitement in marked contrast to the members of BLW. After about 90 seconds, a BLW member appears again on the second screen and as before, and their words overlap and echo those of Queen Mother Moore’s. Heightened here is the sense of difference in tone and pacing—Queen Mother Moore speaks much faster than BLW; as a viewer, I had the strong sense wanting only to hear Queen Mother Moore and that the re-speaking was an interference and distraction from Queen Mother Moore’s speech, an unwanted intrusion. This intrusive and awkward quality of their re-speaking is a very interesting aspect of their project and will be considered later in the chapter.

The Elements of a Re-speaking

These two projects approach and manifest re-speaking very differently. For Tribe, the elements are fairly simple and straightforward: “a location, a speech, a performer, invited guests, and the presence of cameras and various other recording devices” (Sarlin, 2009, p. 141-2). In contrast, BLW’s re-speaking centers less on the elements through which a re-speaking is staged and more emphasis is placed on the struggle to ‘perform’ the re-speaking itself. In the video I have described above, the three members of BLW perform the re-speaking themselves (and in later iterations, BLW invite workshop participants to perform the re-speaking).\(^95\) Whereas Tribe’s project delivers engaging and polished performances, BLW’s re-speaking do not work very well as performances at all. They emphasize re-speaking as something anyone can do. Tribe’s smooth staging has the effect of erasing the labour that goes into the activity of re-speaking,

\(^{95}\) For a description of BLW’s workshop at the 2013 Flaherty Seminar and the controversy the re-speaking generated, see Lee, 2013.
generating instead a sense of immersive transport back to an earlier scene. While watching BLW perform their re-speaking, I feel no sense of transport.

To gain a more nuanced sense of the differences between these two projects, I will contrast how they treat their constituent parts: a text to speak, a speaker/voice/tone, and documentation or afterlife. This allows for a consideration of the material differences between the two projects. For both of these projects, re-speaking cannot simply be understood as speech that aims at an accurate reproduction of a past instance of speech. If a re-speaking simply aimed for an absolutely faithful and accurate rendition of an original, we would simply watch the video of Queen Mother Moore speaking at Green Haven or read the archival transcripts of the speeches from *The Port Huron Project*. The “re-” in “re-speaking” marks not just the “again-ness” of the speech but also the performative and artful transformation of it.

**Element 1: A text to speak**

To re-speak, one first needs a text—a transcript or a video recording of a past speech. For the *Port Huron Project*, Tribe selected six speeches from New Left era activists. In his words, he “chose speeches for their historical significance and their points of resonance and dissonance with contemporary issues” (2010, p. 9). Also, since the re-speakings were delivered at the same location as the speeches, the texts selected needed to have been performed at a still existing and accessible public location. In the case of BLW’s re-speaking of Queen Mother Moore’s speech, they describe how the speech chose them in a way; they watched the video of Queen Mother Moore at Green Haven at the opening of the Pilot festival in Chicago, and experienced the speech as an indeterminate call to action and response. This response took the form of their re-

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96 I take inspiration from BLW’s (2007) article in the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest for organizing this chapter.
speaking on the last day of the festival. Tribe’s project places more emphasis on the re-speaking as a staged public performance put together in a professional and deliberate way and requiring sophisticated equipment, whereas BLW’s re-speaking comes together in a more random, do-it-yourself spirit.

In addition to a different selection process, the speeches themselves are quite different. In the case of Tribe, the speeches are political speeches given at public demonstrations or rallies. Thus, they make many references to political issues and situations of the day and are spoken with urgency, making many overt demands and calling the audience to action on these issues. The Angela Davis (1969) speech, for example, calls for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam and for the release of domestic political prisoners. Such a demand is tied to its context, and when it is re-spoken 30+ years later, it does not make sense in the same way it did in 1969. Of course, this bears a relation to questions of inheritance, which I will discuss later.

The Queen Mother Moore speech (1973) was an invited address delivered not in public but to an audience at the Green Haven Prison, which was recorded and subsequently broadcast on cable access television. Queen Mother Moore’s intended audience is therefore much smaller and she proceeds not through overt demands, but rather through storytelling. One remarkable story she tells is both a re-telling and explicitly about being called to speak. She recounts a story from her early days of civil rights activism, when a group she was part of in New Orleans had invited Marcus Garvey to come and speak to them. Police had prevented Garvey from speaking. With great rhetorical flourish, she asks, “How do you go determined to keep the powers from preventing your leader from speaking? How do you do that?” The solution the group found was to go armed, “with handbags of ammunition,” and Queen Mother Moore tells how:
“Everybody’s gun came out and this is what they said, “speak, Garvey, speak! Speak, Garvey!” with guns in their hands. “Speak, Garvey, speak!” And Garvey said, “As I was saying…” (1973)

She recounts not the speech that Garvey gave, but the moment of being granted the ability to speak through the armed resistance of those who wished to listen to him. I will discuss this moment further later in this chapter as a key hinge for BLW’s approach.

The original texts these artists are working with are different. Whereas BLW have access to a video recording of Queen Mother Moore delivering her speech, Tribe is working with transcripts. This difference might become significant in relation to the ways in which these artists sought to produce ‘truthfulness’ in their re-speaking. It might be suggested that if Tribe had access to video documentation of the speeches he re-enacts, then his efforts to create verisimilitude may have been muted, or abandoned entirely. However, I do not think that the differences between these two projects can be explained or accounted for in this way.

Element 2: Speaker/Voice/Tone

As stated, The Port Huron Project has professional production values, with hired actors delivering the speeches with rhetorical flourish (i.e., in a ‘convincing’ way that mirrors the gestures, tones, etc., of impassioned political speech), whereas the re-speaking of Queen Mother Moore by BLW has a much more do-it-yourself aesthetic and are spoken in monotone, and slowly. BLW makes no effort to create verisimilitude between their speaking and the Queen Mother Moore video in terms of location, racialization, audience, or the look and feel of the speech, whereas Tribe privileges verisimilitude and immersion through his choice of actors and by staging performances at the same physical site as the original. In a way, this decreases the
‘static,’ or the disjunction between a past moment and a present one, creating an immersive spectacle in which the audience re-experiences the speech on similar terms as the original. I named this above as affecting a kind of “transport” for the audience, wherein the project gives the feeling of access to the excitement and urgency of the original scene. None of the speakers in the Port Huron Project struggle with their lines, but rather appear to be speaking from the heart.

As already mentioned, the experience of watching BLW respeak is different. Their stilted delivery and obvious struggle to remember and say the words, as well as their monotone delivery, makes watching their re-speaking an uncomfortable experience. As a spectator, I do not feel transported to another time, but simply stuck in this one, witnessing awkward speech. The words do not roll off their tongues, and they possess none of the charm and conviviality of Queen Mother Moore. I want to emphasize here that the decision not to try to emulate the impassioned delivery of the original speech is related to their decision to perform the speech themselves (and so they are missing the surface fidelity that Tribe affects through his choice to use hired actors who resemble the speakers). But of course they still could have taken a tone that simulated Queen Mother Moore’s rhetorical flourishes. They do not do this, and I want to here mark this lack of trying as an important element of the project, which I will return to later.

Element 3: Documentation/Afterlife

Another difference between BLW and Tribe is how the performances are documented and circulated. Documentation was part of both projects, with Tribe making the presence of multiple video cameras and recording equipment very much part of the overall spectacle of the re-speakings. A passer-by coming upon the re-speaking would have seen not only a person speaking and the surrounding audience, but would have been very much aware of the re-
speaking as a media event. Tribe produced high quality videos that were shown subsequently on his website, in many galleries as part of exhibitions, and also notably on the large TV screens in Times Square (the Angela Davis re-speaking). As stated, the high quality of these videos has the effect of erasing their produced qualities, so as I watch the video, I feel almost none of the awareness of the work of production (unlike commentators who were present at the live performances). Through the videos, Tribe’s project is made to have a rich afterlife. BLW also produce documentation of their re-speaking (at least the Queen Mother Moore one), which is available on their website. I have already discussed the difference in quality of their video production (decidedly low tech).

In addition to the video documentation and websites, both artists have also produced texts about their work. Tribe published a book (2010) consisting of photographs from the re-speaking, several short articles by well-known theorists and activists, and the full transcripts of each of The Port Huron Project speeches. BLW published an article in the Journal of Aesthetics and Protest (JOAAP) about the project, and the members of BLW have published a number of other short articles. The BLW (2007) article in JOOAP is framed as a “kit for speaking and re-speaking.” Rather than a traditional description or analysis of their practice, they offer a breakdown of tools and prompts that invite the reader “to share our mode of inquiry, to mobilize and amplify this practice” (para. 1). In producing a text that documents their practice in the form of an invitation to engage in a similar practice of re-speaking, BLW (2007) reinforce their commitment to practice; just as their own re-speaking of Queen Mother Moore’s words was done as a response to a feeling of being called to speak by those words, their own work very clearly desires to elicit broader participation from their listeners and readers. This is different from Tribe, whose documentation (high quality videos, circulated broadly in media) echoes or reproduces his own
commitment to create for the audience an immersive spectacle in which being an attentive audience member stages a kind of temporal disjunction that is felt while one is engaged by the power of the words and performance.

Finally, on the topic of documentation, it is important to note the concern for documentation and media history that is evident in BLW’s work. The very fact that there is a video of the Queen Mother Moore speech is owing to a specific and rich history of media activism, public broadcasting, and media preservation. As stated, the speech was recorded by the People’s Broadcasting Network and broadcast on local community access cable stations (which were themselves very new at the time). The BLW foreground and honor this rich history in their video by beginning and ending with text that contextualizes their video in a long history of media production and preservation. The list they offer takes up almost two minutes of the video and demonstrates their commitment to historical context. The text consists of white type on a black screen. “Queen Mother Moore’s Speech at Green Haven Prison (1973)” remains on the screen while under it a series of dissolving texts historicize the recording and archiving of the video (“Recorded by the People’s Communication Network”; “Founded by Bill Stephens NYC (1971)”; “Stored at the Antioch College Free Library (founded 1966)”/ “Restored at Bay Area Video Coalition (San Francisco)”/ “Distributed by the Video Data Bank (Chicago, IL)”/ “Recited at Pilot TV: Experimental media for feminist trespass”/ “Videotaped by Daniel Tucker and Ben Mauer (Chicago, 2004)” (video). I reproduce this list here in order to demonstrate the collective’s concern for documentation and the long history of the video.

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97 For a longer discussion of media, see Hill (2011). I watched the original QMM video as part of a remarkable compilation called “Surveying the First Decade.” This two-volume set of videos put together by the Video Data Bank includes ‘over 16 hours of historic video on eight thematically curated programs, exploring conceptual, performance-based, image-processed, feminist, documentary and grassroots community-based genres” (web).
The Time Zone of Re-speaking

The material differences between the elements of the two projects that are described above gesture towards a more fundamental difference between the two in terms of how the relationship between the past and the present is staged. The decisions involved in organizing, staging, performing, and documenting a re-speaking are imbued with a certain understanding of what a re-speaking is, what and who it is for, and the terms on which these past words appear and are received in the present. In the act of translating the speeches across time, place, voice, audience—the many translations involved in re-speaking—a relationship between the past and the present is produced. As projects involving citation, each one explicitly and implicitly discloses its temporal grounds. How is natality disclosed or relied upon differently in these works? I have already suggested that Tribe maintains a commitment to deterministic time, but here I want to return to the idea of syncopation in order to consider the possibility that his fidelity to the past speeches might be understood as doing something more interesting than reproducing determinism.

Rebecca Schneider (2011) has theorized the time zone of re-speaking as a “syncopated time” when a “then and now punctuate each other” (p. 2). In the terms of this project, Schneider (2011) is suggesting that there is something about the time of re-speaking that is an invitation into natality time. For someone viewing and listening to a re-speaking, what is produced is a disjunctive time frame in which syncopation can be encountered. Any instance of re-speaking consists of (at least) two performances or moments, one from a past and one taking place in the present. To hear words spoken to a particular audience in the past at a particular historical moment and in a particular context as a performance in the present is to encounter a syncopation,
in that the words are taken out of their time and put into another. On this basis, it is possible to understand both Tribe and BLW as operating through a syncopated time.

However, as has already been suggested above, all re-speaking projects are not the same. What is needed is an analysis of the different ways in which these specific re-speaking projects engage with or operate through syncopation. To do this work, I want to suggest here that the location of the syncopation is different between these two projects. This section will draw out the difference locations of the syncopation or disjuncture, showing that in *The Port Huron* Project, the syncopation is an effect of spectatorial immersion and transport, whereas in BLW’s re-speaking, the syncopation is located in the enunciation. The location of the syncopation is significant for understanding the time zone of these re-speakings.

As stated, the Port Huron Project can be understood as attempting to create an immersive spectacle that seeks to produce in the spectator a feeling of transport back to an earlier time. This is done through various forms of fidelity: fidelity to the original location, to the race, gender, and appearance of the original speaker, and to the tone or delivery of the speeches. In these ways, Tribe can be understood as seeking to affect a feeling of ‘transport’ back to an earlier scene of political protest. The risk of this is that the project might be understood at promoting a strict fidelity, such that there is no possibility for an ‘in-between’ or the license that would be necessary to address and implicate the present. I want to grant for a moment that there is perhaps a disjunction here—a license—that is located not in the performance but in the transport that is potentially effected as a consequence of viewing the work. This disjuncture is the uncanny feeling of hearing words (and a whole speech) from the past in a public place in the present. Many commentators, including Schneider (2011) have spoken of watching the performances in public space while all sorts of other activities carry on around the scene Tribe sets up. What
potentially emerges here is an unsettlement or an uncanny awareness of the present as holding and housing multiple times, and even potentially becoming sensible of something like what Howard Zinn describes in the quotation that begins this chapter, an experience of a “fugitive moment” (Zinn, 2010, p. 11) that has not been exhausted just because it is past. On these terms, it is paradoxically the smoothness of the speeches that creates for the listener an uncanny feeling of disjuncture. In terms of the relationship between the past and the present, what is staged here is a certain fixity—the speeches are treated as products that can be re-circulated—as well as a comingling of times—in the embodied act of watching the performances or the videos, the audience feels a transport that has already been mentioned. The difference between the past and the present is felt not in the activity of re-speaking itself, but in the activity of listening to it. The audience listens to words spoken urgently and become aware of the temporal disjuncture between these words and their own untimely reception of them.

The actor’s impassioned delivery of Angela Davis’ full 1969 speech potentially evokes not only a transport based on fidelity but also the possibility of a situation in which the listener becomes aware of her own temporal distance from the words she is hearing. When the actress calls for the immediate withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, the listener is caught between responding to the urgency of what is said and the temporal distance. This disjuncture potentially produces in the viewer a kind of “nervousness” which Schneider (2011) associates with syncopation. Schneider (2011) draws on Gertrude Stein’s discussion of the syncopated time of drama and how it produces a kind of “nervousness” in the spectator. The action depicted on stage “is almost always syncopated in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience” (as qtd in Schneider, 2011, p. 65). While the play is “before” the audience, there is nevertheless a syncopation in which the emotions of the audience are always “either behind or ahead of the play at which you
are looking and to which you are listening” (Stein, as qtd. in Schneider, 2011, p. 65). This syncopation produces a dissonance between what is being seen and the emotion that is felt, and it is this dissonance that Stein terms “nervousness.” Paradoxically, it is the immersion in the spectacle that conditions the possibility of such dissonance or syncopation. This paradox is enacted in Tribe’s re-speaking, where the immersive scene he produces and constructs is precisely what the project depends on for creating temporal dissonance.

The project attempts to recreate the feeling of being present at an event. But what kind of event does Tribe take the speeches to be, and what kind of event does he seek to create through his re-speakings? Tribe takes the event as the speech itself, and thus he takes these documents, artifacts of social movements and attempts to reanimate them such that speech comes alive again.

Reducing a speech to a transcript is what Derrida (1996) would call “archivolithic” and erase that which can only be made manifest in the performance (p. 12). Tribe attempts to restore the performative nature of the speeches, staging a located, embodied practice, mode of transmission that is a way of intervening in both temporal and spatial continuity. The potential for such nervousness or dissonance is that the viewer/listener, made nervous by the dissonance between what they see and the emotion they experience (or in the case of Tribe, between the direct and overt demands and calls they hear and the time of their hearing). The Port Huron Project literally intervenes in public space, interrupting the continuity of present time-space with words from the past. The Port Huron Project bets on the performative effects of the speeches, that the re-speaking of a temporally displaced demand can somehow innervate the present, expressing the feeling of hearing political speech. But the problem that I want to point out about Tribe’s understanding of the ‘event’ of the original speech is that in reducing the ‘event’ to the performance of the speech, Tribe misses out on and downplays all of the messiness, work, and
collectivities that went into making the culture of radicalism that he so esteems. In treating the event as equivalent to one speech, and in maintaining fidelity with the speech, Tribe distances us from the politics of that earlier time.

The risk that Tribe takes is that in focusing on the archival transcripts and their re-performance, these speeches might simply entertain viewers and nothing more. The immersive character of the speeches easily becomes a form of entertainment, where the listener may feel that she is temporarily transported back in time but is not challenged to encounter the strangeness of the past. The risk is that the speeches are staged in such a way as to simply confirm what is dominantly held to be true about 1960s and early 1970s radicalism, thus confirming a kind of simple nostalgia for a lost time (and one that most of the audience members in Tribe’s videos would have missed out on). In his project description, Tribe describes being animated by what he senses as a lack of political activism and aspiration amongst the undergraduate students at Brown University where he teaches. What the Port Huron Project risks by staging such an immersive spectacle is that, after viewing the re-speaking, those student might simply receive a confirmation that ‘protest’ is a thing of the past that they have already missed out on.

BLW’s (2004) re-speaking of Queen Mother Moore’s speech at Green Haven Federal Prison locates the disjunction or syncopation differently. At their most basic level, re-speaking appropriate someone else’s words and involve taking on a speaking position that is not one’s own. Whereas The Port Huron Project does much to disguise this simple fact, BLW by contrast highlight it. Their re-speaking deliberately stages re-speaking as a strange and uncomfortable act and highlights the difference between the past and the present, the original speakers and the re-speakers, and the tone and location of the speeches. As stated, they make almost no attempt to create verisimilitude between their re-speaking and Queen Mother Moore’s speech at Green
Haven. Instead, they highlight the disjunctures in order to provoke conversation about them. In critical discussions of their work, the issue of appropriation looms large, no doubt in part due to the fact that these are three young white women re-speaking the words of Queen Mother Moore, an elderly black woman. It is interesting to note that questions of appropriation appear very infrequently in critical commentary about Tribe’s project. This is partly because of Tribe’s decision to cast speakers who mirror the appearance and delivery of the original speakers. On the lack of attention to questions of “appropriation” is Rebecca Schneider (2011), who asks of the Port Huron Project: “why not cross or trouble gender, race or ethnicity in re-protest? Is re-protest really as open to alternative futures as we might imagine if an identity politics of bodily marking (re)determines the field?” (p. 182).

BLW seek to maintain fidelity with their own encounter with the Queen Mother Moore speech, rather than to the ‘event’ at Green Haven in 1973. Through their re-speakings, they attempt to enact the kind of pedagogical unsettlement that they experienced when watching the speech for the first time. In attempting to maintain fidelity with their own explore to Queen Mother Moore’s “call,” BLW stage their re-speakings not as presentations of polished and immersive spectacles, but as participatory public situations where the performance of re-speaking prompts conversations about identity, historical memory, and politics.98

To understand how the project maintains fidelity with the “call,” it is helpful to examine how BLW articulate the many layers of the call. Queen Mother Moore’s speech is first of all about a

98 See Lee article on Fandor website for a rich description of BLW’s workshop at the 2013 Flaherty Film Seminar, and the video Lee created in response to these discussions, which he titles the Flaherty Recitations and which involves him re-speaking the words of the seminar participants as they debated BLW’s work. http://www.fandor.com/keyframe/video-the-flaherty-recitations
call to speak; when she tells the story of Marcus Garvey and the struggle to let him speak, she articulates “the imperative to call others and the uncertainty of not knowing whether or not that call would incite others to something” (Borcila, 2013, n.p.). In the speech, she calls out to the inmates through a series of incitements and invitations that speak to community and belonging. In their encounter with the Queen Mother Moore video, BLW felt “called” by her but through a kind of mis-address, where her words are not addressed to them but nevertheless provoke them towards some thing. Borcila (2013) writes, “we somehow felt like—I mean she wasn’t speaking to us; we weren’t black men in prison in the late sixties—but there was something very clear about how we were being called to a different position than just being viewers of the TV” (n.p.). In the distance between Queen Mother Moore’s words and their reception of them (the “wasn’ts” and the “werent’s), BLW experience a call to shift their viewing positions, to move beyond what they call “televisual enchantment” and towards “political agency” (n.p.). What is clear in the distance and the difference between call and response was the call to become viewers in a different way.

The video recalls the moment of Queen Mother Moore speaking, but at the same time it calls “out the vast distance between that moment and this one” (BLW, 2007, p. 1). That disjuncture becomes for BLW what initiates the possibility of responding to Queen Mother Moore’s address. The temporal discontinuity in BLW’s re-speaking is not only about absence—we were not there, we are not who she is talking to—but it is also what makes them want to carry on the call. In the fundamental uncertainty of the gap between a call and action, they find a way to be responsive in a way that also is a calling for response (in that they attempt to instruct others to engage in re-speakings). This opens an entry into natality time in that it potentiates a critical
responsiveness by opening up a space between Queen Mother Moore’s words and their belated encounter with them.

The BLW use appropriation to open up conversations about what it means to resonate across differences, and what it means to take on a history. Borcila (2013) says: “a lot of what we experience as failure is not our failure, it is a structural situation we are in that disallows certain ways of speaking or relating, or a kind of searching, or that positions failure in a particular way and makes it treacherous to try something” (n.p.). The BLW seek to create not an immersive spectacle for an engaged audience but rather to proliferate opportunities to engage in the messy practice of re-speaking. In their work, they foreground what comes after the re-speaking, often holding seminars or discussion groups as part of the performances to elicit dialogue on what it means and what it feels like to speak someone else’s words. This emphasis on response mirrors what animated their desire to re-speak the words of Queen Mother Moore. In the next section I will discuss this in terms of the collective’s fidelity to practice, but here it is worth noting that they take up and use their own feeling of being indeterminately addressed and provoked by the words of Queen Mother Moore and attempt to proliferate this feeling of unsettlement and the need to respond amongst their audience. They focus on the difficulty of what comes after the exposure to the syncopation or disjunction that can be experienced in re-speaking. Borcila (2013) states:

(t)he hardest thing seemed to be what to do with that information, in other words, how to go from just registering ‘oh, that was uncomfortable; or ‘that was a weird combination of thrilling and tragic,’ to then actually reframe that as a question. Always. And to also re-hinge the affective back into the political (n.p.).
Whereas Tribe leaves the audience to work through the “nervousness” that is potentially elicited by his project, BLW attempt to direct this innervation into questions and dialogue.

The risk BLW take is that their work is so disjunctive and awkward to watch, that it works so poorly as a performance that the viewer may simply turn away from it. In other words, they hear Queen Mother Moore’s words as an indeterminate call to respond in part due to Queen Mother Moore’s impassioned delivery and her energy as a speaker. Taking her words and draining them of such risks a loss of precisely what they felt compelled by in her speech.

Re-speaking as Re-imagining: Democracy, Collectivity, Social Life

“As you speak the words of others, what is moving through you?” (BLW, 2007).

At the beginning of this chapter, I framed these two works as taking part in a larger phenomenon of works of art that are fascinated with protest cultures from the late 1960s and early 1970s. As stated, BLW and Tribe both articulate their dissatisfaction with contemporary politics and opportunities for expression of radicalism but they do so in different terms, with Tribe positioning the earlier era as a kind of lost ideal or wholeness. Such positioning is aligned with deterministic time. BLW, by contrast, articulate their work as demonstrating a more ambivalent return, which discloses natality. For this final section of the chapter, I return to the expression of dissatisfaction with the contemporary political landscape. What understanding of politics is relied upon and produced by these artists, and, give their stated desires to innervate political activism in the present, why bother to re-speak old words at all? What does this indirection serve?

Here I want to suggest the felt lack of opportunities to imagine and express radical sentiment in the present is related to the deterministic time I discussed in Chapter 1, as well as the erosion of
capacities for responsiveness (Curtis, 1999), and capacities for imagination as discussed in Chapter 2. Determinism constrains both appearance and response. Under conditions of determinism, the field of appearance is restricted to what can be apprehended and made visible. Also, what appears does so in a way that naturalizes the appearance and that does not seem to demand a questioning the grounds of such an appearance—comes as if natural, as if self evident. Likewise, determinism curtails or narrows the capacity to respond to appearances. This situation is not conducive to democracy if it is understood through Claude Lefort’s (1988) idea that it “is instituted and sustained by the dissolution of markers of certainty” (p. 19). In this formulation, democracy cannot thrive on deterministic grounds. For democracy on Lefort’s (1998) terms, the public must be an open space of possibility where people appear to one another and respond to such appearance. This idea of democracy also resonates with the cultural production approach I discussed in Chapter 1; to take a cultural production approach is to take seriously that culture is produced in social interactions between people rather than determined in advance or by some governing structure. Under determinism, uncertainty becomes undesirable and something to be avoided at all costs. This avoidance restricts the possibility of politics. Lefort (1988) suggests that democracy “inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law and knowledge, and as to the basis of the relations between self and other” (p. 19). If the “public” we desire becomes a necessary certainty—a lost ideal that can be transferred from an earlier to into this one—the we become intolerant of the experience of uncertainty that for Lefort (1988) grounds the appearance of a democratic public. In centralizing uncertainty and indeterminacy, Lefort (1988) shows us that democracy is created between people acting in the present.
The difference between the two projects discussed in this chapter now becomes a question with political significance. What notion of the public grounds these two projects? Tribe attempts to fill a public sphere he sees as emptied with the expressions and sentiments of an earlier era. Tribe’s project wagers that this re-appearance can do more than simply re-circulate words that have already been spoken. However, within the project itself, no opportunities for response are presented, and the speeches end up circulating as hollowed out forms, like statues albeit living ones. *The Port Huron Project* does a remarkable job of staging an appearance of the past but fails to provide a framework for how the encounter with a re-speaking might turn us back towards the present. In BLW’s re-speaking on the other hand, the public is not a space to be filled by past expressions but rather a shared and communal space where we make our uncertain response to each other. The “call” that inheres in Queen Mother Moore’s speech and is re-spoken on different terms by BLW becomes a tool for promoting distance from the present, and in this distance and the feelings of estrangement, frustration, and failure it provokes, still what is illuminated are our own assumptions. Their own estrangement from the words they are speaking produces for the audience a place to encounter the difference and the distance between the past and the present. This connects back to natality in the disclosure and valuing of belatedness as a condition of response. BLW’s re-speaking becomes “non-spectacular forms of performance” (Simon, unpublished), forms of performance in other words that challenge the audience’s ability and capacity to hear and respond to the mediated appearance of the past.

Lefort’s (1998) description of democracy resonates with Arendt’s (1978) idea of the public sphere as the “space of appearance”—of “what phenomenology calls coming into view” (Deutsche, 2010, p. 62). Deutsche (2010) suggests that Arendt’s (1978) stress on appearances “connected the public sphere…to the field of vision and unintentionally opened up the possibility
that visual art might play a role in deepening and extending democracy” (p. 62). The public sphere becomes that space of appearance where “I appear to others as others appear to me” (Arendt, 1958/1998, p. 199). If the public sphere is taken as the space of appearance, then the central question becomes “not [only one] of how we appear but of how we respond to the appearance of others” (Deutsche, 2010, p. 64). It is to this question that Deutsche (2010) claims art responds, in providing the conditions that otherness makes an appearance and also, and more importantly, a frame in which viewers can develop their “capacity for public life by asking them to respond to, rather than react against, that appearance” (p. 64).

Whereas the Port Huron Project stages an appearance of politics in the present, this appearance is not one that calls for response or that provides an opportunity for response. Rather, as stated, the immersive spectacle of the re-speakings fill up a public space that Tribe has already characterized as empty or as “lost.” The BLW on the other hand stage their re-speaking as a non-spectacular performance that attempts to incite the audience or the listeners to action (in this case, the action is to engage in the activity of re-speaking). Perhaps this is another lesson that BLW takes from Queen Mother Moore’s (1973) speech. The BLW re-speak this particular speech because they experienced it as a call eliciting their embodied response, but the speech itself is a re-telling of the work that went into providing Marcus Garvey a platform from which to address his audience. In their re-speakings, they attempt to carry on this call for response.

99 What is really remarkable about watching Queen Mother Moore’s speech is how difficult it is to imagine such a speech being given today to a group of prisoners in the United States and broadcast on public access television. Queen Mother Moore’s radical account of taking up arms against the police in order to allow Marcus Garvey to speak brings to life a radicalism that is almost unimaginable today.
In this attempt to elicit responsiveness from those who listen and participate in their re-speaking, BLW demonstrate that the embodied act of listening is more than absorbing the linguistic content of the communication. Listening is rather a relation of asymmetry between speaker and listener that involves a fundamental strangeness (Gibbs, 2000). Listening is a relation to another person in which the listener becomes responsive to that otherness, and is therefore a learning relationship. This otherness is doubled in re-speaking in that there is the temporal otherness or distance between the original speech and the re-speaking, as well as the distance between the speaker and the listener in the present moment of re-performance. The promise of natality is that this distance or difference initiates the possibility of newness and creative response.

In maintaining fidelity to the transcripts of the speeches and to the performance as speeches, Tribe fetishizes the speeches, focusing on the end products of a social movement (Student for Democratic Society or New Left) and erasing the labour that went into making these speeches as well as the context in which they arose. In The Port Huron Project, the re-speaking reinforce the idea that 1960s and early 70s radicalism consisted simply of a series of moments in which exciting and engaging political rhetoric erupted from nowhere. Tribe’s project maintains what Markell (2014) calls in a different context “an investment in a problematic picture of the punctuality, the suddenness, of genuine political events” (p. 115). This investment obscures the character of political action, abstracting it from a practice made between people. Markell (2014) draws on Arendt’s (1958/1998) idea of action as an alterative to the reliance on the language of “moments” for discussing political action. According to Markell (2014), Arendt’s action is “not a

100 For further critical discussion of this point, see Sarlin (2009).
leap, in the moment, out of the stickness of the present and into a radically different future” (115). Rather, even though for Arendt (1958/1998) action is not determined in advance of its appearance, it is always conditioned by and emerges through people’s words and deeds. It is worth quoting Markell at length:

For Arendt… the primary way we experience action is not by finding our way to it when it is absent, but by finding ourselves in the midst of it when we or others have already begun—a locution, notice, that already implies that action has a duration; that it is not just a moment but a course (Markell, 2014, p. 115).

In focusing on the speeches as products and delivering smooth, captivating performances, Tribe risks reinforcing the belief in “the moment” (and a lost moment at that), whereas BLW re-speakings invite their audiences to re-speak and respond to the re-speakings of others.

**Encountering returns**

This chapter has engaged in a comparative analysis of two re-speakings projects that take up political or protest speeches from the late 1960s and early 1970s and return us to them as performances. In doing so, they return us not to that era but to our own cultural fascination with the protest culture of an earlier time. This is the belatedness that inheres in natality, as a call to attend not only to the end points but also to the pregnant interval of time that potentially changes actions and their meanings. Juli Carson (2010), writing of another work of art that takes up the same era (Mary Kelley’s *Circa 1968*), reminds us that “(r)eality is not just the progression of events as they unfold in time, but the events themselves as they change upon our continual re-encounter with them” (p. 197). The cultural fascination with and the many returns of and to the 1960s and early 1970s complicate questions of inheritance and fidelity to the past. Carson
(2010) argues that many returns of the 1960s and early 70s create a paradox that demands a consideration of appearance and response. She writes

we must continually work on the means of representing an event, which is to say that an artwork must re-enact the dilemma of the subject’s divide such that one is forced not only to confront the moment of the sixties cultural revolution, in this case, but also to consider his/her relation to it in contemporary terms. For any authentic return to the sixties is as impossible as any dismissal of its inevitable return  (Carson, 2010, p. 198).

**Performative Re-speaking**

In order to constitute a “performative practice” of inheritance, an artwork must not simply perform fragments of the past in the present. Rather, I wish to close this chapter by returning to Roger I. Simon’s (2000) contention that the practice of historical memory must itself be a transactive one in which writing, speaking, and listening seeks not to reproduce what has been gathered from the past, but rather provokes a creative response. It is this creative response that constitutes inheritance as a “performative practice.” Simon (2000) writes of this practice as one that is accomplished in the in-between space of encounter. He writes of re-telling as witnessing and what is necessary for this witness is an “attempt to hear and see within this boundary space and re-say what I have heard or seen…in a way that takes cognizance of its strangeness”  (p. 21).

It is in the maintenance of this boundary and this belatedness that “my re-articulation [can] begin to touch, to interrupt my taken for granted performance of the present”  (Simon, 2000, p. 21). Developing a relation to the past is described here as an uncertain attempt to sensually engage with a temporal other amid great constraints. These constraints stretch to become what enables the witness to history to re-articulate what they have heard and seen in a performance that holds
on to the strangeness and the difference. A performative practice is therefore not simply a repetition of what one has heard or encountered, but rather a re-articulation or translation that is inevitably touched by the one who attempts to re-speak it. Rather than a recitation of the past, Simon (2000) here calls for a re-articulation that begins to touch on the present and the self—the one who is doing the re-articulation is “touched” by what is being re-cited. Simon (2000) theorized this as “not merely a recall, but always a renewal” (p. 23). A performative re-telling discloses the promise of natality in that it seeks not to simply reproduce the past or what has been learned from an encounter with the past. On the terms suggested by Simon (2000), it is necessary for the witness to put themselves into the frame of re-telling.

What is political about such forms of witness is that it opens a “creative solidarity” with other times and people (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2010). Gaztambide-Fernández describes “creative solidarity” as “a solidarity that underscores a way of being with each other that contingently preserves itself against a sense of normalcy and coherence…[and] that operates under the assumption that we are incomplete” (p. 89). This notion of creative solidarity touches natality in that both share an investment in contingency, uncertainty, and plurality. This idea of solidarity becomes a politics of being together in the in-between space of relationality. Natality provides the temporal ground for this space, and creative solidarity the materialization of such. On these terms, re-speaking someone else’s words in another time might harness some of the force that Kathi Weeks (2011) aligns with the “utopian demand,” which she argues serves “to produce the modes of critical consciousness that they seem merely to presuppose, to elicit the political desires that they appear to reflect, and to mobilize and organize the collective agency of which they might seem to be only an artifact” (p. 225). For Weeks (2011), the demand has a force that
exceeds its utility and becomes a form of imagining, eliciting and producing the forms of critical consciousness and collective agency that it seems merely to reiterate.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have built an investigation of inheritance as cultural practice by examining the temporal grounds of inheritance and representation. I have shown that both inheritance and historical representation can be re-imagined by unsettling their temporal grounding in determinism. From Arendt’s natality, I have theorized a temporal ground that values and affirms newness, belatedness, and betweenness. In this dissertation, I have explored artists who activate these three temporal themes in their work. One way my project can be understood is as a demonstration of how Arendt’s thinking enriches cultural analysis. This is significant since the fields of cultural analysis and cultural studies do not usually call on Arendt.

In relation to inheritance, there remain some questions that still need to be addressed, and in this concluding chapter I hope to raise those questions and provide a substantive discussion of the overall significance of this project. This chapter has two sections. The first revisits and reviews the work that I have already done, beginning with Arendt’s articulation of natality and proceeding through a re-encounter with the works of art I have analyzed. This will provide the opportunity to create connections—and contrasts—across the various works of art discussed in this dissertation in a more substantive way. The second section of this chapter looks forward, and engages with some of the larger implications of this work for thinking about inheritance.

Part 1: Looking backwards: natality time in the works

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men [sic] and the new beginning, the action, they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full
experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope…It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their ‘glad tidings’: ‘A child has been born to us’ (Arendt, 1958, p. 247)

With these words, Arendt (1958) ends the section on “Action” in *The Human Condition*. Here, I will provide three readings of this passage and use it to return to the three temporal themes of newness, betweenness, and belatedness. The “miracle” of which Arendt writes is the human capacity for natality, suggesting that humans are not fully determined beings but rather arrive into a relational world where, through words and deeds, they/we can condition the space of appearance in new and unexpected ways. The “full experience” of natality is realized not immediately but only later, when the capacity that humans are endowed with by virtue of their birth is manifested in action, and later still when that action becomes meaningful by virtue of being told (and heard) as a story. Thus, the “full experience” of our natality demands and is contingent upon complex arrangements and relationships to both time and other people. The “miracle” of natality/action syncopates natural time and is positioned in the passage above as what “saves…the realm of human affairs.” Thus, we are reminded of the syncopated character of natality’s time—both in the sense of a punctuation of a given rhythm (natural time or calendar time) through the introduction of an offbeat, and in the sense of “syn-cope” [from the Greek, *syn* = together; *koptein* = to cut] as a ‘cutting together.’” Natality’s time interrupts the natural or calendar flow of time in order to introduce a cut or a complication—a new human, a beginner—who will then (at least potentially) “save the world” by bringing the old world together again in new ways.
At the heart of this dissertation has been an exploration of interpretive encounters with selected works by artists that provide experiences of natality time and opportunities to practice forms of attention and imagination that ready us to take on the task of inheriting. I have made the argument that these artists disclose or materialize or invite the viewer into an experience of natality time. Natality time has thus appeared both as the ground of these works of art and what is disclosed or manifested through engagements with them. Here I will revisit how the artists studied work in and with natality time in different ways. What qualities or characteristics of the works or my encounter with them condition, encourage, or sustain the appearance of natality time? To return to a question posed earlier (p. 66), What are the “right conditions” for natality to emerge or to be sensed?

**Newness + creative response**

In the passage above, Arendt (1958/1998) reminds us of the newness that is a temporal feature of natality. The capacity for new beginnings inheres in birth, and while the human is always conditioned by what has come before and arrives into the midst of an ‘us,’ the human is not determined by and cannot be expected from what preceded its arrival. The artists whose work I have analyzed—the Black Audio Film Collective, Bracha Ettinger, Samuel Bak, Mitov Panov, and BLW—produce newness in different ways through their works of art. In each of the works, the artist(s) dislodges fragments or aspects of the past from the prescriptives of tradition and produces something new from these fragments that is conditioned but not determined by what is given. In my analysis of these works, I have drawn attention to the different ways in which newness emerges in each of these works. The Black Audio Film Collective produces the new by removing the structuring device and the dominant narrative voice of history and representation. In light of this removal, the ‘stuff’ of history is cut free from its codifying structure and those
fragments become available for re-arrangement. In *Handsworth Songs*, the new emerges through a rearrangement of what has been given. The filmmakers use montage to expand the register of representation, such that the new can emerge even through old images. Thus the Black Audio Film Collective disclose a natal sensibility through their practice of cultural production—their deconstructive practice shows the viewer how history can be sensed differently. Through the juxtaposition of images and sounds from different times, they punctuate or syncopate the viewer’s present experience of watching the film. Bak’s paintings and Panov’s film also remove a photograph from its previous emplacement in two powerful traditions. Through their translations of a photograph to a different medium, Bak and Panov interrupt a given history in order to produce potentially new ways of encountering the figure of the boy.

In her *Eurydice* series, Bracha Ettinger also produces new ways of looking; she does so not through montage and juxtaposition but through a movement of layering. By interrupting the photocopier and adding layers of paint, Ettinger creates a kind of barrier or obstacle to encountering the photographic image that she begins with. These layers materialize the temporal distance between the past and the present, but also paradoxically draw the viewer in through the small images and the desire to discern the multiple layers that appear on the canvas. Like Black Audio Film Collective, then, she inserts a longer history between the viewer and the past, but Ettinger accomplishes this not by a profusion of images, sounds and spaces between them but through complicating access to the image through her layering. This produces an indeterminate image that invites a more complicated engagement. Both artists slow down the circuit between the viewer and the image, potentially eliciting a less immediate and more complex scene of encounter. Ettinger, Bak, and The Black Audio Film Collective unsettle the viewer’s easy relationship to the histories they reference, and open the opportunity to look in new ways.
Through his short film *With Raised Hands*, Mitov Panov creates a new engagement with an archival photograph by transferring it across medium. His film animates the scene of the photograph, drawing the viewer into the action as it unfolds. In making a drama out of this scene—albeit a small, prosaic drama of a boy chasing his cap in the wind—Panov draws me into the scene and elicits my self-conscious involvement in the present-ness of the photographic scene. This invites a new way of viewing the photograph and endows the figures in the frame with a kind of liveliness or presentness that the mass circulation of this photograph had rendered static. An elicitation of a new, self-conscious involvement is also central to the artistic practice of BLW. In staging their re-speakings as creative responses to a feeling of being addressed by the words of Queen Mother Moore, they, like Panov and Ettinger, put themselves into the frame that the viewer is then invited to encounter. Their address to the viewer elicits a call to become responsive, and encourages the viewer to take on the act of re-speaking, which they position as an inheritance practice.

**Betweenness + interval**

The quotation from Arendt (1958/1998) that began this section also serves as a reminder of the second temporal theme I derived from natality, namely, betweenness. Arendt (1958/1998) describes the “full experience” of natality as one that takes place over a protracted time. Natality’s time is replete with gaps. One such gap is the temporal distance between being endowed with a capacity to begin something new and the realization of that capacity through action. There is always a temporal gap or distance here—an interval between the capacity and the manifestation of that capacity. The interval between first and second birth (endowment and realization) is not a void but is rather what readies us to make our own beginnings. Just as birth is dependent upon others and therefore a social moment (the ‘us’), the “full experience” of...
natality is dependent upon plurality and the web of human relationships. Ricoeur (1983) explicates the quotation above by tracing a temporal trajectory through Arendt’s works. He describes her trajectory as a movement from the ceaseless repetition of the natural world (the futility of labor) to the regularity and productivity of calendar time (the durability of work), and finally to the syncopated time of natality (the unexpectedness of action). Of this last sense of time, Ricoeur (1983) remarks that Arendt “reaches a frailty more formidable than any futility” (p. 72). Action is frail not because it is pointless or meaningless but because it exists only so long as others sustain it, and becomes meaningful only through the activities of others, who will tell the story. Just as there is an interval between our being endowed with a capacity for natality and our realization of this capacity, there is a gap between action and its meaning. This second gap is not only temporal but also plural. In other words, action is dependent on others. Thus, betweenness, the second temporal theme, invites considerations of intervals or spaces between but also of contingency and indeterminacy. To place focus on betweenness is to enter the messy middle, the present of things unfolding.

How do the artists whose works I have analyzed in this dissertation disclose or invite viewers into the betweenness of natality time? How is contingency and indeterminacy manifested and valued in these works of art in different ways? In this dissertation I have drawn attention to a number of different gaps or ‘betweens’ that inhere in the cultural production of inheritance.

101 Ricoeur (1983) finds it perplexing that Arendt (1958/1998) ends her section on “Action” with an affirmation of frailty, in that “acknowledgement of the frailty of a history that we don’t ‘make,’ and which undermines all the works that we ‘make,’ sounds like the ultimate memento mori” (p. 72). But rather than a reminder of death, Arendt positions this frailty as a quality of birth, as the enabling condition for faith in and hope for the world.
grounded in natality time. These gaps include the gap between the individual and her historicity, pointing to the fact that humans are in need of mediation to “accede to their historicity” (Simon, 2000). Other gaps that inhere in natality include the gap between first and second birth (Arendt, 1958/1998), and the gap between being and meaning and events and their eventual meaningfulness. I have also discussed the gap between reception and possession (Ahmed, 2006), which opens the possibility that we can come to question what we receive before it becomes a taken-for-granted possession, and thus do more than reproduce what is given. Arendt (1946/2005a) also draws our attention to the gap between the ‘no longer’ and the ‘not yet,’ and I have attended to the gap between past and future that indexes the present as a time of uncertain action and possibility. The final scene of ‘betweenness’ that I wish to recall here is the gap between the work of art and the viewer, which throughout my analysis of these works of art I have attempted to show as an interpretive space in which new meanings can be made.

All of these ‘betweens’ have been animated through my engagement with the works of art. One theme that brings together several of the works of art I have analyzed is the way in which the artists place focus on the mediated quality of historical representation. Across several of these works, there is a real effort to foreground the ‘stuff’ of cultural production, to make the image or the work contingent on a variety of conditions and materials of production, and to make those conditions and materials visible and sensible. One way this is done is by literally emphasizing the cameras, recording devices, or other materials and conditions of production. Mitov Panov does this in With Raised Hands. The film begins with a shot of a still camera, and the drama unfolds around the staging of the photograph. Throughout, Panov shows the viewer that there are two cameras—one still camera that is engaged in taking the storied photograph, and one moving camera, which shows the viewer the developing action. As I suggested in Chapter 5, this
serves to multiply perspectives; between two cameras we find the present-ness of the scene. Through the second (moving) camera, Panov also demonstrates that the photograph has been constructed in a particular way—that it is not simply an index of a moment that happened, but rather that it is an image that was produced by someone, situated within a certain set of practices and available technologies, and with an imagined audience and an imagined purpose in mind. Thus, the second camera and the space between the two cameras give us not only multiple perspectives on the scene, but also reveal the constructed quality that the scene always possessed, but that was covered over or disguised by the single perspective.

The Black Audio Film Collective also highlights ‘the stuff’ of cultural production through their disjunctive montage. Like the Chris Marker clip I discussed briefly in Chapter 3, the Black Audio Film Collective use cinematic montage in a self-reflexive manner, foregrounding production. The disjuncture between multiple voices, non-synchronous visual and audio tracks, and so many different source materials (archival photographs, news coverage, shaky video) foregrounds the constructed character of the film. Both the Black Audio Film Collective and Panov highlight the ‘stuff’ and the work that goes into cultural production. As Eshun (2010) would say, both artists make a drama out of “the basic operation of cultural production,” the joining of one image to another (n.p.). In order to make this into a focus of ‘drama,’ the constructed character of that joining must be made visible or sensible in some way.

I also analyzed Mark Tribe’s *The Port Huron Project*, which does make some effort to foreground (or at least not disguise) the mediated quality of the re-speakings he stages. In that project, the presence of cameras and recording devices are very visible at the public performances. However, as I discussed in Chapter 6, his foregrounding fails in that the slick performance and immersive videos produced from those performances ultimately relegate the
constructed-ness of the production once again to the background. In other words, the ‘stuff’ of cultural production is erased in the slickness of the presentation. The lack of static enables the performance and especially the video produced from that performance to slip back into a kind of transparent access to the past, and this ease collapses the referential tensions that separate the past from the present.

BLW foregrounds a slightly different kind of mediation in their re-speaking project. Rather than foregrounding the ‘stuff’ of cultural production (cameras, recording devices, transcripts), their performance is done in a way that foregrounds the difficulty and uncertainty of the task they are trying to accomplish. Like Marker’s *Sans Soleil*, which draws the viewer’s attention to the space between images, BLW draw attention to the work that goes into their performance. They refuse to smooth over the distance and the disjunctures between their time, place, and social positions and Queen Mother Moore’s, and in so doing, they draw attention to the complexity of re-speaking and inheritance more generally.

The stress that artists such as BLW and the Black Audio Film Collective place on the mediated quality of their work makes visible a gap that is usually closed over as a constitutive part of the production. Conventions of film, for example, generally hold that the viewer should not be made aware of the space between images (as Marker does), and likewise, conventions of performance hold that the audience should not be invited into the struggle of delivering one’s lines (as BLW do). Even Ettinger’s interrupting of the photocopy discloses the workings of copying and makes them visible in a way that is usually seen simply as an error rather than a productive action. Thus, in opening up a series of gaps or in-betweens in their works, these artists are refusing the conventions of cultural production. This can be understood as a refusal of the prevailing modes of reception that I discussed in Chapter 4. Each of the dominant modes of reception—evidence,
knowledge, and spectacle—is enabled by an adherence to conventional ways of representing the past. The artists discussed above refuse to reproduce an understanding of the past as evidence, knowledge, or spectacle and instead foreground the conditions of the production of historical knowledge through cultural practices. In so doing, they refuse the thing-ification of history and make inheritance visible as an ongoing practice that demands the self-conscious involvement of the one who inherits, rather than a more simple act of incorporating fixed and finished products into a narrative structure. What is foregrounded in this is the pedagogical character of historical consciousness.

In foregrounding the mediated quality of their work, theses artists open a gap between reception and possession (Ahmed, 2006). As Ahmed (2006) suggests, these two activities are often fused together such that it becomes difficult to separate what we receive (for example through our engagement with historical representation) from what we come to possess (as knowledge, as our grounds). In making the work of cultural production sensible, artists such as the Black Audio Film Collective, BLW, and Ettinger demonstrate that reception is a participatory and constructed activity. In giving these gaps, the artists open up contingent relationships between what we receive and what we come to possess, and it is this contingency that Ahmed (2006) suggests might enable us to do more than simply reproduce the status quo. Cultural production becomes a space in which to learn of ourselves as political beings, acting on the world as it acts on us.

As discussed in the previous section on ‘newness,’ several of these artists can also be understood as putting themselves—their interpretations, their struggle to respond and to inherit—into the frame. Ettinger does this through her layering technique, Bak through his repetition of the questioning figure of the boy, and BLW through their awkward and stilted performance. This insertion works to create a betweenness that is usually downplayed. In the works of these artists
this creates another level of betweenness that can be understood as a materialization of creative response. Recalling my discussion of Gadamer (2004) in Chapter 1, he critiques the assumption that to do history we must “transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance towards historical objectivity” (p. 297). Against this objectifying impulse, Gadamer (2004) stresses that “into this other situation, we must bring, precisely, ourselves” (p. 304). To bring ourselves to historical interpretation grounds the possibility that the past might make a claim on our present and be felt as an interruptive force, exceeding the prevailing modes of reception that constrain and contain this encounter. The artists discussed above bring themselves to the work, and in so doing, make that in-between space sensible for the viewer. Making the in-between “sensible” can be understood both in terms of it becoming available to be felt or perceived, and also being worthy of such consideration from the viewer.

The production of such betweens also shifts the viewer’s relationship to the encounter with the works of art. What is introduced and made sensible to the viewer is a certain reflexivity or contingency, and this potentially infects the viewer’s way of looking. In this betweenness, the viewer is invited to practice different ways of looking, and potentially called to creative response.

In the creation of betweens and the production of gaps that are understood as places of possibility rather than things to be filled or covered over, the works disclose natality time in different ways. The betweenness of natality time reintroduces contingency, uncertainty, and practice into inheritance’s relational field, and produce an understanding of inheritance that is contingent on the otherness of the past and on others in the present (plurality).
Belatedness + Imagination

Returning for a final time to Arendt’s (1958/1998) quotation from *The Human Condition*, I want to suggest that what she calls the “full experience” of the capacity for natality reminds us of the centrality of belatedness, the third temporal theme that I have explored in this dissertation. Belatedness inheres in the interval between endowment and realization of the capacity to begin, as well as in the interval between action and meaning. Arendt shows us not only that beginnings inhere in our birth, but that we are also always late, both to the world that we arrive into (that is already unfolding and that we must form a relationship with) and to our understandings of that world. Belatedness is our condition, and as I demonstrated through discussing the work of Simon (2000) in Chapter 1, it is our belatedness and our boundedness to the present that conditions our responsibility to form a relationship with the otherness of the past, to take on the responsibility of inheriting.

All of these works of art I have analyzed in this dissertation have in common that the artist who produced them arrived belatedly to the scene of the history they are referencing. Each one functions as a later manifestation or re-telling of a prior aspect of history that has already been emplaced in a historical narrative. In the works by Bak, Panov, Ettinger, Tribe and BLW, there is a long interval between the ‘original’ representation they are referencing and the re-telling or re-staging of it. The 30-40 year time span between the representations and the works of art produced by these artists becomes the condition of possibility for these works.

In Bak, Panov, and Ettinger, this belatedness allows the artists to take on the legacy of the photographs they re-imagine. Each of these artists maintains and relies on the distance between their artistic productions and the photographs they begin with. In Ettinger, this distance is preserved and materialized through the layers she places between the viewer and the image, and
it is this distancing that potentially chastens the viewer’s visual engagement with the photograph—when I look at Ettinger’s paintings, I become aware of the impossibility of looking at and understanding the past on its own terms, but even in this awareness of impossibility, I am still addressed by the past. Another way of understanding these layers in terms of belatedness is that they act as a materialization of the temporal distance in a way that thwarts or interrupts the original murderous, Orphic gaze of the perpetrator who took these photographs. Thus, when we look at these photographs through Ettinger’s layers, it becomes possible to look in a way that does not reproduce the scopic regime that produced these images in the first place.

This distancing is related to Bak’s practice, as in his iterations of the boy with his arms raised, we are no longer confronted by the same boy as is captured in the photograph. Even as the gesture of ‘arms raised’ is repeated, in the multiple iterations, the boy becomes a questioning figure, who gazes at us from the frame rather than being framed by the perpetrator’s gaze. Even as Ettinger and Bak expand the repertoire of how we attend to the photographs they take up, it is also important to note that, as discussed in Chapter 5, they do not allow the viewer an easy exit from complicity. Rather than telling a comforting story that the relationships and scenes that led to such images being produced in the first place are ‘no longer,’ both artists ask the viewer to recognize that we are ‘not yet’ free from such scenes. Our belatedness, in other words, does not excuse us from being addressed or from responsibility.

Panov takes on the legacy of the photograph in a different way. By animating the photograph, Panov grants a kind of access to this scene that risks collapsing the belatedness of our engagement with it. He resists such collapse through his foregrounding of mediation (as has already been discussed) and also through his use of fantasy or fiction. In telling us a different story of the photograph, a prosaic story of a capricious boy and an even more capricious wind,
Panov alludes to the one time present-ness of this scene in a way that does not equate it with our present, or erase the distance between then and now, but rather reminds us that we do not know the story. Panov invites imagination to enter a scene that was previously over determined by the photograph’s frame and by its traditions.

The one work that does not rely on a long interval is the Black Audio Film Collective’s *Handsworth Songs*. But the Black Audio Film Collective, working as they are with very recent events, still activates belatedness in their work. They do so by recalling much earlier histories of immigration and settlement. Thus the belatedness that is activated in *Handsworth Songs* is made through referencing the past and juxtaposing it with footage from the present in order to comment on or provoke thought about the present. This is different than the other works with their longer time delays, in that those works remain in their own presents (whether the 1980s, 1990s, or 2000s) but take up or reference materials or representations of a distant past. The significance of this difference is that it demonstrates that there is more than one way of producing belatedness. What the Black Audio Film Collective share with the other artists discussed above is a conviction that belatedness is essential for inheritance. Since the collective is very close in time to the Handsworth disturbances, they make a different kind of belatedness through the insertion of a much longer history.

All of these works activate belatedness, which demonstrates that belatedness is central to inheritance. This is different from how an inheritance grounded in deterministic time would produce belatedness, which would be to regard the interval or gap as a problem to be surmounted or overcome through such strategies as re-enactment, ‘living history,’ identification, or incorporation. An inheritance grounded in natality time values belatedness as what conditions
and initiates the possibility of forming a relationship with and becoming responsive to the past (Simon, 2000).

Belatedness also demonstrates the central place of imagination in inheritance. Imagination is often regarded as a fanciful flight from reality, and as at odds with historical knowledge and historical consciousness on the grounds that imagination grants us a kind of inappropriate access to the past or takes us away from the reality of the situation. In his 2004 book *Images in Spite of All*, Didi Huberman makes an argument for the role of imagination in historical knowledge and thinking. There, he provocatively asserts, “In order to know, we must imagine for ourselves” (p. 3).102 For our purposes here, I wish to focus not on his whole argument but only on how Didi Huberman (2004) describes imagination, and to show how it relates to belatedness. Didi Huberman (2004) claims that imagination is a task that is central to historical thinking:

An image without imagination is quite simply an image that one didn’t spend the time to work on. For imagination is work: that work time of images acting ceaselessly one upon the other by collision or fusion, by ruptures or metamorphosis—all of these acting on our own activity of knowledge and thought. To know, one must therefore imagine for oneself (p. 117, 119, emphasis in the original).

Since photographs do not simply reproduce reality or speak for themselves, the viewer or cultural theorist must engage in the work of imagination “for oneself.” In their principle moves, artists such as Ettinger, BLW, and Panov demonstrate that no image simply speaks for itself.

102 This statement is provocative in that Didi Huberman is taking a position in a controversial polemic about the representability of the Shoah. It is, however, beyond the scope of my project to give a detailed account of this controversy or Didi Huberman’s position on it. See his discussion in Didi Huberman (2004).
Didi Huberman (2004) here brings us back to Sartre’s idea of “image as relation” and the idea of imagination as a type of consciousness. Imagination is not the “faculty of deriving ‘images’ from our sensory experiences,” but rather, as Ricoeur claims, “the capacity to let new worlds build our self-understanding” (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 110). On Ricoeur's terms (he is writing about literary works), this consists of a “grasping of the world propositions opened up by…the text” (p. 110). To do this, readers must place themselves “before the text” (p. 110), and be open to the disclosure of new worlds and new ways of being that the text announces. Interpretation is not a synthesis between reader and text achieved through projection or identification, but rather an ability to be before the work as it discloses a “new world” (p. 110). This disclosure demands a separation between the work and the reader. The artists whose works I have analyzed in this dissertation have in different ways made sensible their own estranged engagements with the histories that they reference. As stated, BLW do this in a very overt way by foregrounding the difficulty of responding to their feeling of being called by Queen Mother Moore’s speech. Bak also does this through his repetition. What is common to both is a separation or boundary between the artist and the original representation that facilitates the feeling of being addressed from a different time.

In Ricoeur’s formulation, the world of the reader and the world of the text (self and other) must be kept separate—some distance must be maintained between the two such that the text can disclose a different and new proposition. This brings us back to the betweenness that I already discussed. Didi Huberman (2004) is describing a similar capacity in relation to historical photographs, and the difference or the distance that must be preserved is more overtly temporal. He claims that historical images require our self-conscious involvement and a willingness to imagine across temporal distance and difference. In a review of Didi Huberman’s book, Susan
A. Crane (2008) points out that, “(i)n German, [to imagine] would be rendered as vorstellen: ‘to imagine’ is ‘to place before oneself’ what is otherwise unknowable; thus imagining is an act that bears with it an ethical imperative” (para. 5). Didi Huberman (2004) maintains that viewing itself is insufficient and that we must view with imagination. To view with imagination is to maintain the boundary between the past and the present, ourselves and our texts. Our belated arrival and the boundary between past and present means that there is an intractable distance between the past and the present. Thus historical knowledge requires the kind of intuitive leap that imaginative work such as that described by Didi Huberman (2004) potentiates. Imagination thus constitutes a form of relation between past and present that is not based on identification or assimilation but rather on belatedness. One final time, we can return to Simon (2000) and his idea of estrangement and belatedness as what conditions the possibility of inheritance:

I am estranged from a past to which I always arrive too late (thus as I come close, I find myself moving away). Yet this boundary is not simply the limit of my social imagination condemning me to indifference, voyeurism, or an epistemological violence that renders the other in terms I recognize or imagine as my own (Simon, 2000, p. 21).

Belatedness is not simply a lack, but a condition of possibility. From belatedness, a sense of historical consciousness emerges that is not an attempt to recapture the past, to re-enter or to access others times, but rather to make an uncertain approach in a bounded time. This chastened approach draws attention to forms of historical memory and consciousness that might emerge through micro practices, day dreams, re-tellings, and imagination. This form of historical consciousness requires an inheritance practice that does not seek to know the past by making it
identical with the present, but rather that approaches the past as a way of making a relationship with difference.

Belatedness has been activated differently in my analysis of the various works of art. Of course it is not only the artist who arrives late; later still is the viewer and even later, the cultural theorist. I have also produced and relied upon belatedness in my own analysis here. My ability to turn belatedly to these works is made possible by their durability, by these artists having produced publically available recordings and representations of their own re-tellings.

Looking forward

In Chapter 1, I claimed that inheritance becomes sensible as a cultural practice when the activities that make it up are recognized as social and cultural constructions rather than as simply natural or automatic phenomena. The two activities that I have placed emphasis on here are attention and imagination, both of which are capacities but also activities or tasks that make the work of inheritance possible. Recognizing inheritance as cultural practice allows us to discern the tasks that are part of it. Such discernment makes attention and imagination sensible as practices (‘doings’) and as practice-able (as something that can be learned). To say that inheritance is a cultural practice is to claim that “inheritance” is never and can never be a finished product or outcome but rather that it is an ongoing and interminable set of tasks or doings. Inheritance is a practice in that each newcomer must form their own relationship with the past, and in that past always exceeds its capture in narratives and representations.

At the very beginning of this dissertation, I told a story about encountering a distressing photograph (see p. 1-4) that I felt unprepared to respond to in any meaningful way, and how I experienced my choices in that moment as either to continue staring or to turn away.
Approaching inheritance as a cultural practice expands the repertoire of looking beyond a simple choice between staring or turning away. In reviewing how natality has been encountered in the works of art I have analyzed here, I have described a great many ways of attending to historical images that exceed the two that were in my repertoire when I first encountered the Mizocz photographs that morning in Trinity Library. Through the analysis of works of art, we have encountered a vast repertoire of different ways of attending to the past through cultural forms, and have also considered how such forms of attention are shaped and contoured through such engagements. The encounters with the works of art I have analyzed in this dissertation grant an experience that potentially proliferates forms of attention and may expand the viewer’s capacity for looking. This is the promise of natality. I took up Ettinger’s work as an example of an experience with art that potentially expands the viewer’s repertoire and offers the opportunity to practice forms of looking that aren’t simply staring or turning away, nor a form of looking that mistakes its grounds in culture as its own power as if to look is simply to see. When I look at Ettinger’s *Eurydices*, I am brought into an awareness of my distance from 1943, but it is not a distance that severs my relation to that past time. If inheritance is a cultural practice, then we can analyze how the past is given through representations rather than assuming that representations are simply granting access to what happened.

These interpretive engagements with historically concerned works of art have also provided opportunities to think about what it might mean to expand capacities for imagining other times and other people. This imagination is a form of relation that is not premised on identification or assimilation of the otherness of the past, but is rather what enables an encounter with difference. As Ricoeur (1974) writes, imagination is activated when we are confronted with difference and
we allow that disclosure of difference to become “the capacity to let new worlds build our self-understanding” (p. 110).

Natality, thought of as a temporal ground and as a way of orienting to difference leads into a politics. The significance of inheritance grounded in natality time is that it opens up new forms of relation that make it possible to think and act differently in the present. My work as a cultural theorist has been to show how interpretive engagements with works of art disclose and manifest the promise of natality time, and in so doing, to open the possibility of conceiving inheritance on terms other than those prescribed by deterministic time. This involves an expansion of the modes of reception, such that an engagement with the past might release more than information, knowledge, or spectacle and begin to address us in the present.

In the passage quoted from The Human Condition, Arendt (1958/1998) grants to natality the promise of saving the world; she also grants the same promise to stories. She writes, “acting and speaking men need the help of homo faber in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all” (p. 173). The works by artists at the heart of this dissertation have provided durable scenes and situations, which I have activated and engaged in order to show how natality is released therein. In Arendt’s (1958/1998) terms, the artists produce a kind of political storytelling that has provided the basis for my work as a cultural theorist. In this way, the cultural theorist becomes a storyteller as well. Walter Benjamin (1968), who shares with Arendt a desire to critique deterministic time, also described the work of the storyteller. For Benjamin (1968), the storyteller is a very important figure for the critique of determinism. He describes the purpose of storytelling in his essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” like this: “It is not the object of the
story to convey a happening \textit{per se}, which is the purpose of information; rather it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening” (Benjamin, 1968b, p. 159). On these terms, storytelling becomes a practice through which the past can be understood as more than simple information to be transmitted. Storytelling passes along not information but “counsel,” which Benjamin (1968a) describes in “The Storyteller” as “less the answer to a question than the suggestion about the continuation of an ongoing story” (p. 86).

At various points in this dissertation, I have made claims for what the work of the cultural theorist is or should be. The job of the cultural theorist is to enliven that tension between the past and the present as a place in which to explore inheritance as a cultural practice. Cultural theory can perhaps be thought of already as a kind of inheritance. Another way of articulating the work of the cultural theorist is to say that their task is to respond with syncopation to what is given. To understand how syncopation might be thought of as a response, we can look to Ralph Ellison’s \textit{Invisible Man}. In the Preface to that work, Ellison (1995) suggests that invisibility grants access to a sense of time:

\begin{quote}
Sometimes you’re ahead and sometimes you’re behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps around. And you slip into the breaks and look around. (p. 8)
\end{quote}

Coles, Reinhardt and Shulman (2014) suggest that this sense of time gestures to “one of the distinct gifts” of their vocation as cultural theorists, namely, “to make and use traditions of the strange, for it is by recovering past times or conjuring future times that we become present to our own time in creative ways” (p. 23). The cultural theorist’s task is to recover and to conjure, to render palpable an awareness of “the breaks,” and to respond to what is given with syncopation.
To “slip into those breaks and look around” rather than treating the breaks as a problem or simply an error is to work from and in natality. By responding to what is given with syncopation, the cultural theorist is able to gain (and to provide) a little bit of distance on the ‘given’ or the taken for granted.

Natality teaches us to value newness, betweenness, and belatedness in our engagements with difference. To approach inheritance as a cultural practice grounded in natality time is to open the possibility that our engagements and relations with the past might do more than simply inform or amuse us. If the role of the cultural theorist is to respond with syncopation, then the role of the historian is, as Jocelyn Letourneau writes, “to constantly encourage the men and women of their time to ask themselves not what they must remember in order to be, but what it means, in light of the experience of the past, to be what they are now” (Letourneau, 2004, p. 27). In this formulation, the present is not determined by the past but rather the past is potentially a resource that supplies something more than information and that might illuminate the meaning of the present. What this is contingent upon is a responsive and participatory impulse—the willingness and the ability to ask questions and to allow “new worlds to build our self-understanding” (Ricoeur, 1974, p. 110) rather than simply an attempt to memorize facts about history. The practice in attending and imagining that our encounters with art works have provided to us have prepared us to take on the task of inheriting. Our encounters with natality through these works of

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103 On this point, here is Letourneau (2004) again: “leads heirs as subjects, as participants in present and future collective life, to place their lives in the context of a movement in which they have a stake and which they are urged to build in the present, together with others, drawing more or less on the actions of their predecessors” (Letourneau, 2004, p. 28)
art and my analysis of them have demonstrated the ability to cultivate creative responsiveness, as well as the great importance of this work, given the deterministic times in which we live.
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