Remembering the Past in Visual and Visionary Ways: Rhetorically Exploring the Narrative Potentialities of Esther Parada’s Memory Art

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ABSTRACT

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Rhetorical scholars have examined the ways in which memory is visually and materially enacted. While most research has concentrated on national scale subjects (e.g., the Vietnam War, the Oklahoma City bombing, the attacks of September 11th) when exploring collective memory, little attention has been given to vernacular engagements with the past. Memory art provides a rich area of inquiry for investigating rhetorical techniques used by artists to memorialize and inventively (re)create visions of familial memory and communal pasts.

This dissertation explores the narrative capacity of artwork and how visual texts can be narratively experienced to engage with collective memories. Drawing upon theories in feminism, rhetoric, and collective memory, I theorize a visual narrative perspective grounded in a Bakhtinian understanding of dialogic intertextuality. This perspective views narrative as a sense-making process in which the rhetor and viewer intertextually co-construct textual meanings. Textual meanings of photographic images, specifically memory art, are intertextually co-produced through the dialogic interaction amongst rhetor, artifact, and viewer. Audiences converse with artists through images, merging their subjective knowledges and voices with the artist’s intentions.

Specifically, I examine three artworks by Chicago-based artist Esther Parada to highlight this theory of visual narrativity. First, I explore the photomural Past Recovery
and examine how Parada utilizes different visual tropes to invite me into the text. Then, I investigate the hypertext, *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*, and consider how the multilinear structure elicits narrative co-constructions. Finally, I analyze the multimedia installation piece, *When the Bough Breaks* and examine how different traces encourage a (re)piecing together of loss and memories. Collectively, Parada’s photographic works provide alternative ways of seeing and remembering personal and collective pasts.

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For my parents and Jeremy, with love
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“Let us not withdraw into silence or disdain. Let us savor the zest of intellectual combat, even the thrill of making enemies...Let us enlarge the dialogue to create richer and more subtle images of the world that surrounds us—not just the subtlety of fine grain or high resolution input and output, but images whose sources we have sampled widely, examined critically, and have come to love in their splendid, discordant and idiosyncratic detail.” (Parada, 1994, p. 13)

I cannot recall exactly when I fell in love with photography. I know that at a very young age I was determined to document my impressions of the world around me, of people, places, and events that I knew were temporal and fleeting in nature. I saw life as an ever-shifting drama of human action, a succession of moments that needed to be gathered and recorded. My daily ritual was to chronicle the happenings of the day in my journal. But it was the camera that allowed me to grasp the je ne sais quoi of life that was beyond my words of private reflection. And so, with the click of the shutter the camera became my creative tool for capturing the movements of life and the moments in time. It was a magical tool that could make time stand still and produce a visual forever present-ness—a photograph. In middle school and high school, I was a yearbook photographer. In college, I worked as a photojournalist. Even during graduate school, I spent a summer working for the local newspaper.

My passion for producing photographs led to my curiosity about them and their communicative power (e.g., Berger & Mohr, 1982). I became intrigued by how pictures are produced, circulated, reproduced, altered, disseminated, consumed, viewed, (re)viewed, interpreted and understood. A photograph develops in multiplicity—in how
the photographer frames a scene, in how an audience member interprets that photographic text, in how the photographed subject acts towards the camera, and in the discourses surrounding them. While numerous theories in art, photography, anthropology, and rhetoric helped me to better comprehend photography, I always seemed to come back to the personal impact of an image. When I took photographs I was sharing my vision, my rhetorical voice, with others. And in viewing photographs, I was being granted not only a sight to see, but also an invitation to listen. A photograph beckons the viewer to respond. As Elkins (1996) argues, there is always a “betweenness” that takes place when viewers and images interact (p. 44). In fact, objects “are no longer just things out there to be seen but also places where I can think about seeing and being seen” (p. 70).

Not only can we create photographs, but we also are transformed by them. We commune with photographs in many ways. They can inspire us, amuse us, romance us, persuade us, dishearten us, anger us, and even haunt us. Most importantly, they hail us to reflect and remember. Photography is “not only as a means for collecting and storing information but also as a record of historical consciousness and source of material evidence” (Hardt & Brennen, 1999, p. 13). A picture tells us: this subject existed in this particular place and time. Through photographs, we are called to hear the voices of the past, whether they be our individual, familial, community or national histories. They are mnemonic devices that aid us in accessing our personal and collective memories. Particularly with personal photography, the images offer us a sense of identity. They facilitate the stories that we tell ourselves and share with others, constituting who we are and the histories that we remember.
Photographs, however, are not limited to the private sphere. Indeed, the desire to publicly represent and share our individual and collective stories is found in the world of the visual arts. Artists, particularly those who encourage us to listen to the small stories, provide us with intimate looks at everyday life. They help us to explore the sometimes taken for granted relationships, happenings, and spaces that house and configure our lives. In particular, feminist visual artists have offered critical pictorial portrayals of marginalized voices, silenced individuals, and personal narratives (e.g., Chadwick, 1990; Collins, 2006; Jones, 2003). For example, Nigerian born artist Fatimah Tuggar utilizes the media of photography and computer-mediated photomontage as a means to address issues of social and political inequality. Her works juxtapose traditional domestic images of Nigerian women with technological signifiers of economic wealth such as skyscrapers, computers, and electronic devices (Chambers, 2001). Along with Tuggar, May Steven’s multimedia series *Ordinary/Extraordinary* addresses women’s experiences and constructions of identity in relation to the domestic. Using old images of her own mother with photographs of political activist Rosa Luxemburg, Stevens exposes the false binary of public and private (Chadwick, 1990; Hills, 2005).

As such, these feminist artists draw upon their experiences and utilize art as a means to create awareness of the challenges that individuals face and the forgotten histories that need to be recovered. Through art their stories are told. They compel us to see ourselves in inventive and insightful ways. As Frank (1995) notes, the importance of sharing personal narratives is a moral act that connects the individual to the community. Through art, we are summoned to commune and communicate with one another.
As a photographer, rhetorical scholar, and lover of art, I have contemplated many of these ideas about images and how they influence and shape the world. It was in graduate school that I came across a kindred spirit, a woman who not only professed her dedication to examining images critically but who also produced photographic artworks that gripped me. In our lives, we meet souls that forever change the paths that we take. These relationships are simple and serendipitous, reverberating in our actions and in our beings like intermingled concentric circles. Through her art and lifeworks, Esther Parada invited me to enter into such a relationship with her.

Although I never had the privilege of meeting Esther in person (she passed away in 2005), I experienced her through the stories that her family and friends shared with me and in her artworks that inspired me. As a self-proclaimed “cultural worker,” Parada used photography as a way to communicate alternative visions of the past. With artworks like Past Recovery (1980), Memory Warp (1980), Who Was Smedley Butler? (1986), 2-3-4-D Digital Revisions in Time and Space (1991-1992), Who Dis/Covers—Who Dis/Colors (1992), Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents (1996), and When the Bough Breaks (2004), Parada weaved personal tales with and through cultural meta-narratives to invite audiences to examine critically intersecting and sometimes contradictory narratives. As Esther’s sister Margo Davion recounts, “She was interested in telling stories…She constantly recorded everything around her. It was her way of understanding people and the relationship between individuals and experience” (quoted in Bowean, 2005, p. 6).

And as Krantz (1990) describes,

Parada's mixture of the personal and public becomes a larger statement about the interconnections between an individual and his or her society, thereby proposing
that all attempts at separation are artificial and futile. Her multiple images and the
variety of their sources reveals not only how truth is sometimes willfully distorted
by our government and the media, or how difficult it is to ascertain the truth, but
also how multiple layers of experience create multiple truths which can only be
spoken of as an interweaving, a warp, as opposed to a single entity. (¶ 32)

Spanning five decades, Parada’s photographic artworks are rhetorical texts that
invite audiences to question critically different socio-political and cultural issues. Her
works are found in nearly every major anthology of 20th century photography and are part
of several permanent art collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York
City, the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in
Chicago. In fact, Parada’s works reflect a tradition of feminist activism in photographic
art. As Parada (1987a) states, the primary goal of a feminist artist is

redressing what the artist perceives as an imbalance or distortion of public
memory. She articulates a taboo. She recycles images from the past or present
which have been unheralded or marginalized. She invents new images, giving
form to experience or connections never, or rarely, visualized. She challenges the
artificial separation between political/economic systems and our private concerns.
(p. 204)

Numerous reviews and articles have been written about Parada’s photographic
artworks (e.g., Artner, 2004; Bartky, 2000; Bright, 1989; Eggemeyer, 2004; Gillespie,
1980; Hertz, 1997; Kirchman, 1990; Kirkpatrick, 1999; Kowaleski, 1992; McQuaid,
1989; Mercedes, 1998; Ollman, 1988; Pendleton, 2004; Sampson, 2000; Snodgrass,
However, there has been no investigation to date into the rhetorical visual strategies utilized by Parada to facilitate dialogic engagement with viewers.

Although art criticism is valuable in examining aesthetic properties, it does not provide scholars with considered insight into the persuasive and narrative potentialities of art. This type of insight is achieved through a rhetorical interrogation of artworks. Therefore, in this dissertation I utilize three selected photographic works by artist Esther Parada as case studies for exploring persuasive features of visual narrativity and how I, as an involved viewer, informed by specific concepts, commentaries by other interested parties, and life experiences narratively make sense of her works.

In particular, I investigate how Parada utilizes personal and familial photographs in her artworks to construct imaginative and critical visual understandings of collective pasts. By examining how personal images are (re)appropriated into larger public arenas, such as the art space, I consider how these images simultaneously acquire new meanings and cultural memories while retaining their “original” meanings in the private context. If rhetorical scholars are concerned with how history and cultural pasts are rhetorically constructed, then it is necessary not only to address macro, public memories, but also familial, collective ones. I suggest that each memory artwork provides a unique opportunity for analyzing how artists can rhetorically engage viewers and encourage them to narratively experience visual texts and (re)envision the past in personal and visionary ways. This critical engagement encourages viewers to reevaluate how personal images and their own experiences play a vital role in collective constructions of public memory. Indeed, I extend research in visual rhetoric and collective memory studies by theorizing the process of visual narrativity and the narrative capacities of photographs. I
argue that meanings of visual texts are collaboratively constructed through the dialogic, intertextual process between rhetor and viewer.

In Chapter 2, I review literature on collective memory, photography, and visual narratives to provide an interdisciplinary context and theoretical framework for understanding Parada’s works. I focus on how rhetorical scholars have observed the role of material and visual rhetoric in the construction of collective memories. I note the lack of rhetorical scholarship in the visual arts and argue that the world of visual arts is a pivotal space for engaging with the past. Specifically, I suggest that artists who construct “memory art” provide textual sites that address the creative, cogent, and contingent ways the past is (re)constructed. Then, I discuss the connections between photography and the domestic sphere, recognizing familial images as rhetorically constructed memory texts that evoke narrative understandings. Finally, I theorize how individuals narratively experience visual and material texts. Drawing from Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogism, I argue that textual meanings of photographic images, specifically memory art, are intertextually co-produced through dialogical interactions among rhetor, artifact, and viewer. Audiences converse with artists through images, merging their subjective knowledges and voices with the artist’s intentions.

In Chapter 3, I articulate my methodological framework. I begin by describing my research practices and by discussing my experiences in the Parada archives. Drawing from Michael Calvin McGee (1990), I argue that archival research is an intertextual process in which I take up the role of bricoleur. That is, I piece together different textual fragments to (re)construct the rhetorical, visual text. After reflecting upon my archival experiences, I narrate my journey of close textual analyses through each of Parada’s
artworks. I explore a number of visual strategies used by Parada in inviting me, as a viewer, to engage narratively with her works. Finally, I discuss how the writing is itself a way of knowing and provides a reflexive means for investigating visual rhetorical texts.

In Chapter 4, I rhetorically analyze Parada’s photomural, *Past Recovery*. Specifically, I use the framework of visual tropology to examine how Parada rhetorically utilizes (1) the grid and (2) superimposition to invite viewers to experience the art as a “dialogical space” of narrativity. Together, these visual tropes embody a rhetoric of montage that address the binaries of public/private and visible/invisible.

In Chapter 5, I examine Parada’s online artwork, *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*. I argue that Parada opens up a dialogic space within the hypertextual medium in which viewers are given more participatory power in constructing the visual narrative text. By utilizing a network of multilinear linkages, or hypertexts, Parada invites viewers to piece together information fragments and co-construct narrative meanings. I perform a detailed descriptive analysis of the artwork and suggest that by taking up the form of hypertextual “family photo album,” *Transplant* allows viewers to enact the processes of self-directed narrative sequencing and (re)captioning.

In Chapter 6, I scrutinize Parada’s multimedia installation piece entitled, *When the Bough Breaks*. First, I briefly review literature on representations of loss and formulate a theoretical framework that addresses the concepts of trace and absence/presence. Then, utilizing archival fragments, I perform a detailed descriptive analysis of *When the Bough Breaks* and examine how the different visual, material, and spatial traces enact various degrees of loss and absence/presence.
In Chapter 7, I conclude by briefly reviewing each chapter and justifying how this dissertation theoretically and methodologically has extended rhetorical research in collective memory and visual culture. These issues include how I conceptualize the role of the rhetorical critic, how I approach rhetorical research as an intertextual process, and how I develop a visual narrative perspective. Finally, I conclude with directions for further study.

As rhetorical scholars, the topics we select are, in many ways, the ones that choose us. They grab us by the collars of our shirts, linger in our dreams, compel us to question societal assumptions, and provide us with rich texts for understanding the world around us. For me, photography and photographic art has been and continues to be the subject matter that provokes me to examine critically the plurality of memories and the rhetorical, visual, and material practices in which the past is continuously (re)made. As visual vessels of memories, personal photographs are attempts to visualize and materialize the past. When they are relocated from the private space of our homes to the public space of the art world, photographs take on new and generative meanings. Audience members dialogically meet and interact with these visual texts, co-creating boundless visual narratives. This dissertation, then, is my journey into three artworks by Esther Parada. It is an excursion into the rhetorical strategies used by her to invite me to see and hear her stories. Her words and her art echo in my life, and I am compelled to share them with you.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I begin with an overview of the literature on collective memory. Specifically, I highlight contributions by rhetorical scholars in examining the role of material and visual rhetorics in the construction of collective memories. Then, I examine “memory art” and the ways that art provides alternative locations for creatively (re)constructing the past. Third, I explore how photography, specifically family photography, allows for families to develop and sustain shared memories within the visual medium. Finally, I develop a theory of visual narrativity to explain how individuals narratively experience visual and material texts.

Collective Memory: How We Remember, How We Forget

Our everyday lives are filled with memories. We see, hear, and feel multiple cues daily prompting us to (re)experience them, continuously evoking the past within the present. Our memories provide each of us with a sense of who we are, the continuities within our lives, and how we know ourselves. In our attempt to resist historical erasure and forgetting, we individually and collectively memorialize our pasts—journaling in diaries, taking photographs of loved ones, sharing stories with others, performing celebratory rites of passage and rituals of mourning. Through these everyday activities and rituals, remembering becomes much more than an individual, cognitive process. Remembering becomes a culturally communicative practice, linking each of our personal histories to collective ones (see Blair, 2006; Crane, 2000; Roediger, Bergman, & Meade, 2000; Zelizer, 1995).

There has been growing interest in how we collectively remember and (re)construct the past (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Schwartz, 1998; Zelizer, 1995, 2004). First
coined by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1980, 1992), the idea of “collective memory” centers on the ways in which memories are continuously constructed through and with(in) societies. Collective memory is both a product and a process (Dudai, 2002; Zelizer, 1995). It is simultaneously “a repository of shared cultural images, narratives, and visions of the past” (Leavy, 2007, p. 7; see also Browne, 1995) and the complex activities of how we produce, consume, and remember the past (Kansteiner, 2002). Within collective memory scholarship, memories are recognized as “living memory” (Crane, 2000, p. 151), shifting over time and space, continuously evolving, open, malleable, and mutable to exigencies of the present (Browne, 1999; Mandziuk, 2003; Nora, 1989; Stormer, 2003, Zelizer 1995).

This communal sense of the past and the ways we enact it, however, is not the same as history. Memory is a matter of construction, not reproduction, of the past (Bartlett, 1932). History focuses more on the recording and ordering of events, primarily a search for “what” happened in the past. In contrast, collective memory concerns primarily with “how” history and cultural pasts are rhetorically developed and utilized within the present (see Biesecker, 2002; Jordan, 2008; Schudson, 1992). Collective remembering is an intentional, rhetorical process of selection, invention, omission, and arrangement (Batchen, 2004; Zelizer, 1995). As Phillips (2004) notes in his book *Framing Public Memory*, “The study of memory is largely one of the rhetoric of memories. The ways memories attain meaning, compel others to accept them, and are themselves contested, subverted, and supplanted by other memories are essentially rhetorical” (pp. 2-3). Collective memories are rhetorical entities privately and publicly produced, retained, and negotiated through symbolic discourses and narratives.
One approach in investigating collective memory is to analyze cultural artifacts rhetorically and determine how they are utilized to anchor the transitory past. As Nora (1989) asserts, “memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects” (p. 9). A number of scholars have advocated examination of collective memory’s material rhetoricity (Casey, 1987; Edwards, 2004; Halbwachs, 1925; Kandsteiner, 2002; Leavy, 2007; Wagner-Pacifici, 1996; Yates, 1966; Young, 1993, 1994; Zelizer, 1995). Material artifacts, be they places (museums, sites of commemoration) or objects (clothing, newspapers, diaries, mementos, photographs) are lieux de mémoire (sites of memory) (Nora, 1984/1996, 1989) or “vehicles of memory” (Yerushalmi, 1982) that help us to remember. Tucker, Ott, and Buckler (2006), for example, explore the history of scrapbooks in the United States and how scrapbooks are “a material manifestation of memory” (p. 3; see also Katriel & Farrell, 1991). Rohan (2004) examines how quilts provide locations for “record-keeping and recollection” (p. 370). In Collecting and Historical Consciousness in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany, Susan A. Crane (2000) investigates the “rhetoric of saving” and how the collection and preservation of historical artifacts produces particular histories (p. 38). Stewart (1984) explores the relationship between souvenirs and nostalgia, investigating how “objects may serve as traces of authentic experience” (p. 135).

While some scholars assert that memory cannot be fixed to objects, even leading to collective forgetting (see Barthes, 1981; de Certeau, 1984; Duras, 1990; Forty, 1999), personal and cultural artifacts are valuable loci for collective memories. Collective memories are not merely contained in the material; rather, they are enacted with, in, and through the material. We “remember through commemorabilia” (Casey, 2004, p. 218;
italics in original). Objects do not have memories, people do. We use these material texts as mnemonic devices to generate our individual and collective narrative pasts. As Browne (1995) argues, the process of “memorializing [is] a textual practice” in which the text is “a site of symbolic action, a place of cultural performance” (p. 237). Investigating material artifacts and visual representations as rhetorical texts is crucial for scholars to make sense of how collective memories are utilized in organizing, distributing, and maintaining particular visions of the past.


Specifically, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (VVM) has been a popular rhetorical text for analysis (e.g., Carlson & Hocking, 1988; Ehrenhaus, 1988; Foss, 1986; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998; Sturken, 1997, 1998; Titsworth & St. John, 2005; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991). Scholars have been particularly interested in the memorial’s postmodern architectural design and location in exploring how different
rhetorical meanings of the VVM are constructed, contested, and circulated (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Foss, 1986; Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991; Sturken, 1998). Sturken (1997), for example, points out that the black granite sheen of the VVM wall metaphorically functions as a “memory screen” that encourages visitors to see the loss of American lives but not the loss of lives throughout Southeast Asia. By comparison, Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz (1991) examine how the VVM dialogically interacts with other monuments located in Washington Mall, demonstrating that “monuments never exist in isolation” (van Vree, 2004, p. 16).

In addition to examining the material site, scholars have investigated how audiences respond to and interact with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Haines, 1986; Foss, 1986; Ehrenhaus, 1988). The memorial prompts visitors to leave behind truckloads of material offerings such as flowers, letters, photographs, and other tokens of memory. In their study of the VVM, Carlson and Hocking (1988) analyze “over 2,000 artifacts, including nearly 1,000 written texts” left by visitors (p. 214) to “reveal how visitors are made rhetors by the power of the Memorial” (p. 205). These artifacts are evidence of individual memory-making, vernacular expressions of engaging with the monument.

Public memorials constitute official expressions of collective memory that reflect a discourse of “timelessness and sacredness” (Bodnar, 1992, p. 13). They are also “political instruments, in the sense that they promote or support particular representations of history” (van Vree, 2004, p. 16). In contrast to public memorials ordained by those in power, private individuals perform vernacular memory work (see Hauser, 1999; Savage, 1994). Such vernacular expressions may reinforce and challenge official interpretations of the past (see Jorgenson-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998). While national monuments speak to
national memories, audiences experience these textual sites in personal ways. Memorial sites may be concrete in form, but they are not uniformly understood or experienced. Rather, they are continuously being made and remade by the persons who interact with them.

Rhetorical scholars have acknowledged the value of individual audience members’ responses and collective voices in exploring constructions of collective pasts. Yet even when examining vernacular expressions of remembrance, the focus of textual analysis implies a national scale of meaning-making. For example, memorial subjects are limited to “big events” such as the Vietnam War (see Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Carlson & Hocking, 1988), the Oklahoma City bombing (see Jorgenson-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998), and September 11th (see Hess, 2007; Jones, Zagacki, & Lewis, 2007). Thus, most rhetorical research has addressed the macro, public sphere (e.g., public places of commemoration, well-circulated iconic images, and national discourses) and has consequently ignored how material and visual texts function within smaller collectivities (e.g., families, local communities, and co-cultures).

While monuments, museums, and iconic images help us to develop collective consciousnesses and national identities, our histories and identities are not limited to these official renderings of the past. Our personal, familial, and collective selves and memories also are founded on small stories. Memory work can and does occur in less formally sanctioned and more personal sites of memory. If we recognize collective memory as arising from “the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions” (Bodnar, 1992, p. 13), then we also need to focus on alternative publics and less official
locations for how collective memory is enacted. One such semi-public space is the art space.

Memory Art

While the majority of visual rhetoric has focused upon media representations, memorials, and images (e.g., cartoons, photographs, icons) in the public sphere (see Hills & Helmers, 2004; Olson, 2007; Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008), some communication scholarship has begun to examine the rhetorical potential of visual arts (see Demo, 2000; Foss, 1988; Helmers, 2001, 2004; LaWare, 1998; Scott, 1977). To consider a few examples: (a) LaWare (1998) explores Chicano murals of Casa Aztlán in Chicago; (b) Foss (1998) calls attention to the feminist work *The Dinner Party*; (c) Demo (2000) investigates the feminist women’s art organization the Guerrilla Girls and the political rhetoric exhibited in their posters, books, exhibits, and performances; and (d) Helmers (2004), uses Joseph Wright of Derby’s *An Experiment on a Bird in the Airpump* and Winslow Homer’s *Snap the Whip* as illustrative cases of visual rhetoric in action. Taken together, these efforts summon rhetorical scholars to examine the rhetorical potential of the fine arts.

While LaWare, Foss, Demo, and Helmers provide worthwhile instances of engaging with visual artworks, for the most part, rhetorical scholars have given limited attention to art. Visual artwork, specifically photographic artwork that (re)appropriates personal images, can provide rhetorical scholars with rich texts for examining critical understandings of how the past and (collective) memories are constructed. Indeed, art scholars have discussed this link between artistic representation and (collective/cultural) memory (see Candida-Smith, 2002; Confino, 1997; Crane, 2000; Forster, 1976; Gibbons,
2007; Langford, 2007; Salzman, 2006; Taylor, 2007). As Gibbons (2007) argues in *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, “art has become one of the most important agencies for the sort of ‘memory-work’ that is required by contemporary life and culture” (p. 5). The visual, material, and performative arts are *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, (Nora, 1984/1996, 1989) that provide audiences with locations for bearing witness to past atrocities, grasping for disappearing memories, addressing alternative narrative histories, and publicly commemorating personal losses (see Chanin, 2002; Langford, 2007).

I identify this type of artwork that pointedly functions as a creative commemorative tool as “memory art.” Through memory art, artists attempt to visually, materially, and performatively express memories. Arruti (2007) defines memory art as “a form of public mnemonic art that oscillates from installation, photography and monument to memorial” (p. 101). “Memory art” is artwork (photographic, material, multimedia) that encourages a re-articulation of the individual and communal, bridging the private and the public spheres. It interrogates issues such as forgetting (and resistance to forgetting), (auto)biography, remembrance, archives, nostalgia, and cultural amnesia. Finally, it moves audiences to contemplate and experience issues of personal remembering.

I use the term “memory art” to identify artwork that explores memory and differentiate it from “archival art” which focuses on how the archive is “the means by which historical knowledge and forms of remembrance are accumulated, stored, and recovered” (Merewether, 2006, p. 10; see also Ernst, 2004; Legrady & Honkela, 2002; Taylor, 2007). While archival art does interrogate issues of remembering and forgetting, it is traditionally more concerned with critically examining the collection, organization
and storage of information to document the past (see Foster, 2004). Both memory art and archival art characteristically present the viewer with fragmented or lost historical information. However, I utilize “memory art” to highlight the personal connection in relation to collective memory and history.

Like other lieux de mémoire, memory art involves the need for material preservation of transient pasts. What makes memory art distinctive, however, from other forms of memory texts is that it clearly calls attention to the creative process of remembrance. Artists create memory art for public audiences through imaginative communicative acts that reflect the rhetorical impetus of inventio. Such works are visual memory texts crafted by a rhetor with specific intentions. While the past is irreproducible, it is (re)created through memory art. Memory art actively offers viewers inventive possibilities for (re)viewing and (re)experiencing the past. For example, photographic memory art, or artworks where personal photographs are altered, manipulated, reused, and repositioned, encourage new ways of understanding private and public boundaries. The personal images simultaneously acquire new meanings and connect with cultural memories while retaining their “original” meanings in the familial context (Hirsch, 2006; Sturken, 1999).

Numerous artists have engaged in memory art, addressing issues of autobiographical memory (e.g., June Clark; Raymonde April), familial memory (e.g., Donigan Cumming, Clarissa Sligh; Marian Penner Bancroft), counter-memory (e.g., Jordan Crandall), collective memory (e.g., Tjebbe van Tijen), maternal memorials (e.g., Joan Lyons, Miyako Ishiuchi), and collective trauma (e.g., Marcelo Brodsky, Christian Boltanski, Shimon Attie). There also have been large collaborative art projects that speak
to personal and collective memories. These works include: (a) *Positive Lives*, a traveling photo exhibit that depicts the lives of people with HIV/AIDS (see Kelly & Kerner, 2004); (b) *Still Present Pasts: Korean Americans and the Forgotten War*, a multimedia exhibit that speaks to the silences and memories of the Korean War (www.stillpresentpasts.org, 2005; see also Cho, 2006; Liem, 2007); (c) *Pockets Full of Memories*, an interactive installation that invites visitors to contribute personal objects and construct a digital archive (see Legrady & Honkela, 2002); and, (d) most famously the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt (see Blair & Michel, 2007; Rand, 2007; Sturken, 1997).

Several photographic artists have been crucial figures in fostering memory work through the visual medium. American artist May Stevens, for example, and her multimedia series *Ordinary/Extraordinary* addresses women’s experiences and constructions of identity in relation to the domestic. Pairing old images of her own mother with photographs of political activist, Rosa Luxemburg, Stevens exposes the false binary of public and private (Chadwick, 1990; Hills, 2005). By mixing personal images with public ones, Stevens “examines specific women’s lives in relation to the patriarchal structuring of class and privilege” (Chadwick, 1990, p. 329). Although Stevens primarily paints, her multimedia works in this photographic series reflect a feminist impulse to blur the boundaries of public and private lives within the visual frame. Indeed, Stevens provides viewers with a critical visual commentary about how our memories necessarily blend the personal and the historical.

Photographic artist Marcelo Brodsky also employs the personal to speak to the historical. In his examination of Brodsky’s photographic works, *Buena Memoria* and *Nexus*, Arruti (2007) notes how Brodsky utilizes private images to engage with cultural
memory. By incorporating personal photographs of his brother, classmates, and self, Brodsky calls attention to the disappearance of hundreds of people during the 1976-1985 Argentinean military regime. As Brodsky (n.d.) explains, his work *Buena Memoria* is “in memory of the students of the school who had disappeared or were murdered by state terrorism in the black years of the dictatorship.” The photographic works become visual memorials that register and mourn individual and collective losses. His works are tools for bearing witness to the crimes of a dictatorship. They enable viewers to remember historical trauma and to seek personal and political justice. As Huyssen (1998) declares, “Brodsky’s powerful memory work on the disappeared, among them his own brother, reveals the crippling effects of political violence on a generation. At the same time, it energizes the public not to forget.” Indeed, Brodsky’s (re)use of personal photographs constitutes “memory art” that visually and critically interrogates Argentina’s silence about its past (see also Taylor, 2007 for more on activist groups such as Grupo Arte Callejero and H.I.J.O.S and how photographs are utilized as performance tools for making visible the “disappeared” Argentinean population).

Most notable for addressing issues of memory, death, and loss is contemporary French artist Christian Boltanski (see Eccher, 1997; Hobbs, 1988; Semin, Kuspit, Garb, & Boltanski, 1997; Solomon-Godeau, 1998; Troisi, 2002). Described as “avant-garde monuments to memorialize this century” (Kuspit, 1997, p. 98) that reflect “the torment of memory without peace” (Eccher, 1997, p. 19), Boltanski’s artworks merge the specific with the monumental (Gibbons, 2007). With works such as *Monument: The Children of Dijon, Chases High School*, and *Photo Album of the Family D*, Boltanski pieces together found photographs from family albums, newspapers, and magazines. These uncaptioned,
“random” photographs are removed from their original historical/narrative contexts, displaced, and re-placed together. In *Reserve: les Suisses Morts* (*Reserve: The Dead Swiss*), for example, Boltanski attaches hundreds of portraits found in newspaper obituaries onto tin biscuit cans and stacks them upon each other. When collected together, the individual portraits become hauntingly depersonalized. The photographic images are unsettling, mournful, and tragic, for the people’s individual lives and stories are lost. These reappropriated photographs are transformed into eerie relics, echoes of past lives lived.

Boltanski’s artworks accomplish critical engagements with archival practices, material traces, memory fragmentation, and absences/presences of the past. Although Boltanski’s works reflect a deep interest in preserving “small memory” (see Gibbons, 2007; Semin, Garb, Kuspit, & Boltanski, 1997), the images are never of people he knows personally. Rather, Boltanski uses anonymous faces as a way to address universal issues of remembrance, trauma, and death. Boltanski’s works, like Brodsky’s art, reflect what Hirsch defines as “post-memory” or a secondary memory created by the next generation rather than those who experienced that particular past (Hirsch, 1997; see also Gibbons, 2007). Embedded within Boltanski’s art is a “working through” of the trauma of the Nazi Holocaust, a speaking with and to the unspeakable (Gibbons, 2007).

As we have seen, there are numerous individual and collaborative art projects that address familial memory and collective pasts. Artists engaged in memory art present visionary texts that interrogate (sometimes forgotten) pasts. Memory art is located within a practically circumscribed public space—that of the art exhibit—for investigating how collective and familial memories are visually constructed. While memory artwork may
address large national and public issues (e.g., the Holocaust, 9/11, and the Argentinean “disappeared”), it centers on remembering the past in personal and collective ways. By privileging the personal, these artworks sponsor alternative sites for memory-making and remembrance, at times resisting hegemonic metanarratives and official histories. Indeed, memory art is a type of vernacular memory work that demonstrates the individual desire to creatively engage with the past.

Along with the public art setting, collective memory also is performed within the private sphere. Private photographs and personal artifacts (e.g., scrapbooks, quilts, clothing, jewelry) compose important rhetorical texts in terms of understanding how individuals within family groups construct identities and pasts. Considerable research within sociology, cultural studies, and American studies has examined how visual and material artifacts play a primary role in constructing familial histories and collective narratives (Boerdam & Martinius, 1980; Hirsch, 2006; James & Lobato, 2004; Katriel & Farrell 1991; Sturken, 1999; Tucker, Ott & Buckler, 2006). In the next section, I highlight how personal photographs rhetorically construct shared familial pasts and function as vital artifacts towards understanding collective memory.

Photography and the Familial

With the invention of the camera, photography has become the most prevalent visual communicative practice in contemporary culture. While employed in a variety of areas for numerous purposes (e.g., science, medicine, advertising, journalism, art, and the social sciences), what remains the primary function of photography is its capacity to record human events. The camera is a tool of documentation, “capable of tracing a subject’s presence” (Hirsch, 2000, p. 20), and photographs are “image-traces” that
capture passing occurrences by “freezing” a moment into a single frame (Trachtenberg, 2008, p. 116; see also Berger & Mohr, 1982; Long, 2003). The act of photographing is a way to visually memorialize, a cultural practice that encourages viewers to engage with memories and (imagined) pasts (see Hardt, 2007).

Much scholarship has focused on photography’s deep connection with memory and the preservation of the transitory past (see Barthes, 1981; Baudelaire, 1980; Berger & Mohr, 1982; Bernard-Donals, 2004; Hardt, 2007; Korniss, 1988; Rogoff, 1998; Sontag, 1977; Trachtenberg, 2008). Visual rhetoric scholars also have investigated the relationship between collective memory and photography, focusing upon national archival images that function to preserve national memories (Dunleavy, 2005), iconic images that construct public memory and national history (Berger, 1992; DeLuca, 1999; Edwards, 2004; Finnegan, 2003, 2004; Goldberg, 1991; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003; Schwartz, 1998), representations of iconic events in mass media (Leavy, 2007), and the impact of documentary photography in representing historical “truths” (Rosler, 1989).

Along with its use in documenting the memories of broader collectives, since its inception, photography has been a primary means for visually representing and memorializing families (see Sontag, 1977; Spence & Holland, 1991; Zelizer, 1995). As Kuhn (1995) states, “family photographs are about memory and memories” (p. 19). The taking, displaying, sharing, and collecting of personal photographs is a common cultural practice within families. Not surprisingly, extensive scholarship has focused on family photography (see Barthes, 1981; Batchen, 2004; Boerdam & Martinius, 1980; Bourdieu, 1990; Burlein, 1999; Chalfen, 1987; Hirsch, 1981, 1997, 1999; James & Lobato, 2004; Langford, 2001; Mauad, 2006; Miller, 1999; Musello, 1980; Sontag, 1977; Spence &
Holland, 1991; Sturken, 1999; West, 2000). Within visual communication research, scholars have primarily taken a performative approach when examining family photographs, investigating topics such as wedding photography as ritualized performance (Strano, 2006), smiling in snapshot photography as performance (Kotchemidova, 2005), and performatively engaging with archival images (Hall, 2006). Indeed, family photographs are visual performances of the family, rhetorical texts that allow families to make sense of their shared pasts and themselves in relation to larger society (see Bodnar, 1992; Böck, 2004; Gardner, 1990; Hauser, 1999; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998). They are reminders of our linked experiences, visual evidence of our ancestral roots, and anchors of our identities. As Sontag (1977) explains, “through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself—a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness” (p. 8).

While family photos are uniquely personal artifacts, embodying deep emotions and rich narrative memories, they also reflect larger social conventions of photography (Strano, 2006). Specific recurrent themes are reflected in family photographs and albums (Gardner, 1990; Langford, 2001; Kotkin, 1978; Siegel, 2006) as well as cultural norms that constrain how images are constructed, read, and understood (Bourdieu, 1990; Chalfen, 1987; Holland, 1991; Kotkin, 1978; Musello, 1979; Swartz, 1989). Most modern collections of family photographs reinforce the myth of domestic bliss (see Boerdam & Martinius, 1980; Hirsch, 1997), “immortalizing the high points of family life” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 19). They accomplish this by including images of celebratory events (e.g., rituals such as birthdays, graduations, weddings, and holidays) and excluding negative ones (e.g., conflict, domestic violence, mundane activities).
Contemporary norms of family photography may call for happy, candid images. However, family portraitures were originally solemn events that involved hours of posing for the camera. The shift from stiff, formalized events to “everyday” occurrences was largely due to the rise of the Eastman Kodak company, one of the largest photographic businesses in the United States (Kotchemidova, 2005; West, 2000). The Kodak hand-held camera, acting as “a democratic collector of memories” (Hirsch, 2000, p. 173), allowed anyone to take a “snap-shot” photograph. Kodak’s advertising campaign also constructed photography as play, marketing a culture of middle-class leisure and consumption, and perpetuating familial ideals (Hope, 2008; Kotchemidova, 2005; West, 2000). In fact, Kodak cultivated the standard practice whereby photographed subjects were encouraged to “Say cheese” and smile for the camera (Kotchemidova, 2005). With slogans like “Let Kodak Keep the Story,” Kodak created a culture of snapshot photography in which photographs were (and still are) synonymous with memory-making and family storytelling (see Paster, 1992; West, 2000). The camera’s presence became so taken-for-granted, so embedded in the events themselves that for no one to photographically document the memories would be considered a horrible loss. As van Dijck (2008) explains, personal photography is “a social practice that revolves around families wanting to save their memories of past experiences in material pictorial form for future reference or communal reminiscing” (p. 59).

Families seek to make pasts tangible through photography, and photographs make memories real by giving them a material essence. Collective remembering through photographs, however, is more than merely transferring memory to image-text. Memory-making is a craft (see Rohan, 2004; Katriel & Farrell, 1991). Memories are never
objectively preserved through photography; rather, memories are rhetorically constructed with, in, and through photographs.

First, photographs as “memory texts” (Kuhn, 1995, p. 5) encourage a multiplicity of memories, bringing forth particular memories while obscuring others. Since our memories are never as precise as the photographic images themselves, photographs function as a means to supplement our failing memories. As Baudelaire (1980) proclaims, “Let photography quickly enrich the traveler’s album, and restore to his eyes the precision his memory may lack” (p. 88). The accuracy of the photographic representations is inscribed upon blurred and fragmented pasts, a means for “fixing” shifting memories. Photographs, then, can displace and even replace different memories becoming visual substitutes for a fading past (see Batchen, 2004).

Second, the memorializing activity of photography (e.g., photo-taking, photo-viewing, photo-displaying, and photo-collecting) is a rhetorical one in that photographic devices such as selection, omission, focus, and framing are used in the production, organization, and interpretation of images. Photographers choose how events are visually composed and who will be present or absent within the photographic frame. Viewers, too, selectively organize, omit, and focus on particular photographic images to remember particular pasts. Indeed, viewers continually negotiate the boundaries of family and history, imagination and truth(s) when experiencing photographs. As Spence and Holland (1991) explain,

Family photography can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious. Our memory is never fully ‘ours,’ nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our
past. Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a ‘real’ one. (pp. 13-14)

Our understandings of our pasts are informed by multiple histories of family, community, city, religious community, ethnic group, and nationality (Shils, 1981), and photographs are experienced through these different intersecting lenses. Familial photographs also are read, interpreted, and framed through a “familial gaze,” a way of seeing (sense-making) that combines “the image of an ideal family and the acceptable family relations” (Hirsch, 1997, p. 11).

Finally, photography is a conduit for family narratives and memories (Harrison, 2002; James & Lobato, 2004; Langford, 2001; Mauad, 2006; Spence & Holland, 1991). As Hirsch (1997) argues, family photographs are speech acts that demand narrative readings. Photographs are sites for collective narrative reminiscing in which images are (re)captioned through verbal stories. Through shared stories, families make sense of their pictures.5 As Langford (2001) notes, family photo albums are an extension of the oral tradition, a visual mode of storytelling. While photographs provide visual documentation, verbal narratives often provide more nuanced, contextual information and evoke greater emotional understandings of the images that “reach far beyond the scope of the picture itself” (Hirsch, 1981, p. 5).

Photographs, therefore, are textual fragments, “pieces of evidence in an ongoing biography or history” (Sontag, 1977, p. 166; see also Hirsch, 1997), utilized by families to develop and maintain specific familial narratives. In fact, family photographs are “our storehouse of visual narrative memory” (Miller, 1999, p. 52). We narratively remember with and through photographs. Yet, a single image (or even a collection of images within
an album) is never able to tell the whole story. There is an incompleteness about photographs and photographic artwork (see Elkins, 1996), and viewers must actively complete the texts through narrative viewing. We experience photographs in storied ways. Through the act of narrative experiencing viewers constitute photographs as visual narratives. Photographs do not just elicit narratives—they embody narratives. In the next section, I further elaborate on this concept of “visual narratives” and explore how images are narratively and intertextually experienced.

Photography and Narrative Sense-Making

As I have previously argued, collective memory is a rhetorical process by which we make sense of the past. Material and visual artifacts, whether they are national monuments, works of art, or family photo albums, provide us with textual sites that allow us to “access” memories and (re)produce our pasts. Yet without some sort of contextualization, some form or structure, these texts and memories remain incoherent. It is through narrative that we organize the fragmented texts into meaningful artifacts and the fragmented memories into coherent events. As Hacking (1995) remarks, “the best analogy to remembering is storytelling” (p. 250). Indeed, several scholars have addressed memory’s close ties with narrative (see Freeman, 1997; Hacking, 1995; Wertsch, 2008). While we may hold dearly a photograph, a lock of hair, or a faded flower, these inanimate objects only come to life through us and the stories we share.

Stories, however, are more than a means for remembering. We exist in a world of narratives, of (auto)biographies, family stories, national histories, and cultural myths (see Bal, 1997; Barthes, 1977; Martin, 1986). As MacIntyre (1981) argues, “man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal” (p. 201;
see also, Fisher, 1984, p. 8). We read stories in books, newspapers, and magazines. We watch stories unfold on the stage and on the film screen. We tell stories in our day-to-day conversations. Narratives evoke emotions, teach moral values, and offer alternative perspectives (see Carr, 1986; Crites, 1997; Freeman, 1997; Hacking, 1995; Hodgkin & Radstone, 2003; James & Lobato, 2004). Like collective memory, narrative is simultaneously a product (i.e., a story) and a process (i.e., narrative sense-making). While each individual story is a unique construction, Wertsch (2008) notes that there are “schematic narrative templates” (p. 123) or general cultural patterns for structuring narratives. MacIntyre (1984) also highlights how these “stock of stories” are utilized to make sense of individual narrative lives.

In addition to being a cultural activity, narrative is an epistemology. That is, narrative is a sense-making process, a way of temporally organizing our lives and constructing our realities (see Bruner, 1996, 2002; Carr, 1986; Foss, 1996; MacIntyre, 1984; Mumby, 1993; Peterson & Langellier, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; White, 1981). Indeed, as Fisher (1984) argues, narrative serves as a “paradigm” for human communication (see also, Fisher, 1987; Burke, 1954/1984; Rowland, 1987, 1989; Warnick, 1987). We are story-telling animals who utilize narrative to “grasp together” events and ideas, to collect our fragmented experiences into coherent patterns, and to connect communicatively with others (see Bernstein, 1995; Bruner, 1986; Goldberg, 1982; Freeman, 1997b; Mink, 1970; Ricoeur, 1984-1988; Turner, 1996). Through narrative, our experiences are made meaningful (Bochner, 1997; Berger & Mohr, 1982; Crites, 1997; Freeman 1997a, 1997b, 2002; Parnà, 2001).
Narratives, nevertheless, are not limited to literary texts. Rather, as Bal (1997) explains, a narrative text is any “story that is ‘told’ in a medium” (p. 8), whether that medium be painting, photography film, television or music. Specifically, visual communication and art scholars have explored how images tell stories (e.g., Bal, 1997; Barbatsis, 2005; Brilliant, 1984; Burke, 2004; Lewis, 1999; Helmers, 2004; Meisel, 1983; Steiner, 2004). When examining narratives in visual contexts, one approach has been to explore how texts reflect particular characteristics of narrative such as sequence, configuration, action, and characters. A number of literary scholars have analyzed narrative’s formal properties (e.g., Bakhtin, 1981; Frye, 1957; Scholes & Kellogg, 1966; White, 1981). Despite the variety of approaches towards narrative, narrative is identified as having two major characteristics: ordering and sequence. For example, according to Todorov (1993) narrative has two basic principles of “succession” and “transformation” (p. 30). First, narratives must encompass some sort ordering or “sequential unfolding” (Bruner, 1990, p. 133) of events such that something has happened “before” and “after” a moment. This principle highlights the temporal aspect of narrative. Along with “succession,” Todorov notes that some “transformation” or change must occur, constituting a plot. In short, narratives “require the unfolding of action, change, difference” (p. 28). Todorov’s principles help scholars to recognize the way different elements of a story are linked together to form a coherent whole.

The primary focus by rhetorical scholars has been close textual readings of visual texts to examine the symbolic techniques utilized by the rhetor to create a “visual narrative.” But what are visual narratives? Within the visual arts, the term “pictorial narrative” has referred to “the rendering of specific events, whether mythological,
legendary, historical, or fictional” (Kraeling, 1983, p. 44). Brilliant (1984) identifies visual narratives as “causally and temporally interconnected images that are expressed through the medium of the figured arts” (p. 16). Ryan (2004) argues that visual texts are those that fulfill the criteria that: 1) “create a world and populate it with characters”; 2) “undergo changes of state” and “create a temporal dimension”; and 3) “allow the reconstruction of an interpretative network of goals, plans, causal relations, and psychological motivations around the narrated events” or have a “plot” (pp. 8-9).

Collectively, these definitions draw attention to narrative’s temporal quality; i.e., action must be visually represented. Nevertheless, these definitions are limited in scope. Stories may emerge from an image regardless of whether it presents some type of activity or plot. Are landscape paintings not also potentially visual narratives? Does a portrait not have stories to tell? Visual narratives are more than visual “translations” of verbal texts or illustrations for well-known cultural narratives (i.e., myths, folklore, collective stories). Instead, they encourage viewers to engage with them narratively. Ryan (2004) calls attention to this difference between “being a narrative” and “possessing narrativity” (p. 9). She notes that “being a narrative” means having particular properties of a narrative (e.g., plot, characters, setting) while “possessing narrativity” means the ability for a text to evoke narrative readings.

I argue that as communication scholars, we need to examine visual (and material) narrativities as well as visual narratives. There is a storied nature and potential to photographs regardless of whether or not they specifically exhibit the sequencing process and the configuration of a narrative. Photographs appear to have a “narrative capacity” (James & Lobato, 2004, p. 20). While the widespread approach involving the textual
analysis of visual narratives is valuable, breaking down their formal properties and examining their narrative qualities does not fully explain the narrative potential that these visual texts embody. This perspective not only neglects the narrative contexts encompassing images, but also the emergent narratives through the interaction between rhetor, text, and viewer.

A second approach, specifically within visual rhetorical scholarship, attends to the narrative contextualization of a text and focuses on how visual texts represent and rhetorically construct particular cultural histories and narrative pasts. In Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs, for example, Finnegan (2003) explores how during the Great Depression, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) utilized documentary photography to present the collective struggles of the nation to the American public, to persuade citizens to support government programs, and to shape national policy making. Specifically, Finnegan’s book offers insight into how these images became an essential part of the United States’ collective narrative on poverty during the Great Depression. Rhetorical scholars Hariman and Lucaites (2002, 2003) also have done extensive research on iconic images, including the famous photograph of a naked Vietnamese child fleeing a Napalm attack and the photograph of the flag raising at Iwo Jima during WWII. Their research focuses upon how the (re)production and circulation of iconic photographs encourage public deliberation, frame public memories, and cultivate (and suppress) particular cultural narratives. While these scholars position these texts within a historical context and critically analyze how the images represent particular metanarratives, what is absent from their analyses is how narratives are
communicatively constructed through the audience’s engagement of the texts. That is, how do viewers narratively experience images?

Since “the work of art cannot speak for itself” (Confino, 1997, p. 1391), viewers dialogically speak with the visual text. In a way, an image “hails” the viewer to narratively respond. Audiences integrate images, especially photographs and memory art, into their own lived experiences, memories, and stories—re-storying the texts in rhetorical and creative ways. As Manguel (2000) explains,

When we read pictures—in fact, images of any kind, whether painted, sculpted, photographed, built or performed—we bring to them the temporal quality of narrative. We extend that which is limited by the frame to a before and an after, and through the craft of telling stories (whether of love or hate) we lend the immutable pictures an infinite and inexhaustible life. (p. 13)

Specifically, photographs encourage narrative sense-making. A photograph is a representation of a “disconnected instant” (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 89), a textual fragment plucked from a nexus of time. To counter the camera’s “direct, frontal assault on narrative time” (Frampton, 1983, p. 101), viewers actively (re)place the photographic fragment back into time, into a “sequence of meaning” (Fisher, 1984, p. 2; see also Miller, 1998). As Long (2003) argues, “Photographs frequently function as a goad to narration, acting indexically as a metonymic trace of the past that needs to be provided with a temporal context in order to ‘make sense’” (p. 126; see also Berger, 1980).

However, narrative sense-making of visual texts means much more than constructing a temporal continuity not visually present within the pictorial frame. Through narrative sense-making, visual texts are transformed from incoherent material
traces of the past to provisionally completed textual works. A text is completed or “actualized” in the convergence of reader and text (Tompkins, 1980). As Dewey (1934) asserts, “The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of other than the one who created it” (p. 106). Art becomes art through the interaction between artist and viewer (Volosinov, 1987).

Yet an image is never fully complete. Texts are polysemic in that they “are shaped not by an immanent time but by the play of divergent temporalities” (Frow, 1990, p. 45). That is, although a text may be a concrete, static entity produced in one particular time and place, it is continuously read and reread in multiple settings. The dialogue between author and audiences can span over an infinite number of times and places and provide various meanings to arise. Explains Christian Boltanski in an interview with Tamar Garb, “An artwork is open—it is the spectators looking at the work who make the piece, using their own background” (Semin, Garb, Kuspit, & Boltanski, 1997, p. 24). In fact, there is never a complete or whole reading of a photograph (Cheung, 2005). Texts are continuously positioned and repositioned within an infinite network of texts and readers. New audiences with a myriad of textual experiences continuously engage with a text, (re)producing it in numerous ways. The visual text continuously emerges and reemerges, is made and remade, from each narrative reading.

Narratively experiencing images, then, is an intertextual process. Traditionally, literary scholars have conceptualized intertextuality as the process of how texts intermingle with one another (Barthes, 1981; Culler, 1981; Leitch, 1983). Intertextuality means actively pulling, piecing, and interweaving together textual fragments. This concept of intertextuality, nevertheless, can be applied to how we experience our lives.
and the world around us. Life, in and of itself, is an intertextual process. One is continuously drawing from previous experiences and (re)collecting experiential fragments into a singular moment. Particularly, when engaging with a visual text, we “stitch” an array of visual and verbal textual fragments—memories, stories, images, and emotions—into the material/visual text. Viewing images, then, becomes a “dialogic performance” whereby the viewer is an “active participant in creating a new text” (Lewis, 1999, p. 39; see also, Iser, 2000).

While the active role of the reader is pertinent to constructions of a text (see Crane, 1992; Holub, 1984; Iser, 2000; Karolides, 2000), this does not mean that the rhetor does not have agency in producing a text. In Art and Answerability, Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1990) notes the role of the author in textual production. He argues that, “the artist and the art as a whole create a completely new vision of the world, a new image of the world, a new reality of the world’s mortal flesh, unknown to any other culturally creative activities” (p. 191). The artist/rhetor holds visionary agency and calls readers to take up particular subjectivities to “answer” the literary text. That is, the artist selects and organizes different textual fragments to induce particular readings and reactions to the artwork. The artist’s work, then, becomes a rhetorically constructed entity, an “intentional illocutionary act” (Ciesielski, 1998, p. 64).

Drawing from Bakhtin’s (1981) dialogism, I argue that textual meanings of photographic images, specifically memory art, are co-produced through the dialogic interaction between rhetor, artifact, and viewer. We experience art in a “dialogical space” that facilitates reflecting upon personal narratives and remembering collective memories (see Chapman, 1997; Young, 1994). This communicative process is an
intertextual one in which the narrative experiences of the viewer intertextually merge with the narrative expressions of the rhetor at a site occasioned by the artwork. As Bakhtin (1986) asserts, language is dialogically constituted; that is, speech is always a relational process. He observes, “The word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addressee and addressee (p. 86).

I extend Bakhtin’s argument of the dialogic “word” to include both verbal and visual texts. The “word” or text is always multiplicitous, always in-dialogue with and constructed through the other “voices” or texts. Texts are dialogic such that multiple voices speak to and from multiple perspectives, incorporating many “others” within the text. With a Bakhtinian perspective, I recognize intertextuality as a dialogic process involving rhetor, artifact, and audience. Visual texts are occasions and products of these intertextual “meetings” co-constructed by the polyphonic author with the multivocal audience. Texts are not self-contained entities, but, rather, innately intertextual constructs that (re)appropriate utterances and embody larger, sociocultural discourses. Indeed, no text is “ever fully self-present, self-contained or self-sufficient; no text is closed, total or unified” (Leitch, 1983, p. 98). By theorizing visual narratives as open and multiplicitous entities, rhetorical scholars are allowed to replace monolithic, hegemonic textual attitudes with dialogic ones that encourage diverse and sometimes divergent perspectives.

While there are various perspectives (e.g., semiotic, phenomenological, cultural, historical, art criticism) for examining visual images, a visual narrative perspective grounded in a Bakhtinian understanding of dialogic intertextuality can provide a rich, holistic communicative approach that incorporates both the rhetor and the viewer in the
co-construction of texts. I utilize a narrative framework that (1) recognizes narrative as a sense-making process, (2) views intertextuality as a key characteristic of visual narrativity enacted both by rhetor and viewer and (3) promotes a subjective, person-centered approach in examining visual texts.

As I have argued, narrative is one of the primary means for meaning-making of images, specifically photographs and memory artwork. Photographs provide a basis for narrative work for “there are stories about photographs, and there are stories that lie behind them and between them” (Harrison, 2002, p. 105). My research focuses upon the intentions of the rhetor (the stories behind the text), the visual text (the stories within the text), and the viewer (the stories brought to the text). In the next chapter, I provide a methodological framework for examining visual narratives. While much attention has been given to audience analysis and reception theory within rhetorical criticism and media studies, my concern is not how audiences in general engage with visual texts, but rather how I, as an audience member informed by art critics’ reviews and comments by viewers, subjectively experience and narratively make sense of specific visual narratives. In fact, “a narrative has to be read into a photograph by an individual subject within a concrete historical and ideological context” (Long, 2003, p. 120).
Footnotes

1. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of collective memory research, scholars have utilized terms such as “public memory,” “cultural memory,” “social memory” and “historical memory” interchangeably. Specifically within rhetorical studies, “public memory” has been synonymous with “collective memory.” Public memory research, however, primarily concentrates on national practices of remembering and memorializing. I use the term “collective memory” as a broader, more encompassing concept to highlight the multiple levels of collectivities—family, ethnic and racial groups, community, and nation (see Kansteiner, 2002; Ross, 1991).

2. While my focus is on collective memory scholarship in communication, the phenomenon is an interdisciplinary one (Werstch & Roedgiel, 2008). Excellent collective memory scholarship is found in anthropology (Cole, 2001; Handler & Gable, 1997), sociology (Schwartz, 2000; Zerubavel, 2005), psychology (e.g., Middleton & Brown, 2005; Pennebacker, Paez, & Rimé, 1997), history (Bodnar, 1992; Kammen, 1991), and literary studies (Young, 1993). In addition, foundational work in collective memory studies was produced outside the field of communication (e.g., Halbwachs, 1925/1992; Nora, 1984/1996).

3. While rhetorical scholars have attempted to incorporate how visitors experience places (Carlson & Hocking, 1988; Ehrenhaus, 1988; Katriel, 1994), scholars outside the field of rhetoric have examined visitors’ cognitive responses to places of memory (e.g., Cameron & Gatewood, 2000, 2003; Gatewood & Cameron, 2004; Jansen-Verbeke & van Rekom, 1996; McIntosh & Prentice, 1999).
4. A number of scholars have argued that photography is a type of “vernacular” visual history that emphasizes the personal while simultaneously reflecting cultural, historical events as well as voicing counter-narratives to larger, more official histories (e.g., Batchen, 2000; Bodnar, 1992; Hall, 1991; Mavor, 1995; Schwartzengberg, 2005; Zelizer, 1998). Indeed, personal photographs are vernacular expressions of memory. However, this should not be confused with Cara Finnegan’s (2005) concept of “image vernaculars” in which audiences engage with public images in enthymematic ways.

5. For further readings on familial narratives and how families utilize storytelling as a means to performatively construct familial identities, see Kristin Langellier and Eric Peterson (2003) and Walter Fisher (1984).


7. A number of scholars have recognized photography’s deep connection with narrative and storytelling (e.g., Barbatsis, 2005; Berger & Mohr, 1982; Bernard-Donals, 2004; Goodnow, 2005; Hirsch, 1997; Harrison, 2002; James & Lobato, 2004; Scott, 1999).

8. As Michael Fried (1980) notes, a painting “had first to attract a beholder, then to arrest and finally to enthrall the beholder, that is a painting had to call to someone, bring him to a halt in front of itself and hold him there as if spellbound and unable to move” (p. 92). See also W. J. T. Mitchell’s (1996) analysis of the “Uncle Sam” recruiting poster and the calling power of images.
9. In their examination of scrapbooks, Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell (1991) note that personal artifacts have no meaning unless narratively contextualized. In fact, the text stands as an incomplete narrative, and it is only in contexts of silent contemplation and inner dialogue or social sharing that it becomes a fully storied version of a life. Its life as text lies in the possibility and actuality of its performance—either to self as audience or to a more public audience of potentially significant others (p. 14). Marguerite Helmers (2004) also notes that narration is the primary means for an image to become “alive” for it is “narration [that] animates the static representations of a work of art” (p. 67).

10. Feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva (1986), who is credited with coining the term intertextuality, argues that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation [of other texts] (p. 37). Literary theorist Michael Riffaterre (1990) argues that a singular text exists within a network of texts and reflects “traces” of other specific texts (i.e., the intertext). These “traces” or “fragments” guide audiences to pull from or connect the text with other particular intertexts. The study of intertextuality, then, encourages examination of textual plurality, instability, and contradictions (see Ott & Walter, 2000).

11. Todorov (1984) also notes in Bakhtin’s writings that an utterance is of the subject; that is, “every utterance has an author, whom we hear in the very utterance as its creator” (p. 184).
CHAPTER 3: REFLECTING ON RHETORICAL PRACTICES: A RESEARCH NARRATIVE

As I have argued in Chapter 2, embracing a visual narrative perspective allows me to experience subjectively and narratively to make sense of visual texts. Grounded in a Bakhtinian understanding of dialogic intertextuality, this approach can provide a rich means for examining rhetorical works. In this chapter, I explain how a visual narrative perspective may be performed. First, I provide a brief review of literature to highlight my expansion of rhetorical methodologies and a justification for my narrative orientation. Specifically, I discuss how a visual narrative perspective embodies feminist sensibilities and extends Brock and Scott’s (1980) experiential perspective. Then, I narrate my experiential engagement with Esther Parada’s artworks, from delving into the archives to investigating rhetorically the texts through close textual analysis. In doing so, I suggest that archival research is an intertextual process of selection, reconstruction, and analysis. Finally, I argue that by writing in a narrative voice, scholars can develop fuller and more reflexive examinations of visual rhetorical texts.

Extending Rhetorical Criticism: A Visual Narrative Perspective

Traditionally, rhetorical criticism has been conceptualized as a methodical evaluation of historical speeches and their effects upon specific audiences (Brock & Scott, 1980; Bryant, 1973; Reid, 1977; Wichelns, 1925; Wrage, 1947). However, contemporary criticism has expanded beyond the oratorical canon (Gray-Rosendale & Gruber, 2001) to include such areas as visual culture (e.g. Hill & Helmers, 2004; Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003), cultural studies (e.g., Nelson & Gaonkar, 1996; Rosteck, 1999; Sloop & Olson, 1999), and discourses of gender, race,
and ethnicity (e.g., Blair, Brown, & Baxter, 1994; Campbell, 1989; Foss & Griffin, 1995; Gilyard & Nunley, 2004; Jackson & Richardson, 2003; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995). Indeed, rhetorical criticism can be defined as “the systematic process of illuminating and evaluating products of human activity” (italics added)” (Andrews, 1990, p. 2; see also Black, 1965, p. 9). From ideographic criticism to neo-Aristotelianism to Burkean dramatism, contemporary scholars appear to increasingly embrace more pluralistic attitudes towards rhetorical criticism (Brock & Scott, 1980; Klyn, 1968; Lucas, 1981; Rosenfield, 1968). With a growing interest in visual rhetoric, a variety of methodological perspectives also have been taken up (e.g., Hesford & Brueggemann, 2007; Rose, 2007; Smith, Moriarty, Barbatsis, & Kenney, 2005) including semiotics (e.g., Bal & Bryson, 1991; Barthes, 1968; Bryson, 1991; Eco, 1979b; Hodge & Kress, 1988; Peirce, 1972), psychoanalysis (e.g., Lacan, 1977; Leff, 1980; Mitchell, 1974), reception theory (e.g., Barbatsis, 2005; Holub, 1984; Jensen, 1987), and discourse analysis (e.g., Brown, 1995; Foucault, 1974; Gill, 1996; Macdonell, 1986; Schiffriin, 1994; Stubbs, 1983).

Although some scholars work with prescriptive methods (cf, Benoit, 1994; Campbell & Burkholder, 1997), within rhetorical criticism there is broad acknowledgement that there are no predetermined formulas (see Lucas, 1981; Jasinski, 2001). In fact, Jasinski (2001) notes a shift in contemporary rhetorical criticism from deduction to a process of abduction or “a back-and-forth movement between critical object (e.g., text, message) and the concept that is being investigated simultaneously” (p. 139). Several scholars have argued for more inventive and diverse perspectives (Andrews, 1990; Black, 1965; Blair, Brown, & Baxter, 1994; Brock & Scott, 1980; Foss, 1996; Gray-Rosendale & Gruber, 2001; Lucas, 1981; McGee, 1984; McKerrow, 1989).
Foss (1996), for example, notes that while there are existing practices for enacting rhetorical criticism (e.g., generic, pentadic, cluster, metaphoric), new methods can be generated by the critic. As she argues, rhetorical criticism should begin by selecting a rhetorical artifact that grabs the attention of the critic. The process should then be driven by a research question that “directs the critic to an approach that fits the artifact and allows the question to be answered” (p. 18). Similarly, McGee (1984) calls on rhetorical scholars to operate from different “perspectives” rather than limiting themselves to systematic, predetermined methodologies. The rhetorical critic is to select the appropriate perspective and distinguish what is most important to analyze within a text (see Parrish, 1954). Instead of imposing a particular method or theory upon a rhetorical text, the critic should allow theoretical and methodological frameworks to emerge from the text.

Most notably, Edwin Black’s (1965) *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* encourages critics to take up multiple rhetorical orientations that go beyond traditional criticism. As he argues, “We simply do not know enough yet about rhetorical discourse to place our faith in systems, and it is only through imaginative criticism that we are likely to learn more” (p. 177). One approach that Black identifies as a means for incorporating the critic’s voice is “re-creative criticism.” Unlike neo-Aristotelian criticism, which regards the personal views of the critic as a hindrance to understanding the rhetorical text, re-creative criticism identifies the critic as “a participant rather than a detached observer, enabling him to comprehend the aesthetic experience in a sympathetic intuition of its object” (p. 43).

Although there is recognition that the critic is an interpreter of texts and that criticism is a subjective enterprise of interpretation and evaluation (Andrews, 1990;
Brock & Scott, 1980; Campbell, 1972; Mechling & Mechling, 1999), little scholarship in rhetorical criticism reflects the experiential voice of the critic (Blair, Brown, & Baxter, 1994). A few feminist rhetorical scholars have offered more relational perspectives in analyzing texts (Foss & Griffin, 1995; Hayden, 1997; Ratcliffe, 2004, 2005). Hayden (1997), for example, identifies how an epistemological stance grounded in feminist theory privileges personal experience. Ratcliffe’s (2005) trope of rhetorical listening encourages a “stance of openness” that individuals may take towards others and rhetorical texts (p. 17). And Foss and Griffin (1995) argue that rhetoric can be “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (p. 5). Overall, however, there is a lack of reflexivity in rhetorical criticism (Blair, 2001; Lee, 1998; Meyer, 2007). As Meyer (2007) argues,

> By refusing to name ourselves, and continuing to position our subjectivity outside the realm of academic discourse, we as scholars actually rob ourselves of a key component of rhetorical intent—writing that clearly articulates our own methodological and epistemological foundations as a function and byproduct of authorship. (p. 11)

If rhetorical criticism is a personal process that stems from a “critical impulse” (Rybacki & Rybacki, 1991, p. 8), then a rhetorical perspective that reflects how the rhetorical critic experiences a text is needed. Therefore, I take up a visual narrative approach which recognizes the critic as an embodied subject (McKerrow, 1993), emphasizes the critic’s experiences (Brock & Scott, 1980), and promotes “voice-centered research” that values situated knowledges of the individual (Harding, 1987; Mauthner &
Doucet, 1998). Rather than viewing knowledge within an objectivist or dualistic framework (i.e., subject/object binary), I recognize knowledge as transactional (i.e., dialogical) in nature, emerging from communicative interactions. Knowledge is neither purely objective nor disinterested but, rather, is historically situated and interest-grounded (Habermas, 1968/1971).

In enacting a visual narrative perspective, I draw upon two areas of study. First, pulling from feminist scholarship, I contend that we as rhetorical scholars need to recognize our subjective experiences as starting points for inquiry (see DeVault, 1999; Fine, 1992; Frye, 1993; Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartstock, 1983; Hertz, R., 1997; Scott, 1991). As Krieger (1991) argues, the utilization of the self is essential for feminist research. The rhetorical critic occupies a subjective location, a “critical positioning” (Haraway, 2004), that brings to a text particular situated knowledge(s). One’s epistemological outlooks, research agendas, rhetorical trainings, past experiences, demographic identifications, and personal interests all can shape how one engages with a rhetorical text. Rather than regarding these features as biases, they are factors that inform the critic’s interpretations of the rhetorical artifacts. A more reflexive approach, specifically a visual narrative orientation, can highlight these subjective interpretations and account for the critic’s role in the investigation of images and artifacts.

Second, informing my visual narrative perspective is what Brock and Scott (1980) identify as an “experiential perspective” (p. 135). Their perspective “stresses that the rhetorical critic is fundamentally a participant” in examining texts and that the critic’s interpretations of a rhetorical text “cannot be taken as objective measuring, but rather as an invitation to experience rhetorical phenomena as the critic has” (p. 141). The critique
becomes documentation of the critic’s experience with a rhetorical text, if not an embodied performance of the critic (McKerrow, 1993). In fact, Rosenfield (1968) reinforces this experiential perspective by calling upon rhetorical scholars to re-conceptualize “text” as an experienced phenomenon rather than a distant object of study. As he explains, “It becomes the critic’s task to investigate the cooperation of elements and ratios in the message which give rise to the artistic meaning-as-experienced [italics added]” (p. 62). This assertion is no less true for visual texts. The meaning(s) and rhetorical significance of a text exist within the interplay of text, rhetor, and critic as audience. By employing a communicative, co-constructed perspective, the meaning-making process becomes one in which visual artifacts are not just viewed, but experienced.

As I have stated in Chapter 2, a visual narrative perspective is one that acknowledges narrative as an intertextual sense-making process. In the next section, I narrate my rhetorical engagement with three of Esther Parada’s artworks, reflecting upon my experiences in the archives and the intertextual performance of archival research.

Diving into the Archives: Selection, Reconstruction, and Analysis

(Re)collecting Intertextual Fragments

Tuesday, December 11, 2007

Passports. Emails. Faxes. Photographs. Newspaper clippings. Audio tapes. Drafts of artwork. Journals. Letters. Today I am overwhelmed and yet not. I continue to collect pieces. I am taken in by her handwriting, her thoughts, her notes and how much labor Esther put into each project. There are endless “whys” and “hows” that cannot be fully answered. I tremble with excitement each time I view her indecipherable handwriting
scribbled across manuscript edges and notes. How am I supposed to piece everything together coherently? It seems that there are endless narrative strands and blurred boundaries. I am searching for a path through the forest of documents. The material traces beckon me to (re)construct the artworks and make them whole. But where do I begin?

My first encounter with Esther Parada was in graduate school in 2006. I was taking a course in biographical writing and was obligated to produce a biography in ten weeks. I was skeptical of the quality of work that I could produce in such a limited amount of time. Unsure of where to start, I began perusing obituaries in major national newspapers. How presumptuous I must have been to think that I could just open a newspaper and have a biographical subject appear before me! Perhaps that is where archival research begins—in a serendipitous moment. I decided to look through the *Chicago Tribune* since I grew up near the city. I do not recall how many obituaries I read through before I found her. Dated Monday, October 24, 2005, the headline read: “Esther Parada- 1938-2005 - Artist ‘encouraged people to think’ - UIC professor and photographer used her work to capture Latin culture and to comment on the social and political world around her” (Bowean, 2005, p. 6). The words caught my eye like the glimmer of a quarter at the bottom of a wishing well. I read on and, as I continued, there was something that resonated with me. I had never met this woman before, but here was her life summed up in 683 words. I felt as though I should have known her or maybe that I already did.

That winter I interviewed Esther’s colleagues, friends, family, and former students. I tiredlessly searched for articles she had written and reviews of her artwork.
Her sister, Susan Peters, was kind enough to send me a package of photocopied newspaper clippings, articles, and other random papers. I began to piece together a life story of a woman who used art and photography to invite others to reflect personally and critically upon the past. Yet, I felt that there was something more. Although her life was interesting, it was Esther’s artwork at which I obsessively gazed. Unfortunately, my fascination with her photographic works was beyond the scope of the course. In the end, the final paper turned out to be abysmal. I did, however, learn a little more about biographical research. I had enjoyed the hands-on experience of gathering narrative fragments to (re)construct Esther’s life. I had acquired the courage to interview strangers over the telephone. Most importantly, I had begun a relationship with this artist and her artwork. The seeds of my dissertation had been planted.

It would be an entire year before I would dive into the archives. There was no singular moment when I decided to return to Esther. Her artwork and the themes she grappled with—memory, photography, and family—always seemed to echo in my own research. I decided that my dissertation would center on how visual rhetoric is an intertextual process enacted between rhetor, text, and audience. Indeed, I hoped that by traveling to the archival collection, I would engage in what Jung (2005) refers to as “revisionary rhetoric” in which one sifts through drafts of an evolving text to examine the process of rhetorical invention. I would use Esther’s works as “case studies” for my theoretical contribution. Entering the archives, I was allowed to peruse primary sources rich in textual and historical information. Although I was excited about rhetorically investigating her artworks, I was unsure of what exactly I would find. I was lucky to gain
access to Esther’s papers located at the University of Illinois in Chicago where she had taught for over 30 years. All I could hope for was to be guided by the archives.

**Monday, December 10, 2007**

*In the library. Sitting in front of the door to the archives. I’m waiting for Julia Hendry to arrive. The anticipation is unbearable. This is it! I’m here! I’m on the cusp of a journey into Esther’s papers. What will I find? How will I know what is important or not? There are a gazillion questions running through my head. I’ve read some literature about archival research, but there is no single formula for doing it. It’s like being tossed into the deep end of a swimming pool.*

In December of 2007, I traveled to Chicago to begin sifting through the archived materials. I met with Julia Hendry, the university archivist with whom I had corresponded for several months. She led me around the archives, diligently assisting me (and tolerating my naïveté) in exploring the Parada collection. And so I began. Each day, I would select several boxes (remarkably, each was clearly labeled by Esther). Each day, I would delve further into the textual fragments. Each day, I frantically jotted down names of acquaintances, made copies and copies of whatever I could find, and hastily transcribed personal letters. I admit that I had no idea what I would find. Archival research feels like “a kind of directed rambling, something like an August mushroom hunt” (Connors, 1992, p. 23). All I knew was that I had one week to collect as much information as possible.

**Wednesday, December 12, 2007**

*It is day three of my “archival adventure.” My back and shoulders ache from being hunched over a table for hours. My eyes are sore from reading the heaps of documents.*
My fingers are cramped from writing. I may be physically exhausted, but my fascination with Esther and her art keeps me going. I am compelled to continue. But what am I looking for? Traces. Some evidence. I’m discovering a considerable amount of personal correspondences with friends and colleagues. Through these, I’m learning more about Esther, the person. And I’m finding drafts of artworks, including Past Recovery, Dig.Cultivation, When the Bough Breaks, Canopy, The Monroe Doctrine, 2-3-4-D: Digital Revisions in Time and Space, and Who was Smedley Butler? Unfortunately, I’m only finding a few scraps of audience feedback in the sea of papers. Either I’m not looking hard enough or I’m not searching with the right eyes.

One main characteristic of my archival research was that I could not take archived items out of these archives. So, I attempted to read and document as much as possible in the limited time that I had. Like Esther, I organized information based upon the major artworks. I sought to find not only the progression of ideas that she addressed throughout her lifetime, but what others said about her works. And slowly, I began to realize that the archives offered altogether something else. In retrospect, I initially resisted the archives. That is to say, I was intent on unearthing art reviews and audience interpretations of Esther’s artwork. Even though there was an abundance of draft materials and writings by Esther that revealed the evolution of her works, I found little material evidence of audience responses. I wanted to know how viewers, in general, had made sense of her art. What I had overlooked was my own experience as a viewer. Prior to this trip, I had spent months gathering information about Esther, learning about her life through her writing and through interviews with her friends and family. If anything, I had an advantage of
knowing the personal stories behind her artworks. “Perhaps my dissertation is not so much about Parada as it is my experience of her artwork,” I wrote in my journal.

It was a few days at the archives before my perspective shifted. The archives became more than a container of facts that had to be recovered by me, the rhetorical critic. Instead, I began to engage in what Finnegan (2006) calls “complex rhetorical negotiations” with texts. The archives became a space for me to grapple with fragments, not just find them. Indeed, as McKerrow (1993) explains, “as inventor of texts, the critic’s role is to re-present texts from a collection of fragmentary episodes” (p. 62; see also, McGee, 1990). I repositioned myself not as a biographer or a miner of information, but as a participant in collecting and (re)configuring the constellation of textual artifacts. I began to engage critically with texts and jot down initial interpretations of what I saw. I felt like I was working with an ever-shifting jigsaw puzzle (Gold, 2008). I began to see myself as a bricoleur, by intertextually pulling, piecing, and interweaving together the different fragments that I found and by drawing from previous experiences and understandings of Esther and her life. I saw each scrap of text as potentially significant.

Viewing the visual and verbal texts became a dialogic performance of rhetorical invention. As Biesecker (2006) notes, the archive is a “scene of a doubled invention rather than a site of a singular discovery” in which the rhetorical critic selects, organizes, and interprets materials in particular ways (p. 124). No longer did I see myself as a frantic recorder of information, but as an involved participant, rhetorically (re)creating the past. And slowly patterns began to emerge from the archives.

*Narratively Experiencing and Rhetorically Analyzing Visual Texts*

*Friday, December 14, 2007*
I am beginning to see some linkages amongst her artwork. Many of her works seem to embody this sense of individual and collective history. In some ways, Esther appears to use art as a forum for constructing visual counter-narratives to hegemonic historical metanarratives. Even though there are various topics she addresses (U.S. relations with Latin America, community loss, the erasure of familial histories), she attempts to remember the past in personal and critical ways. She uses photographic art as a way to explore how the past is manipulated, fragmented, and intertextual. In the end, it is about memory.

Tuesday, August 12, 2008

I have spent the past months organizing and cataloging archival “data,” attempting to listen to what Esther was trying to say through these visual works. To be honest, I have been floundering about and going around in circles. I want to hear the stories that I cannot see. I feel that the only way to make sense of all these pieces is through narrative. It is an intertextual engagement in which I draw from different textual fragments. I’ve begun examining Past Recovery and focusing upon the spectral faces of her family members. So many faces, lives, and experiences. She has created a two-dimensional space that enables and constrains how one experiences the narrative power of the image.

After my trip to the University of Illinois in Chicago, I decided that a dissertation encompassing all of Esther Parada’s artworks would be a bit much. After sifting through and accomplishing a provisional arrangement of the archived materials, I selected three works, Past Recovery, Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents, and When the Bough Breaks, which I identified as sharing common themes (e.g., memory, narrative) but independent of one another. Each was composed within a different medium (e.g.,
photomural, hypertext, and installation piece) and each generated different narrative topics (e.g., family, identity, and community). I went back again and again to the textual fragments that I had collected. I began to comb through the “narrative debris” (Schwenger, 2006, p. 146) and familiarize myself with the photographic artwork. I spent countless hours staring at them. As sites of memory, each uniquely drew me into the past. Each called to me. I would spend nights with the afterimages burned in my brain. My head would be reeling with questions. How did art reviewers critique the piece? What did Esther’s drafts show me? How had the artwork progressed into its final product? What did Esther’s essays reveal about what she wanted to communicate with her artwork? I would have visions of the elms from *When the Bough Breaks*, the faces in *Past Recovery*, and the flashing text embedded in *Transplant*. I felt as though Parada was reconnecting me to the past that I had never lived but could (re)experience through her artworks. The images beckoned me to read their forms.

*Tuesday, April 2, 2009*

*The past few weeks have been serendipitously productive. At first, I was a bit worried. Although the UIC archives had many of Esther’s papers, I didn’t have many visual documents of *When the Bough Breaks*. Even though I had a floor plan and a detailed list of what was in the multi-media artwork, the absence of photographs challenged me to visualize the exhibit as a whole. I was lucky enough, however, to get in contact with Rod Slemmons, executive director at the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College in Chicago. Rod informed me that some of Esther’s works are part of their collection. He has been extraordinarily helpful in tracking down photographs and prints that were incorporated in the installation. He also suggested that I return to the UIC*
Esther Parada website. When I went back, I was amazed to find several photographs on the website that provided me with just what I needed! I’m beginning to understand that archival research extends beyond traditional repositories. The information that I’ve found on that website is valuable archival material that will aid me in reconstructing When the Bough Breaks.

The archival materials became both the textual and contextual fragments to (re)construct the artworks. Depending on the selected artwork, there were varying degrees of contextual information that was provided by archival materials. For example, with *When the Bough Breaks*, the installation piece had to be (re)assembled verbally by me. Since it was a temporary installation, I had to reconstruct with words an artwork originally occupying multiple rooms that was no longer physically present. On the other hand, with *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*, the hypertextual artwork could be accessed and “directly experienced” by any online viewer. Besides offering me a sense of Esther’s rhetorical intentions, and, to a limited extent how others had experienced them, the information I gleaned from the archival materials constituted evidence to support my rhetorical interpretations of the visual texts.

I recognized that there were different visual strategies utilized by Esther Parada to invite me to engage narratively with her art. However, I needed to examine how she was reaching out to me through these visual texts. As a rhetorical scholar, I reflected upon the different “tools” utilized in our field. I found myself experiencing each artwork through the lens of close textual analysis. As Jasinski (2001) explains, “close readers linger over words, verbal images, elements of style, sentences, argument patterns, and entire paragraphs and larger discursive units within the text to explore their significance on
multiple levels” (p. 93; see also, Leff, 1992, 1997; Mohrmann, 1980; Slagell, 1991). To borrow from Fish (1972), I attempted to “slow down” my experience with each visual text and “unpack” them. I focused on the “internal dynamics” (Lucas, 1988, p. 253) and the various ways Parada composed the artwork. Specifically, I was concerned with how these visual strategies were rhetorical, communicative acts and how they were addressing me. As Lucas (1988) argues,

> The purpose of the critic is not simply to retell the speech in his or her words but to apprehend it fully from the inside out—to break down its rhetorical elements so completely as to determine how they function individually and to explain how they interact to shape the text as a strategic, artistic response to the exigencies of a particular situation. (p. 253)

In investigating the visual (and sometimes verbal) components, each work became a case study for interrogating issues that could contribute to the study of visual rhetoric and narrative theory. With *Past Recovery*, I first sought to find the visual forms that “popped” out of the photomural. I quickly identified the grid and superimposition as two primary components that organized the visual text; yet, I spent months mulling over how they functioned in *Past Recovery*. For example, I recognized that the grid provided a visual framework, but was unsure as to how it shaped my narrative experiencing of the artwork. I would ask myself questions such as, is the grid functioning as a quilting device? How is time being represented? How is the pictorial plane sequentially structured? These questions led me to exploring how the grid and superimposition had been historically conceptualized and utilized in the visual arts. After reviewing the literature, I then theorized that Esther used these two visual tropes to construct a vision of
relational remembrances. By assembling and overlapping intertextual photographic fragments, the work exhibited what I defined as a rhetoric of montage. In fact, montage signifies working with and transitioning amongst a group of memories. The story of her family is re-framed and retold through the visual tropes. I felt that in *Past Recovery* Esther was attempting to visualize a familial past that can never be fully recollected.

After examining *Past Recovery*, I shifted my attention to Esther’s hypertextual artwork, *Transplant*. Since I had investigated *Transplant* for a rhetorical criticism course I had taken in 2007, much of my time was spent reworking the analysis. I integrated my archival experiences, applied my ideas of visuality I had generated through *Past Recovery*, and worked through the hypertext with new eyes. I encountered new details this second time around and reflected more on how I, as a viewer, moved through the hypertextual space. As a hypertext, *Transplant* allowed me to select the sequence of unfolding pages. I critically reflected upon how I had traveled through the text on different occasions and decided to offer one possible reading from the multiple paths. My analysis, then, became a (re)presentation of one of my journeys through the hyperlinked pages. Taking the reader with me on that journey, I analytically disassembled the artwork. Specifically, I focused on how Parada used sequencing and (re)captioning to interweave these hypertextual narratives within the visual text. I investigated how she utilized re-appropriated photographs, computer generated images, and written text to tell a familial tale of the Curzons and the historical, agricultural, and global connections.

Last, but not least, I decided to rhetorically explore Esther’s *When the Bough Breaks*. Unlike the previous two artworks which I could view in their “complete” form, I had to (re)construct the entire installation piece by intertextually pulling together
different archival fragments. Working with textual pieces enabled me to view the artwork as a conglomerate of traces, presences peppered with gaps and silences. Knowing that *When the Bough Breaks* was the last completed work by Esther, I saw the installation piece through the lens of mourning. For me, the work symbolized her final artistic trace. It imbued loss. I kept returning to the idea of trace and finally stumbled across Jacques Derrida’s philosophical inquiries. Using his idea that the trace is an oscillation between absence and presence, my goal became to understand these absences and presences I had found in the archives and to observe how they functioned within the artwork. So, I analyzed how different trace entities—rubbings, photographs, video projections, audio recordings, and inkjet prints—provided varying degrees of information about the past. I searched for how Esther memorialized the elm trees of Oak Park, Illinois, how she used visual and material traces to enact a process of absence/presence, and how she visually weaved her personal grief to the national loss of September 11th.

With each artwork, I attempted to extract the essential rhetorical components and analyze how they invited me into the texts narratively. This type of close reading provided “the thickening of [theoretical] concepts through grounded critical reading” (Gaonkar, 1989, p. 270). Nonetheless, many of these analytical ideas materialized through my acts of writing. In the next section, I explore how narrative writing became for me a reflexive practice for engaging with rhetorical texts. I suggest that writing is “a method of discovery” (Richardson, 2000, p. 925) that allows us to organize and make sense of our experiences.
Writing as a Way of Knowing

Sunday, July 27, 2008

I have been reading this book, Cion, and thinking through my ideas about memory and materiality. I keep making these linkages back to Parada’s works. I also am rewriting the literature review and attempting to make tighter arguments rather than writing mini-summaries of previous research. I really need to think about how these literatures inform my analysis. Why are they important? Make an argument through these interdisciplinary literatures, and when you do, you’ll see what you’re looking for...

Tuesday, August 4, 2008

Last night, I had an hour of inspiration. I couldn’t sleep, so I decided to write. At first, there were just scribbles. Circling, crossing out, and underlining. I tore out pages and began to re-piece the whole thing together. In the end, I came up with one good paragraph. This morning, I told Jeremy about my midnight writing. The words were written in hot pink pen all over an old newspaper. He noted that I was not just re-writing, but writing on top of history. I was embodying vernacular meaning making. I was inscribing my voice upon history’s materiality. Writing is, in fact, an intertextual process...

Monday, February 2, 2009

I’m having another challenging day of writing. Or, rather, I’m attempting to write. It sounds so easy, in theory, but I have a tendency to stumble across my words. I keep returning to these ideas of layering and movement. Moving through the dissertation, through the research and archival works, I continue to layer my experiences upon one another. Like brushstrokes upon a canvas, I move into and with the artwork. Perhaps this
layered movement is essential to the meaning making process. Funny. As I write these ideas down, I’m beginning to see Transplant with new eyes.

Throughout my research journey, I chronicled my experiences in a journal. I would write down my initial reactions to texts, reveal doubts in my abilities as a scholar, and celebrate breakthroughs in gathering, assembling, analyzing, experiencing, and writing about Esther’s works. Constructing a “historical record” allowed me to review emergent themes and retrace my past experiences from the point of view of the present. Writing became a crucial method of inquiry, a way knowing (see Richardson, 2000). There were many times when I would hit a dead end (or so I thought), and I would write in my research journal. Through the act of writing, I “discovered” crucial themes and ideas. The fragmented ideas that reverberated in my mind would tumble onto the page and slowly take shape.

To write in a journal became more than just a means for personal reflection. I used it to inform my critical analyses of the visual texts and to shape how I wrote the dissertation. First, along with the archival materials and artworks, the journal entries became part of the textual fragments that I would use to weave and analyze intertextually. As sites of memory or representations of my own personal experiences, they provided me with preliminary “clues” that pointed me towards how I could examine each artwork. Second, while close readings of each artwork permitted me to focus on the text or artifact as the object of critical inquiry, a visual narrative perspective allowed me to enter into a discursive dialogic relationship with Esther Parada and her artworks. Rather than writing as an omniscient narrator, I wrote in a narrative, reflexive voice. This reflected my subject position in relation to the texts and simultaneously revealed how I was bringing
my particular interpretations and meanings to my critical findings. In fact, writing in a more “autoethnographic” way (e.g., Denzin, 1997, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000) allowed me to open up a dialogic space for my readers and myself. Indeed, this dialogic space calls for “inter-rhetorical reflexivity” or the contextualization of the author and the audience, obliging me to ask rhetorical questions about my process of “rebuilding knowledge construction, and teaching performance” (Lee, 1998, p. 307; see also, Meyer, 2007).

If “text” is an experienced phenomenon (Rosenfield, 1974), then I wanted to write in a way that reflected my experiences with these visual texts. As I moved back and forth between these two overlapping “worlds” of narrative reflexivity and rhetorical criticism, I decided to write the chapters in a way that performed their interconnections. Specifically, I alternated in writing style between complete personal narrative (italicized block paragraphs) and close textual analysis of each artwork. While distinctly separate, the two styles complemented one another. Although the sections emphasized different aspects of my experiences (i.e., contemplations about myself or critical ruminations about the texts), a personal, reflexive voice was embedded across them. The chapters became textual performances of my experiences with Esther’s works (McKerrow, 1993; Richardson, 2000). As Denzin (2000) notes,

“Working from the site of memory, the reflexive, performed text asks readers as viewers (or coperformers) to relive the experience through the writer’s or performer’s eyes. Readers thus move through the re-created experience with the performer. This allows them to relive the experience for themselves.” (p. 905)
Through writing, I seek to draw readers into my rhetorical world of visual narratives. As I have demonstrated, by integrating a narrative style into my rhetorical analyses, I was able to perform a visual narrative perspective rather than just theorize about it. Enacting a visual narrative perspective in my writing means recognizing my embodied presence and experiences as a rhetorical critic and promotes voice-centered research.

Concluding Thoughts

May 4, 2009

I am in the throes of writing the “methods” chapter of the dissertation. Frustrated by my lack of progress, I attempt to reflect upon my journey. Looking out my office window, I notice petal-like entities caught on the window screen. I rise from my desk to take a closer look at these quivering wafers. I smile as I recognize them as elm seedlings. I gently place one in my palm. No larger than a fingernail, this fragile seedling is a lieu de memoire. It calls me to remember Esther’s When the Bough Breaks. It summons up personal memories of engaging with the archives. And it reminds me that although my dissertation work will soon conclude, the ideas, experiences, and lifeworks of Esther will continue on in me.

A visual narrative perspective offers a more reflexive and experiential approach towards rhetorically engaging with texts. While narrative criticism focuses on issues such as narrative form (Foss, 1989; Lewis, 1987) and narrative argument (Chatman, 1990; Fisher, 1984) within texts, my view of a visual narrative perspective extends beyond the discursive text. It recognizes narrative as a sense-making process and promotes a subjective, person-centered approach in examining texts. My role as a rhetorical critic is not to be an objective, authoritative evaluator; rather, it is to be subjective interpreter and
co-constructor of rhetorical texts. Particularly with archival research, the rhetorical scholar becomes a bricoleur who intertextually (re)constructs texts by piecing together collected textual fragments. In this chapter, I narratively reflected upon my progression through the archives. Then, I documented how I analyzed selected visual artifacts. Utilizing close textual analysis, I was able to develop themes and theoretical frameworks formulated according to recurring patterns I experienced as “grounded” in the data. Finally, I (re)composed the artworks as verbal images through the act of writing. Specifically, I suggested that writing is a mode of inquiry that allows us to make sense of our experiences.

With a revival in archival research within rhetorical studies (e.g., Biesecker, 2006; Finnegan, 2004, 2006; Kirsch & Rohan, 2008; Morris, 2006; Stuckey, 2006), we need to examine how we engage with rhetorical texts that emerge from archival research. As Gold (2008) explains,

Though we may apply a critical lens or favor a particular theoretical approach, the basic methodology of archival research remains the same: read absolutely everything and try to make sense of what happened. It is a bottom-up process and messy as hell—and, more to the point, scary, requiring faith that something will be found, even if it’s not what you first went looking for. (p. 18)

Archival research is a mode of inductive inquiry. We “discover” scraps of information and weave them together, hoping that they will reveal something. It is an organic, fluid process that requires patience, reflection, and courage. In this chapter, I have provided in a semi-chronological fashion the methodological steps that I took towards collecting textual fragments, analyzing the texts, and writing my dissertation. However, archival
research, if not rhetorical research in general, is “messy.” It is a cyclical, non-linear process. We continuously go back and forth, piecing and re-piecing texts. Throughout this project, I was constantly writing, viewing, reflecting, analyzing, editing, re-viewing, re-analyzing, and re-writing. At times when I felt that I was at the end of my rope, I would proceed back to the visual and verbal texts and reexamine them. I would ask myself questions such as, what am I not seeing? What questions am I not asking? How can these textual traces direct me?

Scholars can and do engage in research in personal and narrative ways (see Bizzell, 2000; Bowles & Klein, 1983; Kirsch, 2008; Kirsch & Rohan, 2008; Sharer, 2008). For example, in taking up a more relational approach towards research, Hall (2006) performatively engages with images of Patty Hearst and her own personal memories to critique postmodern ideas of the “amnesiac viewer.” Our scholarship and our writing, then, need to reflect this relational context. If criticism is “the process by which, through the medium of language, a private attitude becomes a public faith” (Black, 1965, p. 177), then essential to that process is locating the rhetorical critic’s subjective voice.

As rhetorical scholars, we need to see ourselves as unique audience members whose subjective experiences inform and shape our rhetorical analyses. As Foss (1986) notes, audiences collaborate with a text to assign meaning to that text. They draw from their life experiences. At the same time, the collaboration is constrained by the text that “renders one rhetorical interpretation more likely than another” (p. 330). Rhetorical scholars interested in issues of collective memory and visual narratives need to recognize that “lived experience and collective memory ‘interpenetrate’ each other through
autobiography” (Crane, 2000, p. 150; see also Halbwachs, 1980, p. 55). Photographs, memory art, and other lieux de mémoire invite us to make sense of them narratively. In telling my “tale of the field” (van Maanen, 1988), I hope that I have provided rhetorical scholars with an example of how we can incorporate that interanimating presence of our selves in analyzing texts. Just as Esther invited me into her world through her artworks I ask you, the reader, to come join me on my narrative journey with each of the three artifacts she created.
CHAPTER 4: REASSEMBLING THE PAST: EXAMINING VISUAL TROPES AND A RHETORIC OF MONTAGE IN ESTHER PARADA’S PAST RECOVERY

My eyes transfixed upon the image, I feel their eyes staring back at me. They beckon me to look. Gazing at the photographic artwork I observe solemn faces, smiling faces, faces old and young. Some are stoic, others are laughing. There are so many faces, so many lives, so many experiences, so many life stories locked inside this single photographic work. There are little girls with large bows in their hair, little boys in sailor outfits, and a sea of women and men in their best dresses and suits positioned around well decorated tables to pose for the camera. They are strangers to me, yet their faces are not strange. The human face is a familiar one. I continue to trace their countenances and bodies with my eyes. I continue to contemplate their lives. Each time our eyes meet, time is transcended. I wonder, “What were you thinking about at that precise instant the shutter snapped your image so long ago?”

As I previously argued in Chapter 2, memory artwork is a creative commemorative tool that invites viewers to experience the past narratively. Located within the art exhibit space, memory art investigates how collective and familial memories are constructed visually. One primary example of this visual engagement with memories is Esther Parada’s Past Recovery. Culled from a photograph of Parada’s great-aunt and great-uncle’s fifteenth wedding anniversary celebration, Past Recovery is a (re)constructed photographic installation that “incorporates scores of family snapshots, taken between 1920 and 1978, into a photograph of a 1920 family banquet enlarged to life size” (Past Recovery, 2008). As Krantz (1990) writes, “In Past Recovery, a 1920 family portrait becomes the matrix for numerous photos of her family at different times
and at different ages, revealing resemblances and differences in time and space. Instead
of being isolated, the past is woven into the fabric of the present, to reaffirm and yet
question her filtered experiences which become memories” (¶ 29). Staring at Past
Recovery, I feel compelled to search for and to “discover” the stories beneath the image’s
surface, to peel back the fabric woven by the picture. As Durrer (2004) states, “The
photo, frequently, does not speak for itself which is why we want, and need, the story
behind it” (p. 1). At the same time, I am intrigued by how Parada critically engages with
time, space, and familial relationships. Sifting through the archival materials, I find a
copy of Deborah Bright’s (1989) Option Shift: An Annotated Interview with Esther
Parada. In this book, I come across Esther’s explanation of her “simple nostalgic
impulse” and her motivation for creating Past Recovery:

My mother lost her own mother when she was three. Her father remarried a
woman with five children of her own who, according to my mother, blocked her
from knowing anything about her own mother. She told me that she never saw a
photograph of her own mother until she was eighteen; that her father was so
intimidated by his second wife (her stepmother) that he couldn’t even bring out a
photograph of her mother on the sly to show her. So it’s deeply ingrained in me,
that sense of the photographic image as charged with repression, as representing
what is lost or denied, as giving access to one’s past” (p. 12).

For Parada, Past Recovery is just that—a way to recover a past, a way to reassemble her
family, and an imaginative way to (re)create the kin relationships within the photographic
medium. Although Parada declares the narrative potentials of the photograph, the specific
ways that she rhetorically elicits narrative experience with this artwork are worthy of
investigation.
Numerous art critics have detailed the composition of *Past Recovery* (Grundberg, 1983; Johnson, 1982, 1988, 1989; Krantz, 1990; Mohnke, 1987; Ollman, 1988; Sampson, 2000; Ziff, 1992). However, an examination of the rhetorical strategies used in constructing the art and how these techniques encourage viewers to engage narratively with the visual work has been absent. In this chapter, I identify and examine how Parada utilizes the visual tropes of (1) the grid and (2) superimposition to invite viewers to experience the art in a “dialogical space” of narrativity. Specifically, I argue that these visual tropes embody a rhetoric of montage. Through a rhetoric of montage that addresses the binaries of public/private and visible/invisible, viewers are encouraged to reenvision visual representations of familial histories. Finally, I conclude by suggesting further applications of visual tropes and montage in visual rhetoric and collective memory scholarship.

**Visual Tropes**

One approach to examining visual texts is by identifying and analyzing specific rhetorical devices present within the text. To explore how *Past Recovery* embodies a rhetoric of montage and invites viewers to experience the work narratively, I examine two visual tropes. At the outset, a clear definition of “visual trope,” however, is necessary. In classical Greek, “trope” traditionally refers to a “change” or “turn” in perspective that calls forth a different sense of a concept or object than the literal form (see Gibbs, 1993; White, 1985). In rhetorical scholarship, trope refers to a “figure of speech” such as metaphor, irony, metonymy, and synecdoche that acts as figurative language (Bloom, 1975; Burke, 1969; Chandler, 2002; Hawkes, 1972; White, 1985). Several scholars have examined how tropes, when taken-for-granted as conventions of
speech, reinforce dominant ideologies, epistemologies, and discourses (Foucault, 1974; Lakoff, 2002, 2006; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; White, 1985).

A significant branch of scholarship in advertising has explored visual and verbal rhetorical figures including rhyme, pun, and antithesis in print media and television advertising (Durand, 1987; Forceville, 1994, 1996; Tuncar & Munch, 2001; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996, 2003). In visual communication, scholars primarily have analyzed the trope of metaphor in painting, sculpture, photography, and design (Aldrich, 1971; Hausman, 1989; Johns, 1984; Kaplan, 1992, 2005; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1993; Phillips, 2003). Although some rhetorical scholars have used the term “visual trope” in passing (cf., Dunleavy, 2005; Farrell, 2006), few efforts have been made to theoretically develop a concept of “visual trope” as distinct from verbal tropes or identifying tropes unique to the visual (cf., Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; 2008).

Although transposing traditional verbal tropes (e.g., metaphor, irony, metonymy, synecdoche) onto visual texts has been helpful in examining visual artifacts, it also has a limiting effect. As Barbatsis (2005) argues, scholars should not “arbitrarily impose verbal constructs onto visual ones” (p. 279). Visual rhetorical analysis calls upon different techniques to examine how pictorial messages are articulated and function. Indeed, visual communication scholars maintain that these are significant differences between visual and verbal texts (Dake, 2005; Foss, 2005; Moriarty, 2005). Therefore I offer two distinct visual tropes, the grid and superimposition, which emerge from the visual, rather applying the visual to literary tropes.

Specifically, I draw on Hariman and Lucaites’ (2008) “visual tropology.” As they argue, “trope” is applicable to visual, not just verbal, texts. In their research, Hariman and
Lucaites articulate the “face”, the “figure”, the “form”, and the “sign” as the four master tropes of emotional display within visual culture. Their analysis focuses upon how these visual tropes shape viewers’ understandings of public displays of emotion. While Hariman and Lucaites (2007, 2008) offer a preliminary classification system for visual tropes, they also call for rhetorical scholars to develop new tropes. I extend their research beyond visual emotional displays. I conceptualize “visual tropes” as recurring devices, techniques, or patterns utilized by visual artists to frame symbolic artifacts and shape how viewers make sense of their experiences with visual texts. As Gibbs (1993) notes, tropes represent “figurative schemes of thought by which people make sense of themselves and the world” (p. 275). Tropes, therefore, are not just ways of speaking figuratively, but “are also constitutive of our experiences” (p. 253; italics in original). I suggest that the visual tropes of the grid and superimposition in *Past Recovery* are not just figurative techniques used by Esther Parada, but essential elements that allow her to co-construct with me my narrative experience. If, as McQuarrie and Mick (1996) argue, literary tropes “invite elaboration by the reader” (p. 429), then visual tropes may similarly dialogically engage viewers to co-create meanings by extending an invitation that can be accepted and responded to by the viewer.

In the next section, I examine how the grid is a visual “quilt,” a repetitive (re)framing device that simultaneously divides and unifies the image-text. Then, I explore how superimposition breaks the frame of the text and opens it into a four-dimensional space. Taken together, these two tropes embody a rhetoric of montage that invites the viewer to experience narratively the photographic art.
The Grid

*Theoretical background*

As a taken-for-granted visual element and geometric process, the grid is an omnipresent part of our lives. One needs only to look at the black and red grid of the checkerboard, the grid of floor and ceiling tiles, and the grid of graph paper. As a visual technique for developing precise mathematical measurements, grids are used in geography (Kippel & Kulik, 2000), urban planning (Aurbach, 2006; Hall, 2002; Kostof, 1991), and architecture (Chilton, 2000; Chen & Cooper, 1995). In an extensive review of the grid, Higgins (2009) explores the history and development of ten different types of grids (the brick, the tablet, the gridiron city plan, the map, musical notation, the ledger, the screen, moveable type, the manufactured box, and the net) and their impact on societies. With computer technology, the grid is an important, if not defining, characteristic of digital images. Television and computer screens are merely grids of pixilated beams of light. Digital images can be broken down into a “digitally encoded grid of cells called pixels” (Nelson, 2003, p. 166; see also, Mitchell, 1992). Much literature in graphic design has also focused on how the grid is a basic design principle in organizing the layout of magazines, newspapers, and books (Ambrose & Harris, 2008; Elam, 2003; Hurlburt, 1978; Müller-Brockmann, 2001; Samara, 2002).

In art, the grid has primarily functioned in three ways: as a technique to create pictorial depth, as a mode of transference, and as a stylistic device (cf., Davis, 1972). The rise of linear perspective during the Renaissance (1400-1527) encouraged mathematical precision in depicting illusions of space in painting. Utilizing geometric and algebraic theories, artists such as Giotto di Bondone, Filippo Brunelleschi, and Leon Battista
Alberti developed perspective as a method for depicting more realistic representations of three-dimensional spaces on a two-dimensional surface (Pierce, 2001; Schneider Adams, 2002). Thus, the grid became an essential means for geometric perspective-making and spatial representation (Krauss, 1985; Tufte, 1997).

As a functional process, Trémeau (2004) notes that the grid has been the primary “rhetorical mode of dividing the picture plane in use since the Renaissance” to organize and guide the placement of elements within the image (p. 27). Simply put, a grid is a system of horizontal and perpendicular lines, uniformly spaced to construct a coordinate map (“grid,” n.d.). As a coordinate system, the grid is a means for systematically locating and “relationalizing” points on a plane, a way of mapping and organizing two-dimensional surfaces. The grid, “conceived of as a field comprised of points and axes” (Williamson, 1986, p. 18; italics in original), allows artists to structure the pictorial plane.

Along with providing a mathematical structuring of the image surface, the “grid method” is used also as a visual art technique for transferring or enlarging an image from one plane to another (Davis, 1972; Klee, 1953). With this transference method, “an artist might ‘copy’ a natural scene or a painting by applying a grid and reducing all measurements to one half or one quarter of the original” or increasing the size and still retain a sense of the correct dimensionality (Shiff, 2003, p. 148). There is a calculated accuracy to the grid because it breaks a large image into “bite size” pieces of equal proportion for the artist to use. The grid is used to organize the basic visual forms within the frame. Unlike the grid lines in graph paper, however, the lines of the “grid method” are removed or remain hidden once the copy of the image is finished.
The grid is not only a basic geometric method of organization and transference, but also a stylistic device in art. Unlike the grid of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that functioned as a perspective-making tool to create the illusion of three-dimensional space, the grid in modern works flattens the surface of the plane (Krauss, 1985). Specifically, the grid has become an “emblem of modernity” (Krauss, 1985, p. 10). The grid is ubiquitous in the art, architecture, and graphic design of the 20th and 21st centuries (Lupton & Miller, 1993; Poyner, 2003; Samara, 2003; Williamson, 1986). Prevalent in works by Cubists (e.g., Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris), Op artists (e.g., Victor Vasarely, Bridget Riley), De Stijl artists (e.g., Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, Friedrich Vordemberge-Gildewar), members of the Bauhaus school (Wassily Kandinsky, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Paul Klee), and others (e.g., Michel-Eugene Chevreul, Agnes Martin, Jasper Jones), the grid has been transformed from being the “invisible logic ‘behind’ the composition” for creating perspective to a visible, intentionally used element of the image (Williamson, 1986, p. 24; see also Krauss, 1985). The grid, therefore, becomes a dominant visual trope that structures the image’s surface and evokes a sense of stability, precision, and mathematical order for an image.

From the Renaissance to the present, the grid has been and continues to be (1) a useful art tool in developing the composition of an image and (2) a primary characteristic of modern and postmodern iconography. If, as Poyner (2003) argues, “The grid itself is a form of language” (p. 124; see also Lupton, 1993), then we, as viewers, need to examine how the grid rhetorically speaks to us. In the next section, I explore how the grid in Esther Parada’s *Past Recovery* constructs a visual narrative order that (re)frames the pictorial past and invites viewers to engage narratively with the artwork.
Grid as narrative plotting

I turn back to Past Recovery and trace the faces with my eyes. This time, however, I begin to become aware of the heavy black lines of the grid. The longer I gaze at the artwork, the more I become aware of the smaller individual frames within the entire photographic frame. The one hundred little rectangles allow me to move my focus from one section of the whole photomural to the next. The grid becomes a rhythmic map upon the surface of the image. Not only has Esther made visible the unseen kinship ties that bind us, but she also has revealed the “visual grammar” of the grid. Here is an attempt to re-piece memories; a way to try to organize and make sense of the forgotten. Here is a way to create pictorial order even when familial lives are messy and chaotic. Here is a grid to frame our pasts.

In Past Recovery, the grid functions as a primary visual trope. Several art critics note Esther Parada’s use of the grid. They have described Past Recovery as an image composed of “100 individual ‘frames’” (Johnson, 1982, p. 15), “a montage of 100 pieces” (Johnson, 1988, p. 15), a “recombination of grid patterns” (Sampson, 2000, p. 140), and a “twelve-by-eight-foot photo-grid” (Gillespie, 1980, p. 40). Past Recovery is a collection of one hundred tone gelatin silver photographs that together create a unified photographic image of Parada’s family. While one may be overwhelmed by the largeness of the 8-by-12 foot size of the image, the grid provides a way of breaking down this enormity into smaller, more personal, multi-framed images. Each photograph becomes a distinct visual component. Like other artists, Parada utilizes the grid as a way to enlarge accurately the original family photograph into an 8-by-12 foot image. The grid method allows Parada to rework the expanded photograph by focusing on individual units or cells
of the grid. Like a visual quilt, each segmented patch then can be attended to and altered. New faces are re-patched into the original image.

This grid, however, is more than just a method of transference and alteration of preexisting photographs. Although it accomplishes numerous things (e.g., structures, orders, and flattens the image), I argue that, in *Past Recovery*, the grid functions primarily as a type of narrative plot; it operates as a visual and psychological (re)framing device that (re)configures the (visual) past. First, the grid is a visual (re)framing device. It frames spatial boundaries by telling us what is constituted as inside or outside the frame.¹ Using a photograph of a family banquet as her base image, Parada reframes the single image into a grid of multiple yet coherent snapshots. As Tufte (1997) notes, “multiples directly depict comparisons. Multiples represent and narrate a sequence of motion. Multiples amplify, intensify, and reinforce the meanings of images” (p. 105). While *Past Recovery* is not one single image repeated in a larger frame (such as Warhol might attempt), the presence of multiple frames constructed by the grid gives a sense of multiplicity that then “amplifies” and “intensifies” the faces within the overall image-text.

In *Past Recovery*, one does not look at the grid. Rather, one’s eyes are guided rhetorically by the grid. Facilitated by its geometric plot, the grid embodies a “dissection of seeing” (Samaras, 1967, p. 26). This dissection, as Firstenberg (2003) notes, fragments the images and “points to the possibility of multiple perspectives of vision” (p. 324). By having the one hundred photographs placed into a grid format, the viewer is invited to focus on each separate photograph of the 8-by-12 foot artwork and simultaneously see the whole, unified family photomural. The grid cleaves the whole into relatable parts, at
once uniting and dividing the image-text. A sense of stability and order is produced by
the grid, and it “draws attention to opposing elements in the composition” (Davis, 1972,
p. 5).

In addition to serving as a visual framework, the grid is also a psychological
framing device (see Bateson, 1972; Reese, 2007). As Tufte (1997) notes, the grid orders
both the world of the eye (perception) and the world of the mind (cognition). Along with
ordering one’s visual perception, the grid’s framework involves selection and coherence
of information. As Entmen (1993) explains, “to frame is to select some aspects of a
perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (p. 52; italics in
original). Specifically, in Past Recovery, the grid communicates boundaries and
cultivates a sense of who is included and who is excluded from the family. Parada
constructs a new image of the family by remapping family members into the banquet
scene. If, as Klee (1953) notes, the grid is a “net” that safely transfers content from one
place to another (see also Miller, 1993), then the grid in Past Recovery is a metaphoric
net that catches and collects the multiple images of family members into a single frame.
The grid not only visually embodies the interdependency among the images but also
reflects how family members are interdependent upon each other. In examining 18th
century familial photo-montages, for example, Batchen (2004) notes, “when organized
into geometric grids of rectangles, squares, and ovals, this sort of ornate wall sculpture
stressed the potential connections between one image and the next” (pp. 25-26). In
describing the grid-like layouts of the photographic exhibits by the Farm Security
Administration (FSA) during the Great Depression, Teitelbaum (1992) also explains how
the grid functioned “as a symbolic matrix of harmonious social relations” (p. 178). As
Lupton (1993) argues, within a grid “each fragment invokes the extended field of fabric from which it was cut” (p. 28). While each photograph is distinctly unique, each echoes the “fabric” of the family.

Finally, the grid functions as a narrative plotting device. It becomes a visual representation of narrative ordering that guides viewers into the image. As explained in the previous section, the grid is a tool to organize and structure visual planes, creating a “rhythmic or sequential logic” within the image-text (Samara, 2003, p. 19). It represents the logic of the overall artwork, thereby becoming the visual equivalent of narrative configuration. As de Certeau (1984) explains, “narrative structures have the status of spatial syntaxes” (p. 113). The reverse is also true—spatial syntaxes, such as grids, are a form of narrative structuring (cf., Bates, 2002). If narrative configuration is “the process by which happenings are drawn together and integrated into a temporally organized whole” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5), then the grid is a visual means to establish this structured whole.

Looking at Past Recovery, one engages in what Mink (1970) refers to as configurational comprehension. In this process, individual fragments (events, images, texts) are pieced together by the audience member to explain the whole. Rather than an unfolding of framed images over time, the grid acts as a type of synchronic articulation whereby each separate framed image is simultaneously made present and connected to one another. As Johnson (1982) observes, the placement of faces within the grid encourages a sense of temporal movement. Indeed,

Every part of the fractured image is alive. No sooner does one focus on one face than one is immediately asked to look at the one next to it and the one after that.
The image is organized in a strong diagonal that carries the viewer from the youngest to the oldest in a semi-linear fashion, a logical arrangement going “back” in time. (p. 3)

Through the grid, the story of the family banquet is re-framed and retold. Each image is a textual fragment that, when collectively viewed, reveals a re-envisioning of the familial past. Instead of family photographs presenting themselves over time in a photo album on separate pages, the collection of family photos are compressed into a single “imaginary” moment. Snapshots of family members merge into the banquet, creating a “composite family scrapbook” (Tucker, 1982, p. 9). Although the photographed banquet first appears to reveal a single moment only, the overall work incorporates a multiplicity of moments and suppresses temporality by emphasizing on spatiality. As noted before, the grid guides the eye back and forth, and across, between, and among the photographic grid cells. Not only does it evoke a sense of movement across space, but the “grid may induce a feeling of time” (Davis, 1972, p. 6). This temporal movement produced by the grid helps to cultivate a sense of familial continuity. One experiences an elapsing of time and an unfolding of familial history.

In these three ways, the grid operates as a visual device to divide, unify, and, most importantly, organize the image-text of Past Recovery. The grid functions as a narrative plotting device that visually and psychologically (re)frames the artwork. As a quilt-work of family photographs, Past Recovery visually reassembles Parada’s family history and becomes a visual embodiment of how “our memories shade and patch and combine and delete” (Hacking, 1995, p. 250). Time, space, and Parada’s family are reconfigured when they are located upon a singular plane of visual representation. Indeed, the grid expands
the two-dimensional surface of the artwork, articulating a temporal vector.

While the grid is an essential component of *Past Recovery*, it does not work alone. In the next section, I examine how the visual trope of superimposition de-frames the text and opens it into a three-dimensional space. First, I briefly review literature on superimposition. Then, I argue that, within *Past Recovery*, the superimposition of familial faces embodies an aesthetic of co-presence that suggests spatial, temporal, and psychological dimensions.

Superimposition

_Theoretical background_

Since the dawn of photography, there has been a desire to manipulate the photograph. From Fox Talbot’s “photogenic drawings” to Man Ray’s “photograms,” to John Heartfield’s “photomontages,” to the everyday “Photoshopping,” the modification of photographs has been used to agitate, to awe, to amuse, and to help us see the world in new and fascinating ways. One popular technique of photographic manipulation involves superimposing multiple photographs onto one another to create altered final images.

Numerous photographic artists such as Val Felberg, El Lissitzky, Duane Michaels, Edmund Teske, Barbra Morgan, and Diane Fenster have utilized this process of superimposition. Superimposition has been used to construct composite portraits (Galton, 1878; Stenger, 1939; Natkins, 1939; Smith, 1973; Taylor, 1885) and spirit photographs (Chéroux, Fischer, Apraxine, Canguilhem, & Schmit, 2005; Coates, 1911/1973; Ferris, 2003a, 2003b; Gettings, 1978; Gunning, 2003; Harvey, 2007; Jolly, 2006). In photography, this process involves a double exposure of the film to two
different images. The result is a composite photograph in which one image is superimposed over the other.

Although the term “superimposition” has been used primarily in film studies and cinematography in conjunction with the avant-garde (e.g., Abel, 1993; Elder, 1998; Powell, 2007; Sitney, 2002), a handful of photography scholars have noted superimposition’s significance in the development of photomontage (Ades, 1967a, 1967b; Krauss, 1985; Teitelbaum, 1992; Verlon, 1968). While some photography scholars have utilized the term “photomontage” and “photo-collage” interchangeably (Ades, 1976a, 1976b; Buchloh, 1989; Evans & Gohl, 1986; Krauss, 1985; Teitelbaum, 1992), I view photomontage and photo-collage as two separate entities. Indeed, as Coleman (1992) argues, the two terms are “radically different forms of photographic image making” (p.).

I conceptualize superimposition, then, as a type of photomontage trope. Superimposition refers specifically to the process in which images of varying degrees of transparency are layered upon one another to create a co-presence within the pictorial plane. As a visual technique of depicting two images simultaneously, superimposition constructs a sense of “seeing double.” Photography scholars use the term “double exposure” to explain the process of superimposition (e.g., Peterson, 2004; Grimm & Grimm, 2003). In exploring surrealist photographers, Krauss (1985) notes how “doubling” (i.e., superimposition) becomes a way to “destroy the pure singularity of the first [image]. Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another, or within another: of multiples burgeoning within the same” (p. 109).
Superimposing involves the layering of planes (Powell, 2007). Unlike the process of photo-collage, a process that emphasizes the sharp edges of the textual fragments, superimposition involves blurring the boundaries between two (or more) images and seamlessly layering them upon one another. Photo-collage embodies a cut-and-paste aesthetic while superimposition reflects a blended aesthetic. Collage involves juxtaposing individual images and words that retain their separate parts. These textual fragments are then “glued” on top of one another in collage so that the visual and verbal pieces reinforce the two-dimensional plane of the surface. Superimposition, however, blurs distinct boundaries between textual fragments, merging them to produce a singular, three-dimensional space. Through variations of transparency and opacity, “Superimpositions can make objects appear to exist in the same spatial plane which would otherwise bear quite different relationships with each other” (Ades, 1976b, p. 17).

In the next section I explore how the visual trope of superimposition enacts an aesthetic of co-presence within Past Recovery. I argue that, through superimposition, Past Recovery addresses the spatial, temporal, and mental spaces that emerge when memorializing one’s familial past through the medium of photography.

Superimposition: Revealing Spatial, Temporal, and Mental Spaces

I return to gazing at Past Recovery. Months have passed since my initial encounter with the photomural. Like whispers of the past, the superimposed faces call to me. There is something ethereal, something magical. The graininess of the images and the softness of the light evoke the photographic works of the pictorialists, Julia Margaret Cameron, Edward Steichen, and George H. Seeley. The images become a polyphonic symphony of faces, voices, stories, and lives. I seem to travel in and through the faces.
Indeed, we exist in multiple spaces, moving among the worlds of our mind, the worlds of our body, and the worlds of others. Through photography we reach for the past in the present, the has-been merging with the is-now. Photographs are the visible traces of our collective pasts. They are time made still. Located in photo albums and in picture frames, the images come alive in our memories. Layers upon layers of experience overlap and intertwine, animating the frozen past. And when we glance at, look at, gaze at, and unlock these images, we engage in a transformative migration, back and forth, between these different worlds. It is through us, through our narrative engagement, that the pictorial past is made anew, alive.

As Mink (1970) explains, memory is a way of “grasping together in a single mental act things which are not experienced together or even capable of being so experienced because they are separated by time, space, or logical kind” (p. 547). Superimposition is a visual expression of this “grasping together,” connecting people, places, things, experiences, and moments separated by time and space. In an interview conducted at Swarthmore College, Parada discusses how superimposition signifies multiple spaces. She states that, “Layering is a way of speaking generally about perception filtered through one’s cumulative experience. The past is woven into the fabric of the present—genetically, psychologically, optically—and it is transformed, beyond recovery” (Gillespie, 1980, p. 40).

In Past Recovery, the visual trope of superimposition functions primarily in three ways: (1) to create a visual space, (2) to cultivate a temporal space, and (3) to represent a mental space. First, superimposition creates a sense of three-dimensionality by (de)framing or opening the visual space. Not only is superimposition a layering of
different images, but also a juxtaposition of different spaces into a single image. While the grid flattens space, emphasizing the pictorial plane, superimposition creates the illusion of depth within the two-dimensional plane. Throughout *Past Recovery*, there is an overlaying of transparent faces upon one another that cultivates an ethereal feeling of three (and even fourth) dimensionality. Due to varying degrees of transparency, there is a sense of peering *into* the image rather than looking *at* the image’s surface. Some faces appear to dissolve into the original family banquet photograph while other faces seem to emerge from beneath or behind the pictorial plane. There is an ambiguity of separation between layers of faces. While the grid frames or orders the images, demarcating clear-cut borders between visual forms, superimposition de-frames or erases the boundaries that separate pictorial figures. Rather than cutting and pasting images into the same plane, Parada weaves superimposed faces together to construct multiple planes. Superimposition disrupts how we see and experience photographic space, destabilizing the myth of photographic “objectivity” (see Schwartz, 1999; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). One is able to see through objects that are not transparent in the “real world” (e.g., faces and bodies). Rather than capturing real space, the superimposed photograph is one that expands space by “opening reality to the ‘interval of a breath’” (Krauss, 1985, p. 109).

Second, superimposition evokes a sense of temporality. Superimposition visually embodies both a compression of time where the past and present fuse in a single space and an oscillation between multiple past and present spaces of time. *Past Recovery* becomes a space where time collapses. Faces of grandchildren and great-grandparents who have never met sit next to one another. The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston’s website (2009) describes how,
Parada juxtaposes images of her father at three different ages and compares the physical resemblance between a niece and an aunt who never met. The artist thus compresses time, as human memory does, to link visual references never linked in reality.

Scores of family snapshots from 1920 to 1978 are incorporated, displaying images taken from multiple times. Bringing them together creates a moment that never existed. This compression of time is further explained in Parada’s (1979) artist’s statement. She states,

In the large composite piece that 1920 photograph becomes the matrix for other family photographs (dating from 1910 to 1978) which are layered upon it. My sister’s face at age two, for example, is juxtaposed with her own image thirty years later and with that of a great aunt whom we never met, although family legend has it that they were cast in the same mold.

Rather than viewing these pictures of family members in photo albums and picture frames, the progression, growth, and transformation of the family over time is made visually present all at once. Superimposition, then, is a diachronic articulation, an invocation of multiple pasts in the present moment. Indeed, Past Recovery embodies the idea that “The past and present are not entirely separate entities” (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 37; italics in original; see also Barthes, 1977, 1981; Sontag, 1977). Through superimposition, the viewer is able to visualize how the past is continuously re-made through the present and how the present continues to be saturated with traces of the past. At the same moment it merges time, superimposition also expands time.

Photographs traditionally have been conceptualized as representing the “disconnected instant” (Berger & Mohr, 1982, p. 89). That is, they are thought of as a visual
documentation of a specific moment. With superimposition, the photograph becomes a reconnected instant, a space where multiple disconnected moments converge. This convergence, however, does not mean that time is chronologically represented. Rather, Past Recovery becomes a space where time ebbs and flows. The layering of fragmented images creates a sense of temporal movement in which the eye moves from one superimposed face to another and back again. Multiple transparent layers of faces create the illusion of multiple temporal spaces.

Past Recovery is not only a visual retelling of a family banquet. It is also a reassemblage of the family. By reinserting other family members’ faces into the original scene, Parada re-contextualizes not only the event but also the family members themselves. The wedding banquet is viewed through the superimposed snapshots and becomes situated within a temporal continuum of familial history. The faces that reside in the same location (i.e., the artwork), but are located on different spatial and temporal planes (i.e., superimposed photographs taken at different times), cultivate multiple relational sites. Superimposition seems to embody what Zerubavel (2003) identifies as “mnemonic pasting” in which we “mentally transform series of noncontingent points in time into seemingly unbroken historical continua” (p. 40). Indeed, several scholars have noted this social construction of kinship ties and the fiction of genealogical continuity (Morgan, 1997; Tönnies, 1963/1887; Zerubavel, 2003). Superimposition, thus, visually represents the connections between moments and the perceived continuity of kinship ties.

Finally, superimposition is an articulation of the inner world or mental space of the artist’s mind. As Abel (1993) notes, “Superimposition is thinking, the inner life” (p. 311). Our minds are disorderly universes where time, space, memories, and experience
cluster together. We remember certain events with vivid intensity while others are lost, forgotten or actively suppressed. If, as Powell (2007) notes, “Interconnected but distinct realities coexist and we cross between them via the intensive movements of thought” (p. 68), then superimposition becomes a means to represent visually this movement between co-existent realities located within the artist’s mind.

In cinema, superimposition has been utilized frequently to depict memories, thoughts, and ethereal beings (Carroll, 1998; Kline, 1992; Powell, 2007). As Bazin (1997) explains, “Superimposition on the screen signals, ‘Attention: unreal world, imaginary characters’” (p. 74). While Bazin’s primary concern is superimposition in cinema, his claim is applicable to still photography. Superimposition evokes a sense of the fantastic and supernatural.

While *Past Recovery* could be interpreted as a contemporary spirit photographic work, I view the artwork as a visual memorial. Since faces of both living and dead relatives (as well as Parada herself) are incorporated into the piece, it is a visual depiction of the mind’s inner world. It becomes an uncovering, a recovering, and a filtering of a familial past. *Past Recovery*, then, is not merely a collection of familial photographs superimposed upon one another; the artwork is a representation of the impossible recovery of the past and a visual performance of memory’s alteration and fluidity. While a photograph may be static, our memories are not. In fact, de Certeau (1984) notes how memory is “regulated by the manifold activity of *alteration*” continuously “recalled” by present circumstances (p. 87; italics in original). Just as our memories of the past are continually made and re-made through new experiences, so too are the superimposed images renewed through the interactions among the images. Superimposition, then,
attempts to display visually this altering action. As Parada articulates in an interview with Deborah Bright, “I think of *Past Recovery* as meaning ‘beyond recovery’, as well as recovering the past, because the overlaid photographs are the filter that keeps one from seeing what’s underneath” (1989, p. 13). Indeed, the layering of photographs represents this “filtering” of the past by covering, uncovering and re-covering.

As I have explained, superimposition generates multiple spaces in the pictorial, temporal, and mental realms. Through the layering of transparent faces upon one another, *Past Recovery* becomes a site where the past and present, the seen and unseen, and the fantastic and the real, merge. In the next section, I examine how the interaction of the grid and superimposition in *Past Recovery* embodies a rhetoric of montage that invites audiences into a dialogical space. Specifically, I argue that a rhetoric of montage destabilizes the binaries of public/private and invisible/visible and encourages viewers to narratively reenvision visual representations of familial histories.

Disruption and Re-conception: A Rhetoric of Montage

The visual tropes of the grid and superimposition are primary elements of *Past Recovery*. The grid, as a (re)framing device, divides and unites the pictorial plane to create a sense of narrative plotting. Superimposition reorganizes dimensions of time, space, and the inner world. Collectively, they reflect a rhetoric of montage that ruptures and reassembles both the visual plane and the past. As Weldman (1992) notes, montage is “an aesthetic practice of combination, repetition, and overlap” (p. 11). Lippard (1984) recognizes montage as “the juxtaposition of unlike realities to create a new reality” (p. 169). This act of “creation,” of constructing a “new reality” reflects what Foss and Griffin (1995) refer to as invitational rhetoric in which rhetors “present their vision of the world
and show how it looks and works for them.” (p. 7). As a type of invitational rhetoric in which understanding, not persuasion, is the goal, a rhetoric of montage encourages a way of seeing anew. Within *Past Recovery*, this invitation to see, to understand, and to explore critically the binaries of public/private and invisible/visible is enacted. Through a creative disruption, viewers are invited to reenvision narratively visual representations of familial histories.

Specifically, a rhetoric of montage in *Past Recovery* blends the boundaries of public and private lives within the visual frame. This use of personal photographs is characteristic of some feminist art’s move to expose the false binary of public and private spaces (Ziff, 1992; see also, Parada, 1987b). *Past Recovery* is both a public commemoration of Parada’s family and a critical commentary about how families are memorialized through personal photography. Like an immense scrapbook compressed in a single photomural, Parada’s artwork is an act of memory making. In fact, Tucker, Ott, and Buckler (2006) note the relationship between montage, memory making, and scrapbooks, observing that, “Scrapbooks shuffle and recombine the coordinates of time, space, location, voice, and memory” (p. 16). Through the grid and superimposition, *Past Recovery* performs this act of shuffling and recombination. While scrapbooks have traditionally been smaller, private endeavors, Parada’s artwork is a public display of memorializing her family. It is “a celebration of common ancestry” that fills a twelve-by-eight foot wall space (Johnson, 1988, p. 15).

This larger than life celebration “requires us as viewers to ‘read’ them left to right or to move alternately closer to and farther away from their surfaces” (Grundberg, 1983, p. 31). Indeed, several art critics have noted the use of scale in *Past Recovery* (Bright,
1989; Johnson, 1989; Mohnke, 1987) that allows the viewer to enter the visual frame. This visual amplification emphasizes the largeness of the kinship bonds. The familial relationships reflected are not just about Parada’s family, but a testimony to the idea of family, kinship bonds, and genealogy (in all of its diverse forms). By enlarging the overall image, Past Recovery uses the specific to address the universal (see Hirsch, 1997). By bringing small, private images into the large, public space, Parada uses the personal to address the larger socio-cultural ways we conceptualize memory and family. Simultaneously, by organizing superimposed images into a grid, Parada allows the viewer to focus on the private familial images that create the “monumental” whole.

Along with blurring the boundaries of private and public, Past Recovery addresses the lines between visible and invisible. Past Recovery is a vision of ancestral and familial presences that continue on even after the persons have been deceased. Collectively, the superimposed images are visual echoes of a past envisioned by Parada. The overlapping faces are visible traces of people who may have never met, but who are linked by kinship ties. Through Past Recovery, the unseen gossamers of kin relations are made visible in a single frame. Past Recovery is not just a layering of images; it is a layering of lives. If “the present is largely a cumulative multilayered collage of past residues” (Zerubavel, 2003, p. 37; italics in original), so too is each individual a “cumulative multilayered collage” of one’s familial pasts. Parada is claiming that, by regarding one’s mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandfather, one is able to see one’s self. In essence, one is seeing one’s self through the lives of others. Not only are the images traces of the past; they are also traces of Parada’s relational self.
The artwork also makes visible the mutability of the past regardless of photographic “evidence.” That is, Esther Parada’s work becomes a visual embodiment of the invisible world of memories. As Parada (personal communication to Nancy Smith, June 16, 1986) notes, “The perceived ‘reality’ of the photographic image is an important reference point for the manipulations of double exposure, time exposure, or the fragmentation and resynthesis.” By manipulating the original family banquet photograph through the use of the grid and superimposition, Parada encourages viewers to reconceptualize how memories are “preserved” through photography. If material, visual artifacts such as family photographs can be reassembled and transformed, she implies that memories and the past are alterable. *Past Recovery* calls attention both to how photographs (the visible) shape the past (the invisible) and how memories (the invisible) transform photographs (the visible).

Through a rhetoric of montage, *Past Recovery* reexamines the binaries of private/public and visible/invisible. By utilizing the visual tropes of the grid and superimposition, Parada calls attention to the creative processes of remembrance. Incorporating personal familial photographs into a twelve-by-eight foot grid, *Past Recovery* invites viewers to (re)picture how Parada’s family, their families, and families in general are (re)membered. In this chapter, I have offered one interpretation of the memory artwork. To view and visually experience an electronic version of *Past Recovery*, you may visit the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston website at http://www.mfah.org/collection.asp?par1=14&par2=&par3=70&par6=3&par4=198&lgc=4&currentPage=4.
Conclusion

I look again. A young woman coyly tilts her head. I tilt my head towards her, mirroring the behavior solidified by the photograph. Bow ties and fine China. Laughing eyes and solemn lips. They are strange and familiar faces. Some distinctly pop out. Others quietly fade into the shadows. I move in and out, weaving seamlessly through the sharply focused banquet and softly focused memories. It is a symphony of visages. I begin to speculate about how each person is related to each other. A woman with ruffled collar seems to share the same arched eyebrows with a man in a tuxedo. Was that boy an uncle of that boy there? Or perhaps his cousin? Why the scowl at such a joyous event? Why the curious glance at the camera’s eye? Familial secrets are forever locked in photographic images.

How does one memorialize a family that exists beyond the picture frame? The ancestors we are genetically bound to, the family members that we will only know through shared stories and images, and the loved with whom we are linked together with yet separated from over time and space—these are the lost members. These are the ones that are “past recovery.” Past Recovery is an attempt to address how we memorialize our families; it is a critical photographic endeavor in exploring visual memories.

In this chapter, I have offered Past Recovery as a primary case study in visual tropology. Specifically, I have identified the visual tropes of the grid and superimposition as rhetorical devices used by Parada. I have argued that the grid is used to rhetorically organize the pictorial plane, a trope that visually, psychologically and narratively (re)frames the photomural. Along with the grid, I have suggested that superimposition constructs a fourth dimension, compresses and expands time, and visually represents
mental spaces. Collectively, these two visual tropes embody a rhetoric of montage that problematizes the binaries of public/private and visible/invisible. Together, they provide the stitching together of visual fragments that guide narrative understandings of the photomural.

With *Past Recovery*, the visual tropes of the grid and superimposition resonated with me, pulling me into the text. As Gibbs (1993) notes, “There are many times when a particular trope makes us ‘stand up and take notice,’ where the meaning of some phrase reverberates in our minds, generating new interpretations, perhaps endlessly, over time” (p. 255). Through these visual tropes, I was (and continue to be) invited to re-story the collective images. Traditional rhetorical tropes including metonymy, metaphor, and repetition have been useful in examining visual texts (cf., Bates, 2008; Demo, 2000; Edwards & Winkler, 1997; Kampf, 2006; Kaplan, 2005; Parry-Giles, 2000; Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004; Refaie, 2003). Nevertheless, I encourage scholars to identify visual tropes that emerge from visual texts rather than re-using rhetorical tropes from verbal traditions. This inductive approach can provide richer textual analyses of visual texts (Foss, 2004).

As Jasinski (2001) states, close textual analysis means an in-depth examination of “the discursive mechanisms through which ideologies do their cultural and political work” (p. 95). By closely examining a text, rhetorical scholars can identify the particular textual traces that provide evidence of the rhetor’s intentionality (Bates, 2003). Utilizing emergent visual tropes, therefore, is useful in seeking out the rhetor’s intentions embodied in innovative extralinguistic texts.

Second, in this chapter, I began to theorize a rhetoric of montage. As an invitational rhetoric that ruptures, fragments, repeats, and reassembles components, a
rhetoric of montage ultimately hails audience members to co-create actively meanings of texts. Although montage is a highly theorized term in cinematic studies, little attention has been given to a rhetoric of montage. An examination of a rhetoric of montage, therefore, can aid rhetorical scholars in exploring the role of the critic as bricoleur (see Charland, 1991; Gaonkar, 1993), in theorizing how visual rhetorical dispositio is enacted, and in cultivating the relationships amongst intertextuality, collective memory, and montage.

Past Recovery encompasses a (re)visioning of the past and a personal reflection on the family. By taking apart and putting back together familial images, Parada demonstrates that we are never fully able to recover what the past has taken from us. We do, however, attempt to remember, reminisce, and memorialize. As Kuhn (1995) states, “family photographs are about memory and memories” (p. 19). Perhaps that is why we take photographs of our loved ones. In some way, it becomes a way to accessing our memories and imaginations of the people we love.
Footnotes

1. In an investigation of the documentary film *The Civil War*, Lancioni (1996) explains how the visual techniques of mobile framing and reframing allow for the viewer a depth to still images. While Lancioni focuses on how these still archival images are framed within a moving camera, I argue that, similarly, the grid is a type of framing device that enables and constrains what is seen, emphasized, included, and excluded.


3. During the mid-nineteenth century, the rise of Spiritualism and the invention of the camera gave way to the popularity of spirit photography. The technique of superimposing photographs became a way to “capture” the ghosts of loved ones.

4. See Weintraub and Kumar (1997) for a more in-depth examination the private/public dichotomy.
CHAPTER 5: HYPertextual Narratives AND (Re)Presentations OF THE Past: Investigating Parada’s TRANSPLANT

I plunge into the sea of images, voices, and meanings. Like a deep-sea diver, I curiously swim through the different pages of the hypertextual artwork. Clicking on the hyperlinks, I am introduced to a multitude of characters, plot twists, and places. I am taken aback by the Viceroy’s arrogance. I sympathize with Mary Curzon’s alienation. I am awed by the beauty of Kendleston Palace and the Taj Mahal. Intrigued by the personal and global linkages made by Parada, I critically reflect upon these invisible gossamers that join the past to the present, one continent to another, one life to the next. By submerging myself in Transplant, I inhabit a world where Mary Curzon, Esther Parada, and I may transcend time, place, and space.

As I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, through the reuse and manipulation of personal images, Esther Parada attempts to commemorate her family and encourage viewers to critically engage with familial pasts. In Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents, Parada moves beyond the world of her family into images of colonial relations represented in the virtual world of cyberspace. Unlike the two dimensional photo-mural Past Recovery, Transplant is a web-based multidimensional artwork that encourages a more complex approach to examining visual narratives. Esther Parada’s Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents is a visual experience that allows the viewer to create a commentary on feminism, imperialism, and the social impositions of a foreign economy (http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/projects/parada/transplant/introscreen.2.html).

As P. Hertz (1997) notes, Transplant is “a hypertextual essay and series of digitally manipulated images on the scope of historical colonialism and its manipulation
of the natural environment” (p. 249). Utilizing re-appropriated photographs, computer generated images, and written text, Parada (re)tells a familial tale of historical, agricultural, and global linkages. Through the medium of hypertext, Parada invites viewers to discover “the intricate web of connections between continents, between cultural and agricultural influences, between the entrepreneurial and the ministerial, between wheat as a plant and as a commodity” (Parada, 1995, ¶4).

Identified as an exemplar of feminist aesthetic in computer-mediated art (Mercedes, 1998), several art scholars have critically analyzed Transplant (Coleman, 1998; Eggemeyer, 2004; Innella, 2000; Marien, 2002). Describing Transplant, Innella (2000) notes that the web artwork “seems to be about the emotional impact of significant events in women’s lives” (¶4). Taking up feminist art framework, Eggemeyer (2004) examines the different symbolic elements that Parada utilizes in the artwork. Eggemeyer’s analysis “reveals Parada’s commentary on the traditional role of women as objects” (p. 23) and provides art educators a critical case study for exploring web-based art narratives. Marien (2002) also takes up a gendered lens in examining Transplant. She summarizes the artwork as “A story about as a young bride ‘transported’ from her family home and then to India unfolded in an in-direct, non-linear way, with clickable asides about such topics as British imperialist conduct in India during the nineteenth century” (p. 491).

Like these scholars, what draws me into the text is the personal narrative. It is the story of the imperialistic bridges embodied within the marriage between Chicago-born heiress Mary Victoria Leiter and Derbyshire aristocrat George Nathaniel Curzon (Parada, 1995; 1996). Previous analyses, however, have been limited to art critiques that
superficially engage with the emergent narratives. I am concerned primarily with (1) how the personal and panoramic stories emerge through the medium of hypertext and (2) how the dialogic interaction between rhetor, text, and viewer enables different visual narratives of the past to emerge. Therefore, I employ a rhetorical perspective to explore the hypertextual narrativity of the artwork.

In this chapter, I examine the hypertextual web art *Transplant*. I argue that by utilizing a network of multilinear linkages, or hypertexts, Parada invites viewers to piece together information fragments to co-construct the text’s narrative meanings and to critically reconstruct narrative pasts. First, I briefly review literature on hypertextuality to formulate a theoretical framework. Then, I perform a detailed descriptive analysis of the artwork, examining the different visual and verbal components of its narrative potentials. Specifically, I suggest that by taking up the form of hypertextual “family photo album,” *Transplant* allows viewers to enact the processes of self-directed narrative sequencing and (re)captioning. Finally, I conclude by examining hypertextuality’s implications for visual narrativity and collective memory studies.

**Hypertextuality**

With the advent of the Internet, ideas and images are transmitted across boundaries, moving across time, place, and space. Along with this movement come innovative ways of understanding. Information on the Internet is linked in webs or networks of hypertext. Specifically, hypertext refers to “text composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains or trains in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality” (Landow, 1997, p. 3; see also Nelson, 1981). Much scholarship has focused on how hypertext (or hypermedia) embodies a postmodern
ethos that undermines traditional forms of power and authority (Diebert, 1997; Landow, 1997), cultivating a space for diverse and marginalized voices (Consalvo, 2002) and promoting more democratic forms of communication (Lanham, 1993). Simultaneously, scholars have explored how hypertext reinforces global consumerism and homogenizes cultures (Appadurai, 1996; Silbey, 1997), perpetuates structures of education and class inequalities (Dean, 2003; Iandoli & Norris, 1997), and reinforces sexist gender norms (Davis, 2008; Royal, 2008).

Hypertext also offers scholars a new area of study in developing narrative theory and criticism. Hypertext is a “new writing space” that re-envisions how narratives are conceptualized and constructed (Bolter, 1991, p. 10). As a hypertextual “heteroglot” (Bakhtin, 1981), the Internet is a space where various voices intermingle with one another to produce multiple stories and interconnected histories. Hypertexts promote non-linear ways of envisioning history and cultivate spaces of multivocality (Finzsch, 1994; Joyce & Tringham, 2007; O’Malley & Rosenzweig, 1997; Rommel-Ruiz, 2006). Unlike traditional literary texts, hypertexts allow readers to “transcend the linearity of the written text” (Riffaterre, 1994, p. 780). Information is linked in ways that allow for multilinear readings and multiple interpretations of narratives (Bolter, 1991, 2001; Cali, 2000; Delany & Landow, 1991; Douglas, 2000; Dovey, 2002; Hayles, 2001; Landow, 1994, 1997; Zambare, 2004). Audience members are invited to explore information in multilinear ways and to make sense of the text’s meaning by piecing together hypertextual fragments of image and written text that occupy the same symbolic “space” (Bolter, 1991, 2001; Douglas, 2000).
Hypertextuality challenges traditional understandings of narrative construction by reconceptualizing ideas of plot, narrativity, and authorship (Landow, 1997). Many literary scholars have noted that the reader plays an active role in constructing a text (Eco, 1979a; Holub, 1984; Iser, 1989, 2000; McGee, 1990). Hypertextual narratives, however, allow audiences to adopt a more active role in text construction. Unlike traditional literary texts, hypertexts demand that viewers participate in “piecing together” the narrative(s) by choosing among multiple pathways. As Hayles (2001) argues, the materiality of hypertext allows hypertextual narratives to “take shape as a network of possibilities rather than a preset sequence of events” (p. 21). The cyberspace medium enables viewers to travel through computerized “pages” of information in multiple ways rather than down one pre-structured path or over-determined plot. Through the selective activities of a reading subject, “the actual narrative comes into existence in conjunction with a specific reading” (Hayles, 1999, p. 213). Through the acts of viewing, the narrative is (re)constituted.

If hypertexts are borderless texts with permeable boundaries that form “links within and without a text” (Landow, 1997, p. 80), then meanings of a narrative can be endless. If there are no linear structures to guide us, then we must re-conceptualize how we make linkages among pieces of information and formulate coherent narratives. Hypertextuality structures not only how we access information, but also how we communicate and think. Cali (2000) compares page-based and web-based texts, claiming that, whereas paper-based texts formulate a linear perspective, web-based texts exemplify an associative perspective. That is, Cali proposes that an associative perspective sees web
texts as open, unfinished, and invitational and that such texts encourage readers to create multiple “fields of thought” (p. 404).

To explore how hypertextual narratives cultivate these “fields of thought,” I examine Esther Parada’s *Transplant*. Although there are numerous web-based narratives and cyber-mediated artworks (c.f., Aarseth, 1997; Davis, 2008; Dunkley, 2005; Joyce & Tringham, 2007; Murray, 1997; Rush, 1999; Scholder, 2001; Thacker, 2000; Weintraub, 1997), I use *Transplant* as a unique case study for examining how viewers may engage in visual narrative sense-making of a hypertext and how hypertextuality can be used to re-envision the past. In the next section, I examine how *Transplant* enacts a hypertextual family photo album. Specifically, I argue that audiences are invited to co-construct textual meanings by (1) narratively sequencing the web pages and (2) by (re)captioning images with verbal text.

**Hypertextual Photo Albums: Narrative Sequencing and (Re)captioning**

Historically, photo albums and personal scrapbooks were constructed primarily by women and embodied a feminine form of memory-making (Buckler, 2006; Di Bello, 2003; Higonnet, 1987; Siegel, 2006; Tucker, Ott, & Buckler, 2006). As numerous scholars have noted, family photo albums are sites for collective remembering and meaning making as well as a place for developing and sustaining familial identities (Chalfen, 1987; Kotkin, 1978; Miller, 1999; Moore & Meyerhoff, 1977; Scott, 1999; Siegel, 2003; Spence & Holland, 1991). Photo albums not only organize familial photographs, but also shape how families visually and materially construct themselves. As Hirsch (1997) explains, family albums are visual narratives that “tell a story” (p. 187).
Indeed, family photo albums are an extension of the oral tradition; they are a visual mode of storytelling (Langford, 2001).

While family photo albums are unique personal artifacts, they also reflect larger social conventions of photography (Chalfen, 1987; Gardner, 1990) Holland, 1991; Kotkin, 1978; Musello, 1979; Strano, 2006). Katriel and Farrell (1991), for example, investigate how photo scrapbooks have specific “aesthetic principles” that guide how items are selected and ordered. Family photo albums share similarities in how they are constructed. Viewers, then, regardless of whether they have kinship ties to the photographed subjects or not, are able to enact a “familial looking” that calls upon a sense of intimacy (Hirsch, 1999).

Indeed, *Transplant* is composed as a hypertextual “family photo album” (Eggemeyer, 2004; Innella, 2000). By taking up this photographic album aesthetic, Parada encourages viewers to engage narratively with the text from a familial, personal perspective. Not only are viewers introduced to the primary characters in a web of historical, social, and environmental implications of British imperialism, they are also guided into the life stories of Mary and George Curzon. As a hypertextual family photo album, *Transplant* invites audiences to co-construct textual meanings through two primary rhetorical devices.

First, Parada’s narrative artwork allows viewers to construct multiple stories through narrative sequencing. That is, the reader is in charge of locating each textual fragment into an order of events and sequencing the web pages. Extensive scholarship has examined how sequencing is an essential characteristic of narrative (Barbatsis, 2005; Bell, 2002; Booth 1988; Chatman, 1978; Ferguson, 1961; Foss, 1996; Martin, 1986;
argues, narratives “require the unfolding of action, change, difference” or the
“succession” of actions (p. 28). Bruner (1990), too, acknowledges that narratives
encompass some sort ordering or “sequential unfolding” of events (p. 133).

Narrative, then, can be conceptualized as “a sequence of ordered events that are
connected in a meaningful way for a particular audience in order to make sense of the
world and/or people’s experiences in it” (Bell, 2002, p. 6; see also Hinchman &
Hinchman, 1997). With hypertexts, however, these “sequence of ordered events” are
connected in meaningful ways by, not just for, an audience. While there is no preset
sequence of events with a hypertext, viewers temporally engage with them in some
chronological fashion (i.e., view one page first, then another page, and then another)
(Hayles, 2001). We, as viewers, create a sense of continuity and cohesion by moving
from one web page to the next in a serial fashion. As Carr (1986) argues a narrative must
have a “temporal configuration” in which “the events portrayed unfold in time and the
order of their unfolding is important to their significance” (p. 50). Vital, then, to the
unfolding of events is the viewer. With each different ordered unfolding, a new narrative
emerges.

As I have argued in Chapter 3, there is a storied nature to photographs, regardless
of whether or not they specifically take part in a sequencing process. Even so, by taking
up the form of a family photo album, Parada further encourages the viewer to organize
the web pages sequentially to co-create a coherent hypertextual narrative. As Parada
(1995) explains,
the pictorial sequence or narrative will be linked to a series of textual narratives. You will have the option of viewing each pictorial or text sequence from start to finish or shifting laterally between a single image and the particular paragraph link which I have chosen for it. (¶ 4)

The viewer is given the opportunity to move through the narrative artwork in a sequential, yet non-linear, fashion.

In Transplant, each webpage functions as a single page in an online photo album. As Levine (2006) notes, the process of engaging with family photo albums means that when “I turn the pages, I am activating a story” (p. 17). While Levine’s comment pertains to traditional photo albums, it is applicable to Parada’s work. Like turning the page of a family photo album, clicking on a hypertextual link (image or text) transports the viewer to the next (web)page. One moves from one site within the hypertextual “album” to the next, constructing a sequence of pages. With each new link, a new hypertext is revealed. Unlike traditional family photo albums, however, Transplant compromises a multilinear narrative that allows for various readings of a single text. Rather than moving in a linear or chronological order proposed by a conventionally bound family album, one can readily navigate through the hypertext in a non-linear fashion.

A second rhetorical device that Parada utilizes to invite the audience to co-construct narrative meanings is (re)captioning. That is, the viewer narratively engages with Transplant by moving between the pictorial and verbal components. Extensive scholarship has examined this relationship between linguistic text and visual images (Barthes, 1977; Codognet, 2002; Foucault, 1983; Hagan, 2007; Martinec & Salway, 2005; Messaris, 1994; Mitchell, 1994; Royce, 1998). Scholars have addressed the verbal-
visual interplay within the context of children’s books (Benson, 1986; Goldsmith, 1986; Moebius, 1986; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2000; Schwarcz, 1982; Sipe, 1998), comic strips (Varnum & Gibbons, 2007), television advertising (Wiggin & Miller, 2003), and documentary photography (Denton, 2005; Hunter, 1987; Scott, 1999). Gombrich (1985), for example, notes how titles shape how paintings are interpreted while Varnum and Gibbons (2007) examine how the disjunctions between word and image in comic strips can “disturb the reader and show the dark side of the human condition” (p. xvii). Indeed, verbal text can provide ironic alterations to an image (Hunter, 1987; Hutcheon, 1992; Scott, 2004).

In terms of photography, scholars have concentrated on the function of the photographic caption (Barnhurst, 1995; Barthes, 1977; Benjamin, 1977; Berger, 1992; Burgin, 1982; Hunter, 1987; Johnson, 1993; Lidchi, 1997; Long, 2008; Scott, 1999; Sontag, 1977). A caption is a brief title or explanation that may function as a literal description of a photograph (Lidchi, 1997). It provides “a handle” to the photograph (Berger, 1992, p. 14). In examining the image-text relationship in Bertolt Brecht’s War Primer, a collection of “photo-epigrams” in which news photos are re-appropriated and accompanied by Brecht’s quatrains, Long (2008) argues that the caption is a type of “paratext” or “linguistic supplement” that shapes how viewers interpret and make sense of photographs. As Suler (2008) explains, a caption is a verbal text that “adds a layer of meaning that is not immediately obvious in the photo” (p. 557). This verbal text informs the visual while the pictorial reinforces or even visualizes what is being conveyed in the words (Pickering, 1997). As Hunter (1987) argues, “A caption may provide mere
information, or a context altogether altering the significance of the photograph it accompanies, or an untruth for the photograph to mock (p. 33).

While a caption may enhance, complement, or even contradict the pictorial, it is neither a direct translation of the visual to the verbal nor one-to-one correlation between pictorial and linguistic fields. A caption suppresses the ambiguity and polysemic nature of a photograph (Chaplin, 2006). It selects one of the multitudinous meanings of a photograph, attaches one interpretation to a photograph, and, thus, limits how viewers will make sense of the overall text (Barnhurst, 1995; Barthes, 1977; Berger, 1992; Sontag, 1977). Barthes (1977) describes how captions function as a type of elaboration in which the image comes first and the text secondary. The words form a more definite and precise restatement or "fixing" of the photograph, a relation he terms as "anchorage." He also notes that the verbal may come first, so that the visual forms an illustration of the verbal text. However, what Barthes fails to recognize is that each component (the visual and the verbal) is an independent message that interdependently supports one another (see Bryant, 1995; Benson, 1986; Goodman, 1976; Lidchi, 1997). That is, there need not be a hierarchical ordering of the two components (i.e., verbal over visual or visual over verbal).

Rather than reinforcing a binary model in which one is privileged over another, I adopt a more collaborative model that highlights the active role of the viewer. I draw from Caw’s (1989) model of interference in which "The mutual interference of two objects, a visual and a verbal one, involves a dialogue, which the reader or observer enters into and sponsors, and which with other dialogues forms part of a more general conversation" (p. 48). That is, the reader (viewer) recognizes both the verbal and the
pictorial as equally important components that synergistically operate with each other (see also Goggin, 2004; Luborsky, 1987).

By incorporating both verbal and pictorial texts in the hypertext, Parada promotes a dynamically partitioned while connected hermeneutical way of knowing. Although photographs are “pieces of evidence in an ongoing biography or history” (Sontag, 1977, p. 166), written texts guide viewers to read or (re)caption the images in significant ways. The headlines and the paragraphs located above and below the images in *Transplant* provide detailed contextual and historical information that are not revealed by the pictorial text. Simultaneously, the images reveal to us pictorial information that cannot be captured in words. Unlike traditional captions that attempt to describe the photograph with words, Parada utilizes captions to co-tell the emergent stories. Together, the pictorial and the verbal provide the viewer a rich narrative text.

In the next section, I perform a critical reading of the web art. This analysis will focus on both the verbal and visual elements within the hypertext. By engaging in a close textual analysis, I examine how *Transplant* enacts a hypertextual family photo album that invites audiences to co-construct textual meanings through narrative sequencing and (re)captioning.

**Exploring Parada’s *Transplant***

In this section, I offer one possible reading of *Transplant*. I, doing so, recognize my positionality as a rhetorical scholar and the particular situated knowledges (and biases) that I bring to the text. Specifically, this analysis represents my exploration of the text in which I moved through the hyperlinks from left to right and (unconsciously) reinforced more traditionally linear ways of knowing or Westernized thought. While
alternative interpretations that include more marginalized voices could be enacted, I present how I narratively sequenced the hypertext. With each webpage, I focus on how text and image intertwine to cultivate my co-narration of Transplant. In my analysis, I invite the reader to come along on my journey through the artwork. Therefore, I use the term “we” to reflect our engagement with Parada’s Transplant.

The artwork is composed of seventeen separate web pages, in no necessary order, that are connected by numerous hyperlinks. Each page is composed of one central image, a headline or short quote that hangs above the image, a caption. Positioning each in the center of the page, Parada directs the viewer to devote particular attention to the image. The central image also is contextualized by verbal text or a caption. Above the image is a heading, beneath each image is a paragraph of words, and superimposed on top of each image are flashing words. There are hundreds of possible paths one could take in weaving the story together. As co-narrators, we are given the freedom to lace the different vines of narrative together however we may choose. We are allowed to click on the words “Bride,” “Groom,” “Brother,” “Husband,” “Daughter,” “Wife” or on the central image to begin and continue one’s journey. Indeed, Transplant tangibly and functionally embodies the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings that can emerge from a single work of art (c.f. Barrett, 1994; Congdon, 1991; Feldman, 1971; Hamblen, 1991).

Before entering the artwork, we stand before the introductory page. We start with the headline, “Wherein a Victorian love story between a Chicago heiress and an English aristocrat reveals a web of colonial maneuvers connecting the United States, England, and India.” This is a teaser, an introduction, a preface for what is to come. The stories
that Parada wishes us to weave center around the marriage of two people, Mary Victoria Leiter, a daughter of a Chicago millionaire, and George Nathaniel Curzon. Their personal story, however, is part of a greater story of international linkages. Directly below these words is an image of the artwork’s title, “Transplant” in uppercase letters sits across a tilted world map. The word and image reinforce the theme of transnational links. There are colonial, political, and economic connections among the United States, England, and India. The background also reinforces the main theme of global connection with the repetitious image of an outlined world map. The story is to be one that crosses national boundaries, a collection of linked webpages that reinforces boundlessness. The paragraph below the center image explains to us that the work is “part of a larger series called Dig.Cultivation which examines connections between horticultural and cultural histories.” Parada explains that she has been invited by the Montage Gallery in Derby, England to create an artwork that explores these linkages. Although my primary analysis is of the online text itself, I also spent much time sifting through the archival materials to piece together the stories behind the artwork. The seeds of Transplant began with a work entitled Dig/Cultivation: Plotting Virtual Gardens. Invited by the Montage Gallery in Derby, England for their 1995 National Photography Festival, Parada constructed a number of “digital gardens” to examine the agricultural history of the English gardens. One story that emerged from Dig/Cultivation was Transplant. Transplant, then, was one of seven web-based artworks in La Finca/The Homestead, a collaborative web project addressing the theme of colonization.

The title of the piece also reflects the theme of the series; “Transplant” is a play on words as well as ideas. If we see transplant as a verb, then we are focusing on
transferring or relocating a person or thing from one place to another. Simultaneously, transplant may be a noun, the actual thing that is being transplanted. The art/story centers on the “imperialistic tendencies” to control plants/crops and land in search of wealth.

Transplant reflects how the American bride, Mary Victoria Leiter (who becomes Mary Curzon after she is married), becomes relocated across continents because of her husband. The title thus refers to the diaspora of upper class Victorian women of the late 1800s. Mary is first “transplanted” to England. Then, when George Curzon becomes Viceroy, Mary is shipped out to India. “Transplant” may also signify the desire for control over plants and crops to generate wealth and prestige as cotton and tobacco accompanied Britian’s rule over India. Finally, Parada is transplanting us, the viewer, into a new world, a cyber reality, that allows us to transcend time and place. One may read the art/narrative at any time or location. Instead of entering a gallery, we enter the Internet. We become co-constructors of the art by choosing which links will be accessed. I, as a viewer, become a “reader-author” (Landow, 1997, p. 184). By explaining the purpose of the art project in the opening webpage, Parada gives us some directions as to how we, as audience members, should be reading the text/art/artifact. We will be searching for the links between “social and physical environments” and seeking to learn how land/place is manipulated in the name of “neutral progress” and how colonized women play a role in this global narrative.

We then enter a second introductory screen. The image is a rectangle, divided into six separate squares or six link options titled, “Bride,” “Groom,” “Brother,” “Husband,” “Daughter,” and “Wife.” Each word represents a visual code for a familial link. Each square has an image or fragment of a photo that will eventually be repeated when
entering the links. By placing them next to each other Parada also reinforces the tight connection of these relationships. Beneath the rectangle, a brief paragraph reads:

As you examine some of these connections, I encourage you to question the misleading polarities (such as natural vs. artificial, pure vs. corrupt, spiritual vs. commercial, real vs. virtual) which often inform our perception of historical events; or color our understanding of the shift from traditional (idyllic/pastoral) to modern (corrupt/technological) times.

Parada’s voice is heard by utilizing first and second person terms such as “you,” “I,” and “our.” This choice directly invites the viewer to be part of the narrative. Her words are familiar and offer an invitational tone that reinforces a co-construction of the artifact. There is no particular audience to whom she is speaking; rather, anyone who wishes to be part of the conversation about history, women, and/or place may enter. For Parada, the artwork is not about forceful persuasion but about critical understanding of false binaries that have been present throughout history, including “natural vs. artificial, pure vs. corrupt, spiritual vs. commercial, real vs. virtual.”

Parada thus structures the narrative to require active participation in co-constructing the text. We are allowed to select how the story will be told. We choose and create the links to the different pieces of the story and, thus, become part of the story’s unfolding. We can choose among multiple paths. We may move from left to right across the different familial linkages and text, a movement that reflects Western approaches to reading. We may move from the middle, outward or only select the male roles (Groom, Brother, Husband). Or we might enact a more marginalized reading by selecting only those links that directly highlight the feminine: Wife, Daughter and Bride. Located in the
upper left corner of the six linkages, we select Bride. While this is a feminine role that focuses our attentions on Mary Leiter, this selection, however, need not be interpreted as a marginalized reading of the work. In fact, it reinforces Western patriarchal forms of literacy.

The next page selected through this path could be labeled as “Bride.” The photograph in the center is of Mary Victoria Leiter and her husband, George Daniel Curzon. They sit next to one another without touching. Mary wears a late 1880s formal dress with a hat and holds a bouquet of flowers in her lap. Her face is turned down, almost as if she were shying away from the camera. George, however, gazes intensely into the camera. The image of the couple reflects traditional views of the dominant male and the subordinate female, as it shows an active man looking and a passive woman being the object of display.

This connection with women and appearances is also addressed in the headline. It reads, “People discuss my looks as though I were an oleograph.” The quotation is assumed to be Mary’s. She is explaining to us that others see her as an “oleograph” or an imitation, as an oleograph is a photograph printed on cloth to imitate an oil painting. Mary is not quite “real” because she is American, not British. Mary was transplanted to England because of her marriage and “felt isolated due to both excessive admiration and to resentment of her American ways.” She is then quoted as saying, “My path is strewn with roses and the only thorns are the unforgiving women.” Here, Mary confides to us that other women scrutinize her appearance. She feels her difference, her otherness. Like an exotic flower, Mary is always on display for the public. Parada uses the flower theme both visually and verbally: in the caption with “roses” and “thorns”; with the central
image with the bouquet that Mary holds; and, by the repetitive flower print background. As such, the flower symbolizes femininity, a beautiful object of display.

Although Mary is the main focus of the page, she is described primarily in relation to men. She is described as a “daughter of Chicago millionaire, Levi Zeigler Leiter” and the “bride of George Daniel Curzon.” These descriptions reflect a patriarchal understanding of female identity, as they offer her an identity always in relation to men. Flasing across the photo in sequential order are the words, “Bride, Lily, Heiress, Oleograph.” These word associations become metonymic. Each word reinforces the image by linking the photograph, the headline, and the full paragraph (caption) to the idea of Mary. Each word is also a derivative, secondary term, dependent upon a primary entity (person/thing): one can only be a “Bride” if there is a “Groom”; to be an “Heiress” means being subordinate to a “Decedent”; and, “Oleograph” is merely a false representation of the “Real.”

Entering into the next page, by clicking on the central photograph, we see the same photograph of Mary and George. This photograph, however, has been reframed to reveal people standing behind the sitting couple. Men and women are dressed up in high fashion. Mary and George are not alone; they are in the public eye. “You must learn how to think and spell as an Englishwoman, my child,” reads the headline quote above the photograph. A translucent oval frame flashes over the photograph to emphasize Mary. The background is a lily print that links both back to the previous page where “Lily” flashed on top of the image and to a portion of George Curzon’s quote that hangs under the photographic image. George’s statement reads:
Some people are born to stand up and shine before the world; others are
‘violets by a mossy stone/half hidden from the eyes.’ The violets are good
in their way and place. So are the tall arum lilies in theirs. In public life
one wants the latter.

Mary is to take on “her new role” of being an Englishwoman by marriage. Because
George Curzon is a high profile individual, Under Secretary of State at the British
Foreign Office in London, Mary must be re-socialized to fit into the new world of the
British upper class. She must become the arum lily. The paragraph below the image
reveals that “Curzon had coached her on her new role.” The “Victorian love story
between a Chicago heiress and an English aristocrat” does not fulfill the genre
expectations of “love story.” The marriage of Mary and George is an economic/political
bond rather than a love story. The story is not about romantic love; rather, it is about a
marriage between two cultures.

Moving to the next page entitled, “Groom”, the headline reads: “…huge and
smokey and absorbed in the worship of Mammon in a grim and melancholy way.” The
paragraph below explains that George Curzon said this when he saw the city of Chicago.
“He disdained the grubby commerce of Chicago,” the paragraph continues. We begin to
make more linkages to place. Quotes as headlines frame the story in a particular way.
Here, Curzon expresses his distaste for Chicago, articulating uneasiness about the city’s
“worship of Mammon.” Chicago represents the degrading influence of material wealth
and American capitalism. At the same time, viewers see that Mary Curzon is directly
rooted in Chicago.
We do not learn more about specific characteristics of George. We do not know anything about him, except that his ancestors had “investments in the American colonies and the East India Company.” The profits from these enterprises then led to building Kedleston Hall in England. As Parada describes it,

The building of Kedleston in the 18th century involved diverting the public road from Derby, demolishing the village of Kedleston, constructing lakes, and planting and uprooting trees, so that although the classical landscape of Kedleston Park with its sweeping views…may appear completely natural, it is, in fact, entirely man-made.

Through monetary wealth, the landscape of Kedleston was uprooted and reconstructed by humans. The landscape becomes a simulation of naturalness. Kedleston and Chicago are juxtaposed to exemplify how two seemingly contrasting places—one a grimy, mechanical metropolis and the other beautiful green pastures—are both man-made entities. We are asked to reconsider what we know to be as “natural.” Kedleston may be a pristine ecological countryside, but it was altered by and for humans.

If we make the link between word and image, we must assume that the center image is of Kedleston. The image shows grazing sheep in a green field near a river. The river and sheep are in the foreground; in the background, there is a large Masonic structure that is likely Kedleston Hall. The backdrop, or “wallpaper,” of the website is green with more grazing sheep. The words “Groom,” “Uproot,” “Divert,” and “Plant” flashing across the screen over the central image reinforce the horticultural “transplanting” of Mary into English wife, natural into man-handled, and presaging of British interests into India. The entire page becomes a hermeneutic movement between
word and image, a continuous circle of interpretation and re-interpretation by the reader to generate meaning of the whole.

The next page’s headline is a quote from Viscount Wellesley, “the 18th century British envoy who built Government House in Calcutta.” With this site, Parada allows us to see how places, including buildings, have historical connections. She explains that “when Curzon first saw this building in Calcutta…its striking resemblance to Kedleston in England confirmed his sense of destiny as Viceroy in India.” Indeed, the likeness is not just in Curzon’s head. We discover that Calcutta’s Government House “had transplanted much of Robert Adam’s design for Kedleston to the Asian subcontinent.” The building is “transplanting” British style into India. In the end, “Curzon was named Viceroy (British ruler) of India in 1898.” Not only are the British buildings being transferred to India, so too is Curzon.

The central image is of Government House in Calcutta. Government House is a grand white building with several facades and a large pillared entranceway. The paragraph explains that Viscount Wellesley was criticized for “his extravagance” by the East India Company. The building symbolizes British wealth and imperialism. Flashing over the image are the words, “Scion,” “Baron,” “Earl,” and “Marquess.” All the words except for “Scion” refer to titles within upper class British culture. Parada keenly utilizes double meanings of words for us to make multiple connections. For example, “scion” means either a descendent (of someone/something) or a detached portion of a plant. The undercurrent of horticulture is embodied in this word. With the Government House in Calcutta, the building’s design is detached from its British roots and placed in India. The British are grafting their culture upon India’s by utilizing architecture as symbolic seeds
of cultural transplantation. This metaphor allows viewers to be aware and critical of British imperialism/colonialism. The print for the background is of palm trees and a lush armchair. These visual images symbolize both the tropical India and the “royalty” of British imperialism.

Along with the images of exotic India and British imperialism, Chicago is linked into the web of places. We turn to the story of Mary’s brother and the time “the bottom dropped out of the wheat market.” Joseph Leiter, whose wealth was in grain merchandising, “lost close to ten million dollars.” Parada explains that Mary’s family’s wealth supported her husband’s “stellar diplomatic career.” The central image is a blurry visual of factories or “plants” with stacks spewing soot and smoke. The side of one of the buildings reads “Reaper’s Mower.” The words, “Brother,” “Speculator,” “Napoleon of LaSalle St.,” and “Wheat King of the World” flash across the image. This technique of flashing words in most of the central images may emphasize specific ideas that are embedded within the captioning text (headline and paragraph). Repetition directs the viewer’s attention to key elements and messages. For example, in this page, the background is a repeated image of a wheat stalk that reinforces “wheat market” and “wheat king of the world.”

We move from Joseph Leiter’s unfortunate financial predicament to the Chicago landscape. The page tells us that,

In the early 1800s the marshy coast of Lake Michigan, site of today’s Chicago, was gridded for real estate sales. The prairie, in turn, was cleared of native grasses to make way for the cultivation of wheat and marketable grains.
The central picture is a topographic map of Chicago that helps illustrate this “gridding” process. The natural vegetation was uprooted to make way for agricultural purposes and “the dozens of species that defined the prairie ecosystem quickly gave way to the handful of plants that defined the farm.” At first glance, Parada’s tone seems matter of fact. Yet, the paragraph is not a mere description of historical events. She quotes William Cronon to further emphasize the process—“big and little blue stem, side oats gamma, Indian grass, and all the others—began their long retreat to the margins of cultivation.” There is a feeling of loss that these different plant species are being displaced for modernization and agricultural growth. “Grass,” “Grain,” “Crop,” and “Commodity” flash upon the screen to further emphasize these major themes of the story.

We are then invited into a central photograph, an image displaying wheat and wild flowers are in the foreground. Sporadically, an image of Chicago’s Sears tower flashes in the background. We seem to move further away from the original story. Or, perhaps, there is an alternative weaving that focuses more on horticultural development than on architectural history. The headline reads, “(People) could buy and sell grain not as the physical product of human labor on a particular tract of prairie earth, but as an abstract claim on the golden stream flowing through the city’s elevators.” Technology begins to alienate humans from contact with the land. The text states that “The elevator helped turn grain into capital by obscuring its link with physical nature, while another new technology (the telegraph) extended that process by weakening its link with geography.” Crops are commodified, becoming objects that can be bought, exchanged, and sold. They are “traded on the floor of the Exchange.” With image and text, we are
becoming detached from the land and simultaneously becoming economically dependent upon the land.

After briefly mentioning the Exchange, the next linked page draws attention to the Chicago Stock Exchange Building. A black and white photograph of a stone archway with ornate designs draws the eye into the center of the page. Behind the archway, one notices a few skyscrapers that suggest the architectural object stands in a city. Above the photograph, the headline reads: “The ornament…should appear as though…it was there by the same right that a flower appears amid the leaves of its parent plant.” This desire for the natural and nature is reflected in architectural designs. As Parada explains, “even in the interior of the National Farmers Bank (1908) he [Louis Sullivan] aspired to stencil a color tone poem inspired by spring grass and skies along the valley of the Illinois River.”

When we finally move away from Chicago, we return to George Curzon. We are shown a photograph of Curzon and another man standing on a tile floor. Two dead tigers lie at their feet, symbolizing the domination of the natural habitat of India. The men are symbolic of British supremacy over the Indian subcontinent. As Sramek (2006) notes that during the 19th century, tiger hunting symbolized British imperialism and masculinity. The words “Husband,” “Explorer,” “Writer,” and “Ruler” flash across the screen. The headline reads, “Often when we think them backward and stupid, they think us meddlesome and absurd.” This sentence reflects some tension between the British and the Indians. The British imperialistic mindset is one in which the British people are obligated to civilize the uncivilized. The British colonizers are told to “remember that the Almighty has placed in your hands the greatest of his ploughs, in whose furrow the
nations of the future are germinating and taking shape, to drive the blade a little further in
your time…” The agricultural metaphor is reinforced with words like “ploughs,”
germinating” and “blade.” The British may use the agricultural metaphor to justify
colonization, suggesting that it is a “natural” or divine duty to “cultivate” other nations.
Nonetheless, there is an incongruity between the words and the center photograph
depicting George Curzon. Rather than holding a plough, Curzon holds a gun. The rifle
may be symbolic of Western power and colonization’s ability to hunt or destroy what is
“wild” in India. Curzon has not yet beaten his sword into a ploughshare.

The next photograph is of a young girl dressed in white standing next to an Indian
guard in front of an entranceway of steps. The photograph is of one of the Curzons’ three
daughters, Alexandra Naldera, who traveled to India with her parents. The words
“Daughter,” “Baba Sahib,” “Alexandra,” and “Naldera” flash on the screen to help us
reinforce the identity of the girl. As Mary’s youngest daughter, Alexandra was also
known as “Baba” or baby and called by the Curzon’s servants as “Baba Sahib.” As
formal title or a term of respect, “Sahib” was used by native-born Indians to address
British aristocrats. Along with this nickname, Alexandra’s middle name “Naldera” is
presented. However, there appears to be a double meaning to the name. Not only is
“Naldera” another (or middle) name for Alexandra Curzon, it is also a region in India
known for its deodar forests. In fact, Naldehra was a favorite vacation spot for Lord
Curzon who was fascinated by the region’s sloping hills and woods (De Courcy, 2003).

The paragraph below the image explains that Curzon’s move to India was “at
least in part, the result of a network of imperial/technological connections.” Plant
cultivation was a substantial industry for the British in India. Reinforcing this verbal
message of imperial plant cultivation is the background “wallpaper” of the webpage. It is a recurring blurry photograph of people working in the woods. An Indian man squats on the ground, gathering bark from the trees. As the paragraph notes, India allowed “the cultivation of cinchona bark, the source of the wonder drug that controlled malaria.” Above the image, Parada further explains the connection between the Curzon family and cinchona bark, “Quinine (produced from the cinchona bark) was one of the essential tools in attracting to India the large bureaucracy necessary to govern it.” One justification, then, for the England’s governing presence in India was to oversee this blossoming medical industry. The Curzon’s become symbolic of England’s redemptive value for colonizing India.

The next photograph is a regal shot of Lord Curzon. The paragraph explains his affinity towards architecture and his contribution to the preservation of architectural artifacts. The headline reads, “It is to the credit of England that this garden (Taj Mahal) is mainly the product of English hands.” The British have the funds to contribute to architecture and gardens. Those in power shape the landscape. The screen flashes the words, “Eton,” “Balliol,” “St. James,” and “Maidan.” Each is a place that links Curzon with England and India: “Eton” is the prestigious all-boys boarding school in England that George attended; “Balliol” is the college at the University of Oxford where George did his undergraduate studies; “St. James” is an area in central London known for its high society clubs where George frequented; and, “Maidan” is a region in southern India with the largest urban park (as well as an Indian term for “open field”) where statues of historical British statesmen, including Lord Curzon, were erected (see Raleigh, 1906). Unless one knows a bit of trivia, these nouns and their significance are vague. Again, the
viewer must decide how these words connect with the image and text. What is distinctly recognizable, however, is the page’s background showing the Taj Mahal in a soft purple-pink-blue evening light. The webpage appears to emphasize the visual link between Lord Curzon and the iconic Taj Mahal. The images appear to be the dominant focus of the page; the words add supplementary information.

We move onto the next page. There is a photograph of Mary in a white dress and large floppy hat. She has been hoisted up on a sedan chair and is being carried by four Indian men in dark attire. The headline reads, “One of her fads was to visit in disguise the native sections of the city and mingle with the people as one of them.” The image of Mary does not, however, reflect this camouflaging. Rather, she is the center of attention as she is a woman hoisted up by men as if to symbolize royalty. The heading states how she “mingled with the people,” suggesting her friendly relationship with and her curiosity for the native Indians. Rather than being an official photograph, the picture is one that is informal, personal, as though it should be part of a family photo album. The words “Debutante,” “Wife,” “Lady,” and “Vicereine” flash across the screen over the photograph. These are labels we can use to describe Mary Curzon. The paragraph below the photograph explains that Mary died at the age of thirty-six. Parada explains that the Chicago Tribune “was clearly intrigued with the fairy tale rise of this daughter of Chicago millionaire.” Parada, however, invites us to piece together and witness the “true” story of Mary, not the romantic fairy tale version.

The next photograph is a black and white bricolage. A man appears to be peeling away the bark of a tree. Large leaves are superimposed on the photograph and cover a portion of his face and body. In the right corner is an undecipherable message. Due to
viewing the previous pages, we can assume that the man is working on a cinchona tree with cinchona leaves superimposed upon him. The headline and the caption, at first, do not seem to reinforce or even link with the central image. The headline reads, “The white man was now a Victorian family man who had a tradition to uphold and a taboo to enforce.” The caption below explains how the “influx of white women” into the subcontinent exacerbated the “already strong racism.” During the mid-19th century, a wave of British women, mostly family members of British officers, began to immigrate to India. Along with the women came the “attractions of home life” that were transported or transplanted to India, taking away the exotic feel of the country. Parada notes that Lord Curzon felt that he was “an unfortunate exile” due to the “improved transportation and communications technology.” The background wallpaper also reinforces the idea of the “Victorian family man” by providing us with a repeated image of a British family, perhaps the Curzons, taking a walk in the countryside. One gentleman pushes a baby carriage while another gentleman, woman, young girl, and young boy walk with him.

While it was common for British men to take up Indian wives, interracial relations between Indian men and English women were “taboo.” Increasing fears of English women being raped by the natives occurred after the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (see MacMillan, 2007). British men took up the moral role of “Victorian family man” to protect their women’s chastity from the threat of Indian men. Visually juxtaposed with the verbal text, then, is the supposed lustful male Indian savage (i.e., the cinchona tree worker).

The last two pages/images center on Mary. Throughout the story, she appears to be a side-character. Perhaps she was, but not in these final photographs. The first image is
of Lady Curzon in an extravagant dress and a diamond crown and necklace. Her hands are lightly clasped. She stares directly into the camera, no longer shying away. The headline reads, “All the goddesses of the Hindu pantheon must hide their heads in the presence of Lady Curzon, who was like a diamond set in gold or the full moon in an autumnal sky.” Parada explains that, “These words of a Bengalee writer were quoted in the Chicago Tribune’s 1906 obituary for Mary Leiter Curzon.” Indeed, Mary appears to exemplify royalty. The words “Aventurine Quartz,” “Serravezza Marble,” “Spanish Grilles,” and “Stained Glass” flash over Lady Curzon and fill the viewer with images of riches. These words describe different refined and noble building materials only the very rich could afford. The paragraph below also highlights the decadence of the Curzons, focusing primarily on Mary’s dress that was “The magnificent robe of Indian design and manufacture, interwoven with peacock feathers” which was worn at “the coronation of Edward VII as king of England and emperor of India.” The paragraph ends with how the dress is now part of the “Curzon collection at Kedleston, Derbyshire” and “the emeralds have been replaced with green beetle wings and the diamonds with class…” Both in the visual and verbal texts, the dress becomes the center of attention and embodies the connection between India and England. With emeralds and green-jeweled beetles, the wallpaper visually supports the description and central image of Mary Curzon in her luxurious dress. The green scarabs also are an Egyptian symbol of the soul that reminds us of Mary’s death.

The last page is a picture of Mary’s stone tomb. The tomb is ornate. In fact, “Curzon surrounded her white marble tomb with treasures from many parts of the world — green quartz from Russia, silver lamps from Venice, crimson velvet from Genoa and
candlesticks from Spain — as well as stained glass windows depicting the nine Marys of the Church and St. George and the Dragon.” While the text shares with us the list of luxuries, the image of the stone tomb is stark and grey. Above the image reads the heading, “It was as though a Gothic chantry had been made to enclose an Arabian Night.” A long list of Chicago addresses flash across the tomb photograph, naming specific real estate locations that were owned by Levi Lieter, Mary’s father. Parada explains that Curzon used the money that he inherited, “millions of dollars worth of Loop real estate, to financially sponsor restoration projects throughout England.” Parada’s tone does not seem to be judgmental, but rather explains how the money disappeared.

In all, Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents is composed of seventeen separate web pages that are interlinked to guide us through a story. Transplant invites viewers to piece together fragments of image and text to formulate a visual narrative. To knit together your own text, you may access Transplant at the following hyperlink: http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/projects/parada/transplant/introscreen.1.html. Original photographs and digitally altered images are re-placed into a new hyper-context while verbal text is used to complement and (re)caption them.

Conclusion

Esther Parada’s Transplant expresses a multiplicity of converging narratives and encourages a (re)envisioning of the past. In this chapter, I have offered one reading or co-construction of Transplant, detailing my journey through the hypertextual narrative. I examined how Parada and I, as artist and viewer, collaborated in constructing one story within a network of global issues such as colonization, cultural diversity, and international histories. By enacting a rhetorical analysis of Transplant, I examined how
the stories emerged through the medium of hypertext and how the dialogic interaction between rhetor, text, and viewer enabled different visual narratives of the past to emerge. Specifically, I argued that by taking up a family photo album aesthetic, Transplant communicated a sense of the personal that allowed me to focus on the human linkages and stories within the text. I observed that as a hypertextual family photo album, Parada’s work called me to sequence narratively and to (re)caption the text.

With hypertextual narratives, the sequencing of events changes the story’s construction and plot. Depending upon the order in which one views the pages, the emphasis of the story shifts from one area to another. One reading could foreground George Curzon and his role as Viceroy, paying specific attention to issues of power and masculinity within the rise of British imperialism. Another reading could focus primarily on the implantation of plants, highlighting the British obsession with collecting, cataloguing, growing, manipulating, and transplanting different plant life. But, for me, the story begins and ends with Mary. While some of the web pages do not directly focus on Mary Curzon, I view Transplant as an intimate biographical look at the only U.S.-born Vicereine of India. I recognize Mary as the major link between India, the United States, and Great Britain. She was an American compelled to fit into the foreign world of British imperialism within India. As a public figure, she tried to perform her role of Vicereine as best as she could. She was a gracious hostess in a peacock dress, supported her husband by touring the Indian countryside with him, and was a visual beauty at state affairs and governmental processions. Her story becomes the center of my attention. It is not supplementary to her husband’s life or a mere framing device to the more political/historical narrative.
Along with sequencing the multi-linear webpages, I also enacted a process of (re)captioning. By examining the pictorial and verbal texts in conjunction with one another, I explored how *Transplant* provides a rich rhetorical text that combines visual and verbal language to tell multiple stories. The words help to explain the pictures and give the images historical contexts. Simultaneously, the images help to visualize the verbal story and become central iconic structures of the hypertext.

There are several implications that hypertextual artworks like *Transplant* can offer for scholars interested in narrative and collective memory studies. First, hypertextual visual narratives offer an alternative way of understanding how stories are told. Not only do they problematize the traditional view that authority lies with the “author” of the text, but they also disrupt how narratives are written and conceptualized. Hypertextual visual narratives are intentionally and structurally open and multiplicitous entities. They are spaces where intersecting voices and stories co-mingle and emerge. As Parada (1993) notes, “digital technology allows the materialization of linkages in time and space that enhance understanding” (p. 445). As new media become more and more a part of everyday life, we should continue to explore how symbols, language, and form interactively shape audience’s meaning-making of online web art and hypertextual narratives. Humans are storytelling creatures (MacIntyre, 1981), and with new technologies comes innovative ways of telling (and co-telling) stories. With the hypertextual narrative apparatus, we choose how to construct, give form to, and emplot our ideas of place, space, linkages, and history. It is through narrative that we, as readers, organize the fragmented hypertexts into meaningful and coherent wholes.
Particularly with computer-mediated art, viewers are invited into an interactive relationship (see Malloy, 1991). Interactivity, as Mercedes (1998) argues, “is conversational” and means experiencing artwork in meaningful ways that are “pertinent to the viewer’s own lived experience” (p. 71). Not only are textual meanings of hypertextual artwork co-produced, but hypertextual artwork also cultivates a space of connection among rhetor, artifact, and viewer. Indeed, the power of hypertext is in how it develops an interpersonal dynamic or “special connection between artist and audience” (Weintraub, 1997, p. 101).

Second, Transplant is a unique hypertext that extends postcolonial research by addressing concepts of the female subject and transnational connections through the visual medium. Vital in understanding colonial discourse is how the female settler was part of the colonization process within India. By highlighting the female settler within the history of British imperialism, Parada creates a feminist “web-based art story” that explores gender, women, and colonial history (Eggemeyer, 2004, p. 21). Drawing from postcolonial studies and feminist art scholarship, scholars should continue to explore how visual texts critique dominant patriarchal ideologies and promote revisionist historical approaches. Postcolonial research can examine how new technology and hypertexts such as Transplant provide a valuable space in countering dominant constructions of history. Further, postcolonial theories also can be applied to narrative research to analyze how counter-narratives counteract oppressive metanarratives, explain how images of otherness circulate in popular culture, explore ideas of consumption and domination, and investigate how identity is constructed through transnational relations (Shome & Hegde, 2002b).
Finally, *Transplant* is more than just a visual engagement of history; it is a critical remembering of the past. By being a multi-linear narrative, *Transplant* can be interpreted as an artistic and rhetorical response to history’s emphasis on chronological order. Such hypertextual narrative artwork provides an alternative location for creatively (re)constructing historical narratives. Parada cuts and pastes together a pictorial-verbal hypertext that remaps historical information in a creative, critical, and multi-linear way. *Transplant* is Parada’s artistic interpretation of the past that invites my narrative experiencing of that history. In fact, hypertexts embody what Hasian and Carlson (2000) argue is “the polysemic and polyvalent nature of our narrative histories and collective memories” (p. 60). Each new reading culls new understandings of the past.

Esther Parada’s narrative artwork, *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*, is a vital rhetorical piece that encourages readers and scholars to analyze critically how stories and histories are constructed. *Transplant* encourages each viewer to conduct his or her own navigation of the website and co-construct textual meanings. We are invited into the conversation and to take on a critical eye about the past. Entangled in the conceptual and contextual roots of *Transplant* are issues of colonialism, agriculture, and history. Not only does Parada’s hypertextual art engage viewers to reevaluate how women and agriculture were (and are) commodities or items that can be “transplanted” across the world, but it also provides a story of Mary Leiter and George Curzon as an entry point for examining these global linkages.
CHAPTER 6: THE ABSENCE/PRESENCE OF LOSS: EXPLORING TRACES OF PARADA’S WHEN THE BOUGH BREAKS

All I have are traces. I scrutinize floor plans, photographs, and newspaper articles. As bricoleur, I must piece together the textual fragments. I close my eyes and try to imagine the gallery space. I vicariously walk from one room to the next. In one room, I am surrounded by large-scale photo murals and video projections of tree branches. In another room, I gaze at ink rubbings. I can almost feel the woody roughness of the tree stumps. And in another room, I peer at a six-paneled forest of tree trunks. I am enveloped by the presence-absence of the American Elms. Although I can never fully grasp the embodied experience of the exhibit, it is through the intermingling absences and presences that I am able to (re)experience the artwork. I retrace the past, hoping to reveal the layered stories within When the Bough Breaks. I hear the silent whispers of memory and loss. I open my eyes.

As I have explored in the previous chapters, art can be a rhetorical site for critically exploring individual and collective pasts. We commemorate in a variety of ways. By sharing stories, taking photographs, and building memorial sites, we seek to preserve our lived experiences, the lives of others, and our histories. Through different visual and material artifacts, we attempt to grasp the present that continuously slips into the past. One work that addresses the themes of memory, loss, and the past is Esther Parada’s When the Bough Breaks.

Breaking the two-dimensional space of the photographic frame or computer screen, When the Bough Breaks is a multidimensional, multi-media installation merging present and past, time and space, and individual and communal memories. Described as a
“potent multimedia requiem to the American elm” (Snodgrass, 2004, p. 186), *When the Bough Breaks* documents the devastation of the elm trees within the local community, critically interrogates the effects of Dutch Elm disease on the urban landscape, and interlinks the personal loss with the national tragedy of September 11th. In her Artist’s Statement, Parada (2004) explains the scope of the exhibition:

> Indeed as a longtime resident of Oak Park, Illinois, I witnessed the loss of a substantial part of the elm canopy, including a magnificent elm which shaded the south side of my home. The loss of that tree coincided—and became inseparably identified in my consciousness—with personal family upheaval. More recently the cataclysmic collapse in New York and Washington D.C. has struck a corresponding communal blow to security and trust—although obviously on a vastly different scale. I feel more than ever the need to mourn the loss of these monumental structures; and, at the same time, to question the sources of our vulnerability. Do we rebuild or replant in a patriotic effort to rescue “yesterday’s elegance” to our neighborhoods, as promoted by the Elm Research Institute through its cultivation of the “purebred American elm”? Or do we rethink the patterns and assumptions that underlie our social/horticultural fabric? (¶ 8)

Several art critics have examined the work (Artner, 2004; Hawkins, 2004; Pendleton, 2004; Snodgrass, 2004; Workman, 2004). Pendleton (2004) states, “The multimedia installation combines photography, sound, video projection and actual trees to explore not only the haunting demise of the beloved elm, but some not-so-beloved traditions: mainly a lack of diversity in both in horticulture and in human culture” (p. 76). With “an undercurrent of immediate feeling,” Artner (2004, p. 25) claims, Parada invites
audiences into an alternative landscape where fallen trees are mourned and neighborhoods are transformed. Workman (2004) posits that the elm trees are used as “an abundant symbol for loss and change” (3). As one reviewer recounts, “The days of quiet tree lined streets are over, and this project, even though it had no personal history to me, made me feel like it was a personal loss. It made me miss the streets I have never seen” (Cohen, 2004, p. 2).

While these critiques detail the artwork and duly note the themes of loss and commemoration, little investigation has been made as to how loss is rhetorically and narratively performed within When the Bough Breaks. In this chapter, I explore how Parada’s When the Bough Breaks materially, visually, and spatially (re)constructs loss. Drawing from conceptions of trace employed in the works of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, I argue that the multimedia installation enacts multiple levels of absence/presence. Utilizing archival research to (re)collect the textual traces of the multimedia installation, I scrutinize how Parada interweaves, however temporarily, audio, video, still photographs, digital images, and the gallery space. I suggest that by (1) incorporating a variety of traces and (2) allowing the viewer to move through a gallery space, Parada co-constructs a rhetorical site of remembrance rooted in the loss of the elm trees of Oak Park. By spatially structuring the multiple traces, Parada provides an unfolding of absence/presence and encourages viewers to experience her artwork narratively.

First, I briefly review literature on representations of loss and formulate a theoretical framework that addresses the concepts of trace and absence/presence. Then, I perform a detailed descriptive analysis of When the Bough Breaks, insofar as its own
fragments can be resutured into a more or less coherent whole, examining how the different visual, material, and spatial traces enact loss and embody absence/presence. Finally, I conclude by examining how an understanding of absence/presence can be vital for visual narrativity and collective memory studies.

Traces as Absence/Presence

Presence and absence are primary components that structure the perceptions of our everyday lives (Sokolowski, 2000). We make sense of our world by identifying what things are and are not, where they begin and where they end. We utilize language to communicate what is present (i.e., what is there) and what is absent (i.e., what is not there). We live in time that is both present (presence), constituted in part by the present always fading into the past (presence becoming absence), and ever-entering the future (absence becoming presence). The seen is visible to us, and thus present, while the unseen, the invisible, is demarcated as absent. Yet, an action as simple as turning one’s own body makes what is present become absent and what was absent become present.

Much philosophical debate has centered on presence as metaphysical concept (e.g., Deleuze, 1990; Derrida, 1967/1976; Gonzalez, 2006; Hart, 2004; Heidegger, 1962, 1968; Lacan, 1977; Nancy, 1994; Sartre, 1958/2003; Sokolowski, 2000). As the foundation for Western conceptualizations of Being (c.f., Derrida, 1967/1976; Heidegger, 1962), presence has been conceptualized as that which is, the essence or being of a thing, or a state of existence. In critiquing the privileging of presence over absence in Western philosophy, Derrida (1967/1976) describes this “metaphysics of presence” as presence of the thing to the sight as eidos, presence as substance/essence/existence [ousia], temporal presence as point [stigmè] of the
now or of the moment [*nun*], the self-presence of the cogito, consciousness, subjectivity, the co-presence of the other and of the self, intersubjectivity as the intentional phenomenon of the ego. (p. 12)

Not only is presence theorized as constituting Being, presence also is conceptualized as being fundamental in locating objects (and subjects) in time and space (c.f., Buber, 1970; Smith, 2002a, 2002b). Presence is the “being-here,” the being present in the moment, the now (Nancy, 1994; see also, Smith, 2002b). As Smith (2002a) explains, “A presence is an inherence of presentness in some being” (p. 253). Indeed, these temporal and spatial dimensions of presence cultivate a sense of related-ness, a being-in-relation with the world. This related-ness connotes a sense of self-conscious experiencing or encountering of/with other beings. It is “an act of recognition, an act of identification” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 38; italics in original). As Mooney (1999) argues, “To experience the presence of things is to become aware of ourselves as coparticipants with them in one indivisible reality” (p. 33). To be in the presence of an entity means to know its essence, its Being. To be conscious or aware of something means to know or be in its presence.

Presence’s apparent counterpart, then, is absence, particularly within the binary thought of the Western metaphysical tradition. Traditionally, absence has been conceptualized as non-existence, negation, death, or lack of presence (see Bhaskar, 1994; Derrida, 1967/1976; Stamelman, 1990). Absence connotes the not-there, the unseen, the “nothingness” to the there-ness, visibility, and “something-ness” of presence. However, absence is not merely a signifier of non-existence, but a presence in its own right (see Mortimer, 1981). As Goodheart (1984) states, “Absence implies presence, the opposite of
nothingness” (p. 9). Absence assumes agency by materially and spatially organizing our experiences (Meyer & Woodthorpe, 2008). It acts upon us and structures how we live. In fact, “the absent can have just as much of an effect upon relations as recognizable forms of presence can have” (Hetherington, 2004, p. 159).

Several scholars have observed how absence is utilized in artistic representations of loss, silence, trauma, and forgetting (e.g., Irlam, 1991; Meyer & Woodthorpe, 2008; Shusterman, 1997; Stamelma, 1990; Walsh, 1998; Wong, 2007). For example, Walsh (1998) notes that artists can construct loss through the use of “structured absences” by intentionally employing language to make present something that would otherwise be absent. In their analysis of cemeteries and museums, Meyer and Woodthorpe (2008) observe that the architecture of both spaces are “characterized by a simultaneous presence and absence” (¶ 3.4). These spaces not only contain absences, but also material artifacts (e.g., historical artifacts, graves, mementos) that can function as conduits to “make the absent present” (¶ 3.8). In his analysis of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, Irlam (1991) explains that forgetfulness is “the rather singular image of absence, or more paradoxically, the presence of absence” (p. 999; italics in original). Forgetfulness is the negation of remembering, a form of absence that makes present the loss of the past. Individual memory, on the other hand, is a form of presence, of (re)membering the past into the present.

Shusterman (1997) also examines how absence plays a primary role in shaping urban spaces and constructing the urban subject. He explores, for example, how the visually absent Berlin Wall became in 1989 “the structuring principle of this unified city” and is even more present due to its absence (p. 741). Absence also reflects the urban
subjectivity. To an extreme, the “urban mentality” is one in which “we do not see or react to difference because we simply don’t care; we mentally withdraw ourselves in pathological disinterest; we are absent” (p. 747). While Shusterman argues that “urban absence” can cultivate extreme isolation and apathy for others by the urban subject, absence can be utilized as "a means through which people relate" (Empson, 2007, p. 61). As gaps, silences, fissures, or blanks within a text, absences invite the presence of viewers and their active participation in textual construction (see Iser, 1989; Schechet, 2005). By arousing audience participation, absences cultivate personal connections between audience, art, and artist. Indeed, Parada’s *When the Bough Breaks* appears to do just that.

I argue that presence and absence are not two separate and opposing entities; rather, they are enacted simultaneously in how we experience our lives, selves, and the world around us. One may be both present and absent. One may experience both absent-presences and present-absences. Specifically, I draw upon Jacques Derrida’s critique of the assumed presence/absence binary as well as his theories of the trace, the palimpsest, and the spectral. Derrida (1967/1976) asserts that there is an absence of presence embodied by language. That is, words are not only trace signifiers that make present an idea; they simultaneously embody the absences of what they signify. As Spivak (1976) explains in her introduction to Derrida’s *On Grammatology*, “Derrida’s trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience” (p. xvii). In being both present and absent, Spivak claims that the trace enacts the “strange ‘being’ of the sign: half of it always ‘not there’ and the other half always ‘not that’” (p. xvii). Trace, for Derrida
is “the presence-absence” (p. 71). It is a simulacrum of presence, a simulation that ruptures the metaphysical binaries, the “relationship to the illeity as to the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence” (p. 70). That is, nothing and everything is never fully present nor ever fully absent. For Derrida, we live in a world full of traces. As he explains,

> Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each ‘element’—phoneme or grapheme—being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the text produced only in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida, 1972, p. 26; italics in original)

Everything echoes something else in an infinite web of meanings, ideas, times and spaces. Although his ideas have been primarily enacted within literary criticism, Derrida’s ideas on language are echoed in Roland Barthes’s idea of pictorial traces. Specifically, Barthes examines the pictorial trace that embodies this “presence-absence” in photography. As he (1977) claims, photographs can never fully capture the essence of the photographed subject. Photographs are incapable of making present the actual entity in the photograph. However, photographs are (re)presentations of the past, of the “having-been-there” (Barthes, 1977, p. 44; italics in original). Photographs present images that capture a specific subject within a particular time and space. They are indices
that reveal the absence of the photographed entity and present the moment past (see Batchen, 1997; Gibbons, 2007; Lawson, 2004; Krauss, 1981). As Barthes explains, the image becomes evidence or a trace of a temporal past, a “this is how it was” (p. 44; italics in original).

Traces, be they linguistic or pictorial, are inherently linked to issues of the past. Along with probing traces within language, Derrida also interrogates traces in relation to memory. In discussing Freud, Derrida (1978/2001) explores how the “memory-trace” (Erinnerungsspur) is a neurological imprint upon the mind. It is a flash of memory, an internal neurological trigger that brings forth the recalled memory. Explains Derrida, “this impression has left behind a laborious trace which has never been perceived, whose meaning has never been lived in the present, i.e., has never been lived consciously” (p. 269). There is a world of experience that we take in, but these “memory-traces” are unconscious fragments of what we consciously remember.

Derrida further extends Freud’s “memory trace” by employing the metaphor of the palimpsest. Our memories are palimpsests (i.e., writing materials on which the original writing has been erased to make room for later writing. Even though the writing has been effaced, traces of the original remain). Like writing on a palimpsest, our memories occur in a single space (i.e., our mind); yet, multiple meanings can be inscribed into that space. Our memories are continuously being “reused” or altered, yet bear traces of their earlier forms. The trace, then, is “the erasure of selfhood, of one’s own presence, and is constituted by the threat or anguish of its irremediable disappearance, of the disappearance of its disappearance” (Derrida, 1978/2001, p. 287). That is, as we continue to live and experience the world, we constantly construct and reconstruct our memories.
through the filter of the present. As incomplete presences of the past, memories as traces are continuously at risk of being completely erased. And yet, “An unerasable trace is not a trace” (p. 287). Traces are never fully present since they necessitate absence. Traces are the remains of having-been-there and the is-no-more. Indeed, traces are simultaneously absent and present.

In addition to investigating the trace in language and within individual memory, Derrida’s concept of the spectral provides a clear theoretical framework for addressing the binaries of presence/absence and past/present. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (1993/1994) speaks of how our experiences are shaped by the “play between the spirit (*Geist*) and the specter (*Gespenst*)” (p. 126). Not only do we exist in a world of essences (e.g., presence), but we also live in a world filled with apparitions, spectral notions that haunt us (e.g., Being, God, the spirit of people). For Derrida, we can never get rid of these “ghosts” since they reside in the individual mind, leftover psychic memories or echoes of something more. Like his idea of the trace, the specter (*Gespenst*) or “a space of invisible visibility” (p. 126) is simultaneously real and not real, an absent presence or an undecidable in-between. Furthermore, Buse and Scott (1999) make note of how time is disrupted through Derrida’s *Gespenst*,

In the figure of the ghost, we see that past and present cannot be neatly separated from one another, as any idea of the present is always constituted through difference and deferral of the past, as well as anticipation of the future. (pp. 10-11).

If memory is about addressing our specters, those presences that haunt us and linger in our conscious and unconscious minds, then *When the Bough Breaks* can be
considered an attempt by Parada to reveal to us these ghosts. My analysis, then, reflects a willingness to see the specters, to explore the traces that oscillate between absence and presence. While Derrida identifies traces in language and in individual memory, and Barthes draws attention to traces in photography, I extend their theories by differentiating among traces and examining how these visual, material, aural and spatial entities act as conduits to connect the individual with collective pasts. These textual traces (e.g., an elm tree stump, a faded photograph, a song,) act as triggers to engage viewers in individual and collective memory-making. As Booth (2008) notes, “traces, then, are those markers that point or bring to light, however incompletely, a past that dwells in the hollows of the forgotten” (p. 82). They are lieux de mémoire (Nora, 1984/1996, 1989) and serve as “reminders of absent things” (Mortimer, 1981, p. 247).

While for Derrida memory is the individual addressing one’s self to remember, I am interested in how Parada, as an external agent, calls me to remember memories that I have never had and to reflect upon a past that I never directly experienced. As Derrida (1993/1994) argues,

One must see, at first sight, what does not let itself be seen. And this is invisibility itself. For what first sight misses is the invisible. The flaw, the error of first sight is to see, and not to notice the invisible. (p. 149).

Thus, I offer a "second" sight, a double take in hopes of "seeing" the invisible and (re)presenting visions of When the Bough Breaks. Specifically, I examine the traces that signify and make visible the invisible—grief, death, and loss.

Numerous scholars have examined how the visual and literary arts can provide a space for addressing loss through traces (Arruti, 2007; Cho, 2006; Feinstein, 2005;
Gibbons, 2007; Guerin & Hallas, 2007; Liem, 2007; Mortimer, 1981; Semin, Garb, Kuspit, & Boltanski, 1997; Stamelman, 1990; Taylor, 2007; Walsh, 1998). For example, in her examination of the art exhibitions Atrabilarios, La Casa Viuda, and Unland, Wong (2007) analyzes artist Doris Salcedo’s use of domestic objects to represent the collective silence and loss of the victims of political violence in Columbia. By utilizing everyday found objects, “Salcedo inscribes individual memories of traumatic loss onto the object-form in a process described as ‘relic making’” (p. 179). Indeed, the trace objects make both loss and loved ones present, even if the viewer of the art has not him or herself lost loved ones to the violence in Columbia.

The arts, as acts of commemoration, thus, provide a space to make present that which is absent, express loss which can never be fully languaged into being, and (re)present a past lost. Indeed, “Art perceives and attempts to represent an object that must always to some degree be lost in perception and lost in representation” (Schwenger, 2006, p. 14) One can never go back to the past; one can only remember it. Indeed, the past is the absent-present while the memory is the present-absent. As primary characteristics of loss and remembrance, it is vital to explore how absence and presence function within different textual sites of memory.

In the next section, I examine When the Bough Breaks as a multi-media art installation that addresses loss and highlights this process of absence/presence. I suggest that various media (e.g, video projections, census data, ink rubbings, photographs, photographic panels, etc.) are different types of traces that reveal and conceal the past in particular ways. They are tangible presences that collectively construct intangible absences—the loss of the elm trees, the alterations in a community, the national tragedy.
of September 11th, and the impossibility of nostalgia. These visual and material traces attempt to (re)call the past while calling viewers to listen to Parada’s and the community’s stories of loss. By moving through the gallery space, I am invited to experience the absences and presences of the intersecting narratives.

(Re)presenting When the Bough Breaks

In this section, I rhetorically analyze Parada’s *When the Bough Breaks*. As a temporary installation piece, *When the Bough Breaks* is a transient textual site that was exhibited at Gallery 312 in Chicago from February 6th, 2004 to March 13th, 2004. Since it no longer physically exists in its entirety, my goal is to (re)create the path a viewer would take through the installation space. As with the previous chapters, I invite the reader to come along on my journey through the artwork. Specifically, this analysis reflects my (re)collecting of archival fragments or traces of the artwork. I take up the role of bricoleur whose primary task is to use whatever means are necessary in making sense of the textual fragments (Charland, 1991; Gaonkar, 1993; Lévi-Strauss, 1966). As bricoleur, I piece together the textual traces to (re)present the overall rhetorical text. With each gallery room, I focus on how the different visual, material, spatial (and sometimes aural) traces are utilized in conjuring loss and enacting absence/presence.

I offer, therefore, one possible reading of *When the Bough Breaks*. In the following subsections, I (re)construct each space of the gallery. I investigate how Parada utilizes different trace entities, including rubbings, photographs, video projections, and inkjet prints, to invite viewers to experience the overlapping personal, communal, and national narratives of loss. Specifically, I narrate my engagement with the visual, material, spatial, and aural traces. In doing so, I examine how the artwork performs
different absences/presences. Not only am I interested in how traces within the artwork enact loss and absence/presence, I also enact this process through my analysis. Extracting information from archival materials, I examine what is no longer there. All that remains of the exhibit are traces of it. Through my rhetorical investigation, I make present (textual traces) that which is absent (the exhibition). Indeed, *When the Bough Breaks* is simultaneously absent and present for the reader and me. By moving through the (re)constituted gallery space, we travel among divergent spatial and temporal locations of various pasts and presents.

*Introductions: Entering the Exhibition*

*When the Bough Breaks* can be organized around six primary spaces: (1) Entranceway, (2) Mezzanine, (3) Main Gallery, (4) Under Mezzanine, (5) Small Gallery, and (6) Back Gallery. Even before entering the gallery, I am guided by elm stumps lining the entrance walkway. Susie Peters, Esther Parada’s sister, describes the entranceway:

> They [the elm stumps] came from sections of diseased trees cut down in Oak Park, pieces she’d [Esther had] been keeping in her garage for many years. As I recall, placing them on the way into the building was something she thought of just before the opening, but they provided the perfect touch—like skipping stones or grave stones lining the path. (S. Peters, personal communication, February 28, 2006)

These stumps, traces left from when arborists and woodcutters removed the trees, reflect life interrupted. As Novak (1976) notes, the tree stump has traditionally been “a symbol of the march of civilization” (p. 48). It represents the felled tree, a sign of human progress and dominance over nature. As Cikovsky (1979) argues, “the stump affirmed
civilization’s conquest of nature, its connotations of death—of violent death—were a constant reminder that this conquest was brutal and final, and that the wilderness that civilization destroyed could never be restored” (p. 626). While these writers have examined the symbolic function of tree stumps in American landscape painting (see also McGrath, 1989), the elm stumps of Oak Park evoke a different kind of natural symbolism. Parada’s elm stumps represent not the violent taming of nature by humans but a humane measure of horticultural medicine. To control and prevent the spread of Dutch elm disease to other American elms in the vicinity, the infected elms must be “euthanized.” For me, these stumps summon feelings of melancholy and compassion rather than a sense of dominance and destruction.

This connection between tree stumps and death also can be found with “tree stump tombstones.” Between the 1890s to the 1930s, tree stumps were a popular form of funerary art in the United States (Gillon, 1972; Stuttgen, 2000). While traditionally used as tombstones to memorialize people, Parada uses the stumps to commemorate the trees themselves. The tree stumps can then be read as tombstones of fallen trees (Beecher, 1856).

This trail of elm stumps leads up to the gallery entrance. At the glass-paned entrance door, I am greeted by these words:

The grand old patriarchs, those mighty elms, before which I often, when alone, and without affection, bowed my head, and could without shame have knelt and kissed the turf at their feet—where are they now? These trees entered into my young life as truly as the milk that made its blood.
Through the (re)articulated words, Parada positions the loss of Oak Park’s elm trees within a larger context. In quoting Oliver Wendell Holmes’s introduction to *Typical Elms and Other Trees of Massachusetts* (Dame & Brooks, 1890), Parada provides a layer of historical presence (and absence) for the elm trees. Holmes’s words portray the elms of Massachusetts while simultaneously obscure the elms of Oak Park, Illinois. With words such as “grand,” “mighty,” “bowed my head,” and “knelt and kissed,” the quote describes acts of reverence and evokes a sense of naturalistic awe.

At the same time, by reusing the words, Parada hints at a critical perspective. The elm tree connotes a sense of Americana, an idealized symbol of community and tradition (cf, Parada, 1990). Parada simultaneously honors the “the grand old patriarchs” and problematizes this symbol of tradition and patriarchal doctrine. My interpretation of the Holmes’s quote is culled from Parada’s words in her Artist’s Statement: “I’ve become conscious—and wary—of the intense fetishizing of the American elm as a symbol of patriarchy, liberty, and patriotism” (2004, ¶7). Additionally, by drawing an analogy between the cutting down of the American elms with the collapse of the Twin Towers in 2001, (as stated in her Artist’s Statement), Parada’s use of the Holmes’s quote holds a double meaning. Originally about a personal experience with elms written in 1890, it also evokes the yet-to-be ghosts of the Twin Towers. The Twin Towers become iconic presences of liberty and patriotism, “grand old patriarchs” of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Written in black, bold, and italicized lettering, this epitaph fills the door. As I read the words, I am able to see through the glass door into the gallery space. Like a screen, the words are meant for me to look through them. They are both present and absent, filtering how I will engage with the exhibit. As Mortimer (1981) explains,
Like all symbolization, writing fills a space both physically (the pages of a book, the space occupied by a sculpture) and psychically (the need or absence that prompted the creativity in the first place). Its presence thus, paradoxically, both substitutes something for the loss, undoing it or compensating for it as a loss, and serves as a trace (reminder, symbol) for the lost entity. It is both comforting and a reminder of the need for comfort. (p. 250; italics in original)

As a trace, writing becomes a proxy for the vanishing idea that must be written down or be forever lost. For me, the words echo the presence of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Esther Parada, the elms, and the Twin Towers.

Mezzanine

After opening the door and stepping through it, I walk into the mezzanine and observe a sepia-toned wall mural. It is an inkjet print derived from an illustration, Plate XXI entitled “The Whittemore Elm, Arlington” (Dame & Brooks, 1890). The mural invites me into a picturesque neighborhood where white-picket fences and elms line the walking path. Interestingly, what catches my eye is not so much the foliage, but the single lamppost in the foreground of the mural. Juxtaposed with the elm tree, the lamppost becomes a symbol of human progress. The tree may give shade, but it is human progress that gives light. Embedded within the mezzanine mural is a quote from Andrew Jackson Downing, a landscape designer and writer: “But the main street of the village is an avenue of elms, positively delightful.” His words reinforce the charm of the elm trees with their outstretched boughs. The mural represents the taken-for-granted “natural” presence of trees in human-made landscapes (e.g., villages, towns, and cities). By integrating and digitally enhancing the original 1890 illustration, Parada makes present
the historical rooted-ness of the elms. By interweaving these historical visual and verbal traces, she portrays “a framework of historical advocacy for the American elm tree which one might otherwise take for granted as a ‘natural’ feature of our contemporary environment” (Parada, 2004, ¶ 7).

Along with recognizing the elm tree as an important thread in the fabric of American life, Parada also identifies the elm as a symbol of American nostalgia. The mural represents a mythic place, an idealized image of the past that never existed (except as an imaginary place in the present). In some ways, the mural is a nostalgic trace that oscillates between absence and presence. Revealed in the nostalgic trace are the absence of and the preservation of a static past. It is a nostalgic world that calls forth “that absent time-place” (Trigg, 2006, p. 55), a yearning for a place that remains forever absent (see Casey, 1987; Hofer, 1934; Trigg, 2006). Indeed, “nostalgic memory calls attention to itself as a faded copy of a lost reality” (Stamelman, 1990, p. 8). The mural’s sepia-tones embody this “faded copy.” The mural, as nostalgic trace, makes visible the (re)constructiveness of the past and memory’s malleability.

The final visual trace I see in the mezzanine is a framed 11-inch by 14-inch photo-montage. It is the same illustration from Typical Elms (Plate XXI, “The Whittemore Elms, Arlington”) used for the entrance mural. While the mural posted in the mezzanine is an enlargement of the details of part of the image, the framed version reveals a broader view of the neighborhood. Indeed, we are able to see the scale of the Whittemore elm (which can grow up to 80 to 100 feet tall) in relation to the houses, fences, and children who sit and stand alongside the tree. Parada then cut and pastes color video stills from a 2002 block party at 600 S. Taylor Street in Oak Park into the original
sepia-toned illustration. Inserted are photographic images of children running, jumping, laughing, and playing in the neighborhood street. The huge umbrella created by the elm dwarfs the children. Here, Parada juxtaposes two different locations and times. By transplanting the children of Oak Park, Illinois to Arlington, Massachusetts, the elm becomes a trace of childhood, a “symbolic presence in the American psyche, past and present” (Parada, 1998, ¶ 1).

Specifically, my eyes are drawn to two boys located at the bottom of the frame. Their backs are to the viewer, they face the tree. One boy’s arm is raised over the shoulder of his friend. They appear to be crouched in anticipation, perhaps ready to jump for a basketball (even though no ball is in view). Their upward gaze guides me back to the central figure of the frame. It is as if they are caught in awe by the grand elm. Like the other children who have been cut and pasted into the original scene, these two boys “pop out” since they are in color. Even more so, as two Black boys, they stand in stark contrast to the sepia-toned White boys who gather around the base of the elm. The boys represent not only the changes in the Oak Park neighborhood, but also symbolize the “real” present that counters a nostalgic past. By placing them into the image, Parada makes present, the absence of racial difference (i.e., monoracial) of the past, and the presence of racial and demographic changes in the present (i.e., multiracial). The past may be sepia-toned, but the present is of many colors.

In fact, the photo-collage exemplifies Derrida’s palimpsest. The boys become a new set of figures that are “written” on top of the sepia-toned image. They are traces (i.e., video stills) upon a trace (i.e., illustration). While one can mark the vellum anew, the old, washed out ink from the original inscription still bears its trace on the paper. By creating
a photo-collage, Parada confounds time and space: it is an imaginary world rooted in no specific place (neither Oak Park, Illinois nor Arlington, Massachusetts or both). By not being grounded in one “real” location except in the reconstructed illustration, the elm tree becomes symbolic of elm trees *en genre*.

*Main Gallery*

I move to the next room, the main gallery. I am astounded by a 40-by-14.5 foot black and white wall mural. The image is an enlarged photograph (derived from a 35mm photo transparency) of an elm tree. The outstretched boughs are monumental and reach across the gray sky. Like tendrils, the smaller branches extend towards the edges of the mural. I feel as though I am walking under the crown of the tree. There is a sense of falling into or floating upward into the limbs of the elm, as the image is upside down. Indeed, as Pendleton (2004) describes, “Parada shows the elm’s great fall in a haunting and massive 40-foot mural of an upside down tree, suggesting that it has been toppled” (p. 76). I can almost feel the coarseness of the aged bark. I can almost hear the elm creak and moan when the wind blows. What is absent, however, is the actual tree. We see “through” the original photographic transparency to the elm. The photograph becomes a medium for making visible the tree. Nonetheless, the image is only a trace. The viewer is given a (re)presentation of the “haunting and massive” elm. By constructing a 40-foot mural, Parada creates an impression of the elm’s enormity and makes present a taken-for-granted figure. As a trace, the photographic mural reminds me of how the tree is no more. It is (re)placed by the mural.

The photograph, taken in 1998, is of an elm not located in Oak Park, but in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The presence of the elms in Parada’s life is not located in the
singular neighborhood and in the specific decade of the 1970s; rather, the elms are found in plural places and times from her life. By incorporating a “Cambridge” elm into the exhibit, Parada visually represents a more national loss. In fact, the loss of the American elm to Dutch elm disease reaches from New England to the Midwest (cf, Hawkins, 2004). This “natural” devastation parallels the national tragedy of September 11th that sent shockwaves throughout the United States.

My eyes move from the large mural to the bright video images projected onto the mural. They are rectangular in shape and measure approximately four or five feet in width by fifteen feet in height. The vibrant colors of the projections stand in stark contrast to the somber black and white elm. The projections, digitally recast still images from 35mm transparencies, are of children climbing on top of sections of a fallen elm. Originally taken in 1978, the personal snapshots are of the backyard of Parada’s former Scoville Street home after a thunderstorm. As Parada explains in an interview with Linda McCants Pendleton (2004),

When the branch of an elm tree fell into our yard, it created a huge green jungle gym for the neighborhood children. Eventually we lost that elm tree four years later, but it was like an Eden, this really wonderful view of children completely submerged in the leaves. (p. 76)

The mighty elm that once stood tall has been toppled. Instead of mourning the loss of the tree, the children eagerly play on the new “jungle gym.” By superimposing the projections onto the mural, the children who once mounted a collapsed elm now appear to be climbing up another elm. Here, Parada directly links the elms to childhood. With these images on a video loop, Parada seamlessly casts the projections onto the mural,
merging bodies and branches. One young, blond-headed boy in a red t-shirt and jeans curiously looks downward as he tenderly balances on a broken bough. Another boy, his face obscured by leaves, bridges his feet and hands between two divergent boughs. Still another boy reaches upward as though clinging to the trunk of the tree. The majority of images are of boys mounting the tree structure. They conjure, for me, images of firefighters and recovery workers (mostly male) at Ground Zero. While the children fervently play, I close my eyes and see the emergency rescuers frantically searching for survivors.

This connection between the elms and childhood is further reinforced by a soft baritone voice singing the lullaby “Rock-a-Bye-Baby.” Sung by Ben Glaser, Parada’s brother, Parada constructs a direct link to her own family and personal childhood. The familiar song resonates throughout the room, echoing the title of the exhibit, *When the Bough Breaks*. In fact, the lyrics are haunting: “Rock a bye baby in the treetop/When the wind blows the cradle will rock/When the bough breaks the cradle will fall/And down will come baby, cradle and all.” Originally entitled “Hushabye Baby,” the nursery rhyme was said to be the first poem written on American soil (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984). Pendleton (2004) explains the lyrics and the myth behind the song,

The lyrics are said to reflect the observations of a pilgrim boy who had seen American Indian mothers suspend birch bark cradles from tree branches, enabling the wind to rock the cradle and child to sleep. The lullaby also holds a warning on the choice of boughs. (p. 76)

The lullaby is a warning and holds a dangerous subtext (cf, Giles & Shea, 2004). Indeed, as Rollin (1994) notes,
This rhyme, with its soothing sounds and rhythms, rocks a baby and then plunges it to the ground, to injury or death. Yet it may be the single most transmitted rhyme in the canon, offered by mother to infant, generation after generation, for centuries. (p. 105)

The cryptic lyrics reflect anxieties about infancy, evoking issues of rocking and falling that are threats to the safety of the baby (see Winnicott, 1965). While the original lyrics may have focused on choosing the sturdiest boughs for cradle rocking, the meaning of the words is transformed in this new context. Placed in conjunction with the mural and video projections, the nursery rhyme appears to enact multiple meanings. It warns the projected images of children who tediously climb upon the elm boughs. And yet, ironically, the boughs they are climbing are already broken.

“Rock-a-Bye-Baby” is an audio reenactment of America’s past. It is a tradition with “traces” of violence that is never fully secured. The baby in the cradle could be interpreted as a symbol of an America that is continuously threatened by the winds of change. Like swaying elms, the Twin Towers simultaneously convey vulnerability and power. The boughs represent the choices we make as a society, as Americans, in determining how we should sustain ourselves, our traditions, and our lives. Choosing the wrong boughs could (and can) be disastrous.

Further linking the lyrics to September 11th, the song takes on a doubly eerie meaning. “And down will come baby, cradle and all” echoes in my ears. I can almost see the World Trade Center towers crumbling. With the collapse of the Twin Towers, the haunting presence of anti-Americanism and the threat of terrorism on US soil became a reality. As Taylor (2007) recounts, “This looked like one of those surgical strikes that the
U.S. military claims to have perfected. Our aviation technology and terror tactics turned against us” (p. 239). Reflecting upon September 11th, I immediately connect the Rock-A-Bye-Baby to another children’s nursery rhyme, Ring Around the Rosie. The last line, “Ashes, ashes, and they all fall down” bleeds into my experience. I recall images of people falling from Twin Towers and the layers of ash in the aftermath. My attention vacillates from the architectural structures to the loss of lives, from one nursery rhyme to another, and from the American elms to the Twin Towers.

The theme of elms and the Twin Towers as iconic “essences” of America is further articulated by a small video projected at the bottom of the mural. I estimate the video to be approximately three square feet in size. The video footage, shot in September 2000, depicts the removal of the six trees on Taylor Street in Oak Park. The whirring sound of the chainsaw slices my ears. Boughs are severed with technical precision. Woodchips and sawdust fly as the elms are cut down. Layered on top of the original video’s audio is audio from the 2002 Ground Zero closing ceremony in New York City. These are words that promise to rebuild on the site, like a replanting of disease resistant elms. By intertwining the audio with this video, Parada creates a definitive connection between the loss of the elms and the September 11th tragedy. Although the scope and impact of September 11th is “obviously on a vastly different scale,” (Parada, 2004, ¶8), the two events echo one another. Parada simultaneously mourns “the loss of these monumental structures”—the elm trees of Oak Park and the World Trade Center towers of New York City (¶ 8). The World Trade Center towers and the elms both are iconic images, symbols of America. They are the “man-made” skyscrapers and “natural”
structures that ground the United States. Through their absences, the Twin Towers and the elms encourage me to critically evaluate the (horti)cultural landscape of America.

By overlapping the mural with video, photo stills, and audio, Parada superimposes multiples pasts (e.g., 1978, 1998, 2000, and 2002) into a single present. Like individual memory that compresses time and place, these visual and aural traces occupy a single location. Nostalgia, personal stories, and national histories collapse into one another, drawing from each other different presences and absences of the elm tree. I stand for one brief moment in this (re)constructed space and travel on.

_Under Mezzanine_

Moving into the next gallery space, the under mezzanine, I am drawn to the center of the room. Cast upon the floor are five to-scale elm stump rubbings. They have been placed in a rectangular formation with one rubbing at each corner and one placed at the center. I feel as if I have stumbled across a silent grove of tombstones. Each black and white image has been mounted on black construction board and placed upon low platforms that lift it several inches off the floor. They seem to hover just above the ground and, simultaneously, appear to be slowly emerging from below. As Parada (2004) explains, the “five prints of digitally processed stump rubbings form a visceral ‘portrait’ of the trees lost at 607, 622, 630, 632, and 635 S. Taylor” (¶ 9). Like “foot prints” (Pendleton, 2004, p. 76), each rubbing reveals a unique trace of the invisible, internal world of the elm trees. I become lost in the rings, my eyes tracing the crosshatched lines and one-of-a-kind patterns of the woodgrain.

By creating rubbings of the stumps, Parada echoes the tradition of tombstone rubbings made in Europe and the United States to record genealogical information
(Bodor, 1968; Farber, n.d.; Jacobs, 1973; Ramsland, 2001). As Farber (n.d.) notes, the art of rubbing has been a longstanding technique used to reproduce relief designs of gravestone carvings. While rubbings are not limited to gravestones, Parada’s rubbings of the stumps appear to be “symbolic” tombstone rubbings, relics of the dead trees. They are direct recordings, exact replicas, of the surface of the elms.

The rubbing, however, is an inverted replica of the surface markings (Sickman, 1937). While a rubbing may be an even more accurate reproduction than a photograph, it also can only provide a two-dimensional impression of an object (see Walravens, 1980). A rubbing is a trace that attempts to (re)produce the object, a facsimile of the surface. It is a copy of an object that makes present the absent original. Adding another layer to the trace (rubbing) of the traces (the stumps) is the fact that Parada presents five digital inkjet prints of charcoal rubbings of the elms. These prints, then, are “twice-removed” from the tree stumps (e.g., traces of traces of traces).

After weaving among the rubbings and gazing at their unique markings, I approach one of the gallery walls. A digital inkjet mural of yellowed pages of the 1930 U.S. Census report for Taylor Street hangs, filling the entire wall. Transferred from microfilm, the handwritten information is “a testament to the residents whose lives intersected with the majestic elms that once lined their street” (Snodgrass, 2004, p. 186). It presents detailed demographic data that links the five elms of South Taylor Street to the past. As a trace of the 1930 neighborhood, it marks the passage of time. There are names, birthdates, ages, and a variety of countries of origin. Documented in pen and ink are the specific languages each person spoke, whether they were male or female, and if they were wife or head of the household. It is scientific evidence of a population that once
lived in Oak Park but no longer exists. The neighborhood reflected in the census is predominately white. As Pendleton (2004) observes, “Most indicated they were from the United States, New England, Germany, or Northern Europe, as opposed to Africa, Asia, or South America” (p. 76).

This overrepresentation of European-American heritage is similar to the overplanting of the American elms. Indeed, the five elm stump rubbings are symbolic of the 1930 neighborhood. Parada notes how the lack of both cultural and horticultural diversity can be devastating. For the American elm species, the Dutch elm disease spread like wildfire. Over-planted and perceived as superior to other “foreign” species of trees, many of the “purebred” American elm did not survive the infestation. The elms of Oak Park are rooted in a homogeneous past. Only through horticultural and racial/cultural diversity can the neighborhood be strengthened and sustained.¹ The 1930 census data present a very different picture from the current demographic makeup of Oak Park. While Oak Park continues to be predominately white (68.8% identify as “white”), the 2000 U.S. Census documented the racial makeup as 22.4% African American, 4.5% Latino, and 4.1% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The resistance to demographic changes of the community and a desire to seek stability through tradition interweaves with the loss of the elms. As Parada explains,

In the 1960s, two ideas were presented simultaneously on racial change and tree change. In the newspapers was language about urban blight. I tried to do that, show this conflation of messages throughout the exhibit. There are a small majority of those who want to restore the good old days’ past grandeur. I embrace a more diverse population. (Pendleton, 2004, p. 80)
Although Parada articulates this linkage between demographic and botanical changes of the community, what is absent from these visual fragments (i.e., mural and rubbings) is the tracing of the community’s transformations. While there is census data from 1930, there is no visual or material documentation of Oak Park’s demographic spread during the 1960s. By not documenting the changes, we, as viewers, are asked to “fill in” the gaps. In this gallery space, the history of the community is placed in the foreground. While the five elms were once a present part of the landscape of these 1930 residents, all that remain are traces of their past—rubbings of stumps and census data.

*Small Gallery*

I proceed to the next gallery space. Located on the floor is a sixth inkjet stump rubbing. This is all that remains of the elm that once stood tall at 631 South Taylor Street. As I look closer, I notice that this one is different from the other rubbings in the previous room. A narrow band runs through the middle of the rubbing. Through this gap, I am able to view a video projected from beneath the platform. The colorful video images dance in stark contrast to the black and white stump rubbing. The video projection displays a montage of vintage and digital footage. Here, Parada uses personal family movies, which were produced by her uncle Abe Glaser in Grand Rapids, Michigan circa 1948, and incorporates digital video footage of the Ukrainian Village neighborhood in Chicago that she shot in 2002 and 2003.

Since the strip through which the video is viewed is so thin, I can only identify fragments of the footage. There are smiling and laughing faces that stare straight back at the camera. There are children linked arm in arm, perhaps playing the childhood game, “Ring Around the Rosy.” The images are of families spending time with each other and
enjoying themselves. Along with the home movies, Parada documents “the daily routines of the neighborhood” (Snodgrass, 2004, p. 186). By having the video images peek through the rubbing, Parada inserts a sense of autobiography with the elms. Parada’s past (Grand Rapids) with her present (Ukrainian Village) move through the middle of the stump (Oak Park). It is a cross section of personal narrative and horticultural history. Not only are the elms a large, “natural” presence in Parada’s life, but Parada’s life also courses through the roots of the elm trees.

As with viewing the census data, I gain a sense of time passing with the slender strip of video. The video images are traces. They are moving images of specific times and places that are no longer present except on film. Interestingly, I notice that the band that allows the videos to emerge from below on monitors is not a straight line. Rather, two rectangular sections appear to have been cut and pasted, shifting the images a few inches above the rest of the band. The line has a stair-step quality to it. The geometrical band is a precise, but jagged cut through the natural curves of the elm stump print. Like life, one’s path is never a straight one.

Along with video monitors and stump prints, the room is filled with voices. An audio soundtrack plays and envelopes the visual display. They are the voices of Taylor Street neighbors, recorded in 2004. Interviewed by Parada, people share their experiences, memories and deep connections with their elm trees. In fact, “An audio montage of individual accounts bespoke the personal and environmental impact of the disease” (Snodgrass, 2004, p. 186). By incorporating audio recordings of her neighbors, Parada creates an intertextual space of collaborative memory-making and gives voice to the communal loss. Not only has Parada been devastated by the removal of elms; so, too,
have the other residents of Oak Park. Through these voices, the aural apparitions of September 11th echo. They are shadows of shock, grief, and sorrow. The testimonies of Taylor Street reverberate descriptions of Ground Zero as well as the environmental, medical, and emotional effects of September 11th (see Foner, 2005; Johnson, 2002a, 2002b; Kilgannon, 2002; Taylor, 2003). I am surrounded by audible testimonies that make the multi-layered losses palpable.

Their stories represent the larger loss of elms in Oak Park. Once filled with approximately 17,000 American elms in 1970, by 2004 Oak Park had only 2,300 remaining (Pendleton, 2004). Numerous local Chicago news outlets documented the removal of these historical elms (Cater, 2002; Dodge & Carpenter, 1997; McWinnie, 1998; Ryan, 2001). These are the voices of a grieving community that has been deeply impacted by the natural disaster of the Dutch elm disease. These are the voices coping with losing a neighborhood family member. In addition, the stories recollect the loss of the Twin Towers, a grieving nation whose landscape has been forever transfigured. While the September 11th tragedy is of a much larger scale, New York City becomes America’s front yard. All that remain of the two 110-story skyscrapers, incomparable in stature and grandness, is their absence.

Back Gallery

After being immersed in a sea of voices, I enter the final gallery space. I am met by a staggered succession of six banners. Each 2 foot by 6 foot banner, suspended from the ceiling, portrays a distinct trunk of a tree. Taken by Parada, these black and white photographic prints are portraits that highlight the size, texture, and uniqueness of each elm. I visually experience the rugged bark scored with its furrowed folds, flattened ridges
and oblong knots. I can almost feel the woody essence of these deciduous souls. Parada provides detailed information of these elms by constructing to-scale, close-up photographic prints. However, little visual information behind the elms is provided. With each, I am able vaguely to distinguish shadows of other trees in the background. By placing the tree into the foreground, Parada makes each bole fully present. To reinforce this presence, the elongated banner encourages me to move my eyes up and down the trunk. Finally, to highlight the mid-section of each tree trunk, Parada utilizes burning, a photographic technique to increase the exposure and darken areas of the print. The trunk fades into darkness both at the top and bottom of the banner. For me, the elms are a beautiful, yet ghostly presence.

While a viewer may assume that these hanging photographs are images of the original six fallen elms of Oak Park, they are not. Rather, they are disease-resistant hybrids.\(^3\) They are younger and stronger than their predecessors. As Parada (2004) explains, the images are “a regimented progression of trunks [that] represents contemporary American elm trees which have survived the environmental stresses of urban Chicago—three are from the alleé plantings of Grant Park, and three from the parkways of my current Ukrainian Village neighborhood” (¶10). Parada offers a new hybrid forest of elms. As hybrid elms, they take up a mixture of genetic and visual characteristics of their parent trees. As hybrids, they reveal a variety of presences and absences of the “original” American elm. They are a new breed of elms; however, with names like the Pioneer, the Homestead, the Prospector, and the Patriot, they evoke a sense of Americana and nostalgia. Similarly, plans for rebuilding at Ground Zero
discussed constructing a “Freedom Tower,” a name that reinforces national pride and Americanism.

Simultaneously, these elms do not fully exhibit the external qualities of the American elm. Gazing at several of the banners, I notice that the trunks are irregularly shaped. These images contrast with the idealized American elms with their “wine glass silhouette with a wide trunk and graceful, drooping leaves” (Pendleton, 2004, p. 73). Although the hybrids may not visually appear like the American elm, they are still identifiable as elms. The hybrids present an alternative to combating Dutch elm disease. They symbolize diversity as an essential means for surviving. By viewing this mediated elm forest, I feel a sense of closure and a glimmer of hope arising out of loss.

Interestingly, these photographic traces of six elm tree trunks act as a counterpoint to the traces of the six elm stumps from the previous rooms. It is a forest of presence rather than a grove of absence. The extended trunks represent growth, life, and renewal while the stumps signify loss and death. Before, with each room, one was looking to the past. I reminisced with Parada about the grand elm canopies. I mourned the loss of each tree when viewing the rubbings of the stumps. I listened to the voices of grieving neighbors. This final room, however, is a space that presents the future. Like the past, the future is an oscillation between presence and absence. With photographic banners of hybrid elms, Parada creates a vision of what is not-quite-present or the yet-to-be. These elms are traces of what lie ahead. The remaining public traces can be found on Esther Parada’s website at http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/projects/parada/html/art.html#.

At the end of the procession of elm prints, in the farthest corner, sits a portable digital video player on a platform. The miniature video screen displays a loop of
animation consisting of disease-resistant seedlings and a variety of healthy elms. A
number of species are shown: Valley Forge, New Harmony, Independence, Accolade,
Cathedral, New Horizon, Regal, Pioneer, Homestead, Prospector, and Patriot elms. These
American-themed names are a way of getting back to our roots. For example, the name
New Harmony calls forth the utopian colony founded in Indiana. Valley Forge recalls the
historical site where George Washington and his Continental Army survived a bitterly
cold winter during the American Revolutionary War. And Independence explicitly refers
to a celebrated American principle. Indeed, these new hybrid species’ names reinforce the
Americanism of the elm tree.

Some seeds are shaped like tear drops. Others take up the form of heart-shaped
water lily pads. Some have serrated edges while others are smooth. My eyes focus on the
winged achenes that allow the seedlings to be carried by a breeze. The delicate veins that
branch out and mimic the configuration of the boughs intrigue me. Each seedling presents
the potential to become a towering elm tree.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Esther Parada creates a multi-dimensional “relic making” space
that memorializes the loss of six elm trees within one street block in Oak Park, Illinois as
well as somberly echoes the collapse of the Twin Towers in New York City. Rooted in
this loss, Parada intertwines layers of her childhood in Michigan, the neighborhood life of
Oak Park, and the horticultural history of the elm trees in the United States. With When
the Bough Breaks, Parada cultivates an awareness of the “natural” world, a seeing with
new eyes the “urban forests” that surround us, and a sense of “absence-presence” by
(re)presenting absent trees. By incorporating trace entities such as rubbings, photographs,
video projections, audio recordings, and inkjet prints, When the Bough Breaks is an attempt
to commemorate the stunning absence of fallen trees through memorial rubbings of the remaining stumps, they reveal traces of each year’s growth, as well as the overbearing marks of the saw’s blade, and the subtler but unavoidable marks of my own digital recording and printing process. (Parada, 2002, p. 89)

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which art can be a means for communicating loss, sharing memories, and critically (re)creating nature. By analyzing archival materials, I (re)constructed with my verbal text the multi-media installation and attempted to (re)trace the multiple rhetorical and narrative branches that emerged from the artwork. Drawing from scholarship by Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, I developed a framework of the trace to examine rhetorically how different material, visual, audio, and spatial artifacts cultivate various presences, absences, and intimations of loss.

In analyzing Parada’s When the Bough Breaks, I have examined how traces possess different degrees of depth and detail. While, for Derrida, all traces may function similarly, I observed how different aural, visual, and material traces communicate varying gradations of absence and presence. Although Parada mentions September 11th in her Artist’s Statement, directly connecting her personal and communal loss to a national one, this relationship is only vaguely represented in the exhibit. Specifically, I uncovered within the mosaic of textual fragments the faint traces of September 11th and the collapse of the Twin Towers. In “seeing again,” in piecing together the exhibit as bricoleur, I was
able to make present various phantoms of the past. The visible traces incorporated in the exhibition became clues for delving into deeper traces.

As I have argued, traces are oblique copies of the original. In engaging with traces, a viewer never fully experiences the original entity. Although Parada provided rubbings, photos and even the original stumps of the lost elms, I can never directly experience the American elm trees that once canopied South Taylor Street. Even when attempting to articulate fully the loss, the absence of the lost essence remains just below the surface, resting in the silence. All that I can sense is the impression of the object’s presence. All that I can grasp is the trace. As Berger and Mohr (1982) indicate, “Before a photograph you search for what was there” (p. 279; italics in original). In sifting through the archival materials and meandering through the (re)created art gallery, I sought what was once there. No longer does *When the Bough Breaks* exist except in visual pieces, textual fragments, and (re)collected memories.

Multi-media art installations like *When the Bough Breaks*, thus, can offer three primary issues for scholars interested in rhetoric and collective memory studies. First, while visual and material rhetorical scholars have focused frequently on what is visible, further engagement with what is not visible with/in rhetorical texts also is crucial. For example, with regard to her thoughts on horticultural and societal diversity, Parada (1990) explains how “My life and the lives of those dear to me have been profoundly and intimately affected by public images—by the *invisibility* or *negative visibility* of cultural difference” (p. 1; italics in original). With *When the Bough Breaks*, Parada engages viewers to consider this “invisibility or negative visibility.” By critically juxtaposing visual, material, and audio components, Parada addresses issues such as how nostalgia
obscures racial disparities or how historical gaps and inconsistencies are altered and erased.

Just as visibility does not equal presence, neither does invisibility equal absence. One challenge, then, is to explore what is visible/not visible, what is absent/present, how absence “speaks” through texts, and how absences and presences work in conjunction with one another. Indeed, “absence is as important as presence in understanding and evaluating symbolic action” (McKerrow, 1989, p. 107). In examining narratives, for example, Walsh (1998) suggests that, “By following the visible trail of absences through a story, we begin to better appreciate exactly how what is not said relates to what is, sensing in the shadows of words those other whispers that go unheard” (p. 5).

Second, rhetorical memory texts such as When the Bough Breaks provide scholars with demonstrations of intertextuality. When engaging with a visual text, we interweave an assortment of textual fragments—memories, stories, images, and emotions—into that text. Indeed, “texts exist not as unitary and whole objects but as traces or fragments” (McKerrow, 1993, p. 62). Traces within the text become the impetus for a viewer to construct personal meanings. While a text may have intentional messages, no one can be certain of the unintended “triggers” of memory and meanings that can be evoked by the traces. As Derrida mentions, we each are haunted by specters. In analyzing When the Bough Breaks, I identified September 11th as a national specter that continues to resound and reside within myself and Esther Parada. By examining the various degrees of absences and presences, scholars can begin to consider a spectrum of traces and palimpsests that emerge from visual and material texts. If multiple traces are
continuously reinscribed upon other traces, discerning what is beneath or finding what appears to be absent is just as valuable as what is visibly present.

Finally, further examination of “temporary memorials” is needed. Most rhetorical scholarship has focused on memorials that are physically fixed (e.g., Blair, 1999; Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Ehrenhaus, 1988; Foss, 1986; Hasian, 2004). Art installations that are temporary (that is, exhibited within a limited time) possess a performative or immediacy of experience aspect that engages in absence and presence differently than texts that are viewed as more permanent. Further engagement with performance studies can aid rhetorical scholars to investigate embodied rituals and performance “texts” as well as the intersections amongst permanent, semi-permanent, and nonpermanent rhetorical texts (see Taylor, 2007). If a memorial is temporary, how is it experienced in comparison to “permanent” texts? How does the ephemeral play a role in how absence and presence is experienced? How can traces of the performance become a (re)membered text and be incorporated into the analysis of “temporary memorials”?

Through rituals of remembrance, we attempt to make present the absent beloved entity. Through stories, images, and other material relics, we attempt to memorialize those who have passed on, giving them a presence in the now. For Esther, the residents of Oak Park, all those who experienced When the Bough Breaks first hand, and, perhaps, all who (re)experience her work through my rhetorical rendering, we collectively remember the American elms. Our lived experiences, memories, and narratives intertwine and weave through the branches of the installation. We see, hear, and sense the multi-mediated loss of the elms and of the Twin Towers in countless ways. Although what we
lose can never be fully experienced, is never fully present, and can never be fully recovered, we continue to engage in the traces, oscillating between absence and presence.
Footnotes

1. Oak Park has a long history of encouraging and maintaining racial and ethnic diversity, much of which was started in conjunction with the 1966 Chicago Open Housing Movement. Within its housing program department, Oak Park operates a Diversity Assurance Program. See Goodwin (1979) and McKenzie and Ruby (2002) for more information about Oak Park’s initiatives on racial diversity and population integration. For further reading on the intersection of race and suburbia see Berry, (1975), Lake (1981), Stearns and Logan (1986).

2. The following residents of Taylor Street were audio recorded: Addie Anderson, Barb Etchingham, Nancy Fjortoft, Jon Fjortoft, Kris Sagan, Julie Samuels, AJ Schindler, John Seaton, Darryl Strouse, JoBeth Halpen-Strouse, and John VanderLaan.

3. From front to back, Parada identifies the different elms as such: Grant Park, 2001; Grant Park, 2001; Grant Park, 2001; Campbell Avenue at Walton Street, 2003; Oakley Avenue at Division Street, 2003; Campbell Avenue at Walton Street, 2003.

4. Derrida (1978) mentions the trace in relation to time: “This trace relates no less to what is called the future than what is called the past, and it constitutes what is called the present by the very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not; that is, not even to a past or future considered as a modified present” (p. 393).
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this dissertation, I have explored the narrative experience of visual texts. I theorized a visual narrative perspective grounded in a Bakhtinian understanding of dialogic intertextuality and drawing upon theories in feminism, rhetoric, and collective memory. This perspective views narrative as a sense-making process in which the rhetor and viewer intertextually co-construct textual meanings. Specifically, I have offered scrutinized artworks by Chicago-based artist Esther Parada as case studies in the examination of visual narratives. I have contended that Parada’s photographic works provide alternative ways of seeing and remembering personal and collective pasts. Indeed, I used these “memory artworks” to build a case for theorizing the process of visual narrativity, and thereby contributing to the study of rhetorical constructions of collective memory. In this conclusion, I briefly review each chapter of the dissertation. Then, I reassess what art critics have failed to observe with Esther Parada’s artworks and discuss the theoretical and methodological contributions that I have made with this dissertation. Finally, I conclude with directions for further study.

Review of Chapters

In Chapter 2, I began by reviewing three primary areas of literature: collective memory, photography, and visual narrative. I explored how remembering can be a collective, communicative process. Much of collective memory studies focuses on how history is rhetorically constructed (Batchen, 2004; Blair, 1990; DeLuca, 1999; Hasian & Carlson, 2000; Phillips, 2004; Zelizer, 1995). By observing cultural artifacts as different lieux de mémoire (“sites of memory”) (Nora, 1984/1996), scholars can examine the ways in which memory is visually and materially enacted. I argued that although rhetorical
scholars have concentrated on national scale subjects (e.g., the Vietnam War, the Oklahoma City bombing, the attacks of September 11th) when exploring collective memory, little attention has been given to vernacular engagements with the past. I suggested that “memory art” may provide a rich area of inquiry for investigating rhetorical techniques used by artists to memorialize and inventively (re)create visions of familial memory and communal pasts. Then, I focused specifically on photography and its relationship to familial memory-making. I argued that photographs are vital vernacular artifacts that can shape how we collectively remember. Indeed, memories are rhetorically constructed with, in, and through photographs. Personal photographs located in family photo albums or incorporated in memory art can encourage narrative readings by viewers. Finally, I theorized the intertextual process of narratively experiencing images. When audience members view an image, they draw from their lived experiences, memories, and other textual fragments to re-story and co-story the viewed visual text. Through the act of narrative experiencing, viewers constitute photographs as visual narratives. Extending Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, I argued that meanings of visual texts, especially memory art, are co-produced through the dialogic interaction involving rhetor, artifact, and viewer.

In Chapter 3, I reflected upon my research practices and considered the ways in which I performed a visual narrative perspective. Taking up a visual narrative approach which recognizes the critic as an embodied subject (McKerrow, 1993), emphasizes the critic’s experiences (Brock & Scott, 1980), and promotes “voice-centered research” that values situated knowledges of the individual (Harding, 1987; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998), I narrated my experiential and knowledge-questing engagement with three of Esther
Parada’s artworks. I chronicled my journey from the archives to close textual and artifactual analysis to writing the dissertation. I noted that archival research is an intertextual process that requires the rhetorical scholar to become a bricoleur who pieces together collected textual fragments. Then, I detailed the process of textually and visually analyzing each artwork to seek out different visual strategies used by Parada. Through investigating and selecting particular recurring patterns within each visual text, I attempted to understand how Parada invited me as an especially dedicated audience member to engage narratively with her artwork. Finally, I reflected upon the process of writing and verbally (re)composing the artworks. I argued that narrative writing can be conceptualized as a mode of inquiry that allows scholars to be more reflexive in their examinations of visual rhetorical texts.

In Chapter 4, I rhetorically analyzed Parada’s photomural *Past Recovery*. I demonstrated that the artwork is an evocative case study in visual tropology. I identified two visual tropes—the grid and superimposition—as rhetorical devices enacted by Parada. I argued that in *Past Recovery* the grid was used rhetorically to organize the pictorial plane, a trope that visually, psychologically and narratively (re)framed the photomural. For example, the grid spatially divides the photomural, inviting the viewer to focus on each separate photograph that composes the 8-by-12 foot artwork. Simultaneously, the grid creates a sense of temporal order, a visual logic that configures the individual photographic fragments into a structured whole. Indeed, the grid is a visual narrative plotting device that reassembles Parada’s family history into a single imaginary moment. Along with the grid, I suggested that superimposition constructed a fourth dimension, compressed and expanded time, and visually represented mental spaces
within the artwork. For example, I noted that by layering varying degrees of transparent faces, Parada creates the illusion of spatial depth within a two-dimensional plane. Superimposing images allows Parada to visually compress the past and present, collapsing time by placing family members who have never met into a singular moment of the wedding banquet. Through superimposition, Parada’s inner world of familial memory is revealed. Taken together, these two visual tropes embodied a rhetoric of montage which encompasses aesthetic strategies used by artists to rupture the visual plane. In embodying a rhetoric of montage, Parada problematized the binaries of public/private and visible/invisible. By bringing small, private images into the large, public space, Parada memorializes her family and engages viewers to critically examine how families are memorialized through personal photography. By superimposing faces and organizing family members into a grid, Parada also visually reveals the hidden kinship ties and invisible world of memories that shape our pasts.

In Chapter 5, I probed Parada’s hypertextual artwork, *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*. I documented my journey through the web-based visual narrative. I argued that the hypertextual medium allowed the viewer to take up a more active role by selecting different narrative paths through the text. Indeed, it enabled me, an audience member, to be a co-constructor of narrative meanings. Specifically, I identified narrative sequencing and (re)captioning as two primary rhetorical techniques used by Parada to encourage viewers to experience the artwork narratively. For example, audiences can move through the multi-linear narrative in various ways. By allowing the reader to choose the sequence in which to view the web pages, Parada enabled audience members to take up various readings of a single text. Depending upon the order in which one views
the pages, the emphasis of the story shifts from one area to another. Along with narrative sequencing, Parada (re)captioned the images. That is, she incorporated verbal text to disclose contextual and historical information not revealed by the pictorial text. Viewers, then, narratively engage with *Transplant* by moving between the pictorial and verbal components. Together, these rhetorical devices embodied a family photo album aesthetic that invited me to (re)construct a personal narrative within a network of global issues.

In Chapter 6, I examined enduring traces of the multimedia art installation *When the Bough Breaks*. By (re)collecting and piecing together different archival fragments, I attempted to reconstruct and verbally describe the entire artwork and to examine how Parada materially, visually, and spatially commemorated the loss of elm trees in Oak Park, Illinois. Drawing from the theoretical works of Jacques Derrida, I explored the ways in which the artwork incorporated a variety of textual traces that acted as triggers to engage viewers in individual and collective memory-making. Some examples included: the trail of elm stumps that led up to the gallery entrance and represented material “tombstones” of the trees; the Oliver Wendell Holmes’s epitaph written on the door that verbalized the American elm as the idealized symbol of Americana; the photo-collage in which Parada inserted two African American boys from Oak Park, Illinois into a photograph of an elm tree in Arlington, Massachusetts; a 40-by-14.5 foot black and white wall mural of an elm with video projections of young boys climbing a fallen elm; the lullaby “Rock-a-Bye-Baby” sung by Parada’s brother played in the main gallery that reflects the vulnerability of the American elm trees; the rubbings of elm stumps that revealed the inner woodgrain of the trees; six banners that displayed the unique trunks of hybrid elm trees that visualize the hopeful future against Dutch Elm disease. Through
these traces, I investigated how different degrees of absence and presence functioned within this textual site of memory. Finally, I vocalized my experiences of Parada’s multiple narratives of community life, horticultural history, and the national loss of September 11th as she creatively and critically memorialized the elm trees.

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

As an internationally known artist, Esther Parada’s photographic works have been shown at the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Recognized as a significant contributor to feminist contemporary photography (Drukery, 1993; Rosenblum, 1994; Sampson 2000), her critical essays have been published in art outlets such as Leonardo, Afterimage, and Journal of Social Theory in Art. Parada was part of a group of artists who have delved into issues of memory-making, personal history, and cultural narratives (e.g., May Stevens, Joan Lyons, Marcelo Brodsky, Christian Boltanski). As Sampson (2000) observes, “Her themes impinge on the neglected confluence of public and private domains, the stories of lives omitted from official record, and the frank negotiation of personal accountability in response to political dissembling and disingenuousness” (p. 140). By juxtaposing marginalized voices with historical metanarratives and emphasizing personal stories against the backdrop of cultural myths, Parada’s photographic artworks provide viewers with a rhetorical space for critically exploring and questioning the ways in which cultures (re)present the past. As Parada (1993) explains, “Ultimately my aim is to emphasize the mutability of historical narrative, whether it is carved in monuments or fixed on the printed page, recorded in a family album or a national archive” (p. 450). While numerous critics and scholars have focused on the aesthetics of Parada’s works (e.g., Mercedes,
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1998; Snodgrass, 2004), have acknowledged Parada’s reuse and digital manipulation of photographs (e.g., Bright, 1989; Kowaleski, 1992; Sampson, 2000; Ziff, 1992), and have identified the storied nature of her art (e.g., Eggemeyer, 2004; Hertz, 1997; Johnson, 1982; Sampson, 2000), there has been no comprehensive thematic examination of the visual techniques used rhetorically by Parada to invite viewers to experience her artworks narratively.

In this dissertation, I have demonstrated that Parada’s Past Recovery, Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents, and When the Bough Breaks are prime examples of memory art that have offered me, as a viewer and rhetorical scholar, inventive possibilities for (re)viewing and (re)experiencing familial narratives and collective histories. As memory art, they visually, materially, and critically encourage viewers to examine the deep personal connections with the past. Collectively, these works contribute to the study of visual narrative by exemplifying different visual rhetorical strategies artists can use to incorporate the viewer in the co-construction of textual meanings. In fact, these three works can be viewed as offering a catalogue of possible approaches for engaging with visual rhetorical art. Although there are profound differences in the rhetorical strategies of presentation, the emergent themes, and the specific stories being told across the three artworks, my analyses of them in this dissertation provide scholars with several theoretical and methodological contributions.

First, I developed a theory of visual narrativity and explored how I, as a viewer informed by life experiences and critical commentaries by others, narratively experienced images. By engaging with each artwork, I demonstrated that there are diverse visual rhetorical devices (e.g., visual tropes, hypertextuality, and traces) that shape how viewers
can narratively experience texts. While scholars have argued that visual representations possess narrative attributes such as plot, characters, and temporality (e.g., Barwell, 2009; Brillian, 1984; Ryan, 2004) and have addressed the narrative capacity of images (e.g., James & Lobato, 2004), a theory of visual narrativity offers a reevaluation of how visually composed narratives are conceptualized, and indeed how they may be experienced by viewers. Specifically, I argued that visual texts are simultaneously sites for and products of intertextual “meetings” between rhetor and viewer. That is, while the rhetor/artist selects and composes different visual components (e.g., grid, photographs, verbal text) of the work, the viewer weaves different textual fragments such as experiences, memories, stories, images, and emotions to interpret the artwork. This communicative process is an intertextual one in which both rhetor and viewer dialogically co-construct the text. In recognizing that visual narratives are constituted through this intertextual, dialogic, and collaborative process involving rhetor, text, and viewer, I have urged scholars to conceptualize artworks as open entities that are continuously being made and remade through a plurality of readings. Viewing an artwork is a unique narrative encounter because we each bring our singular backgrounds and lived experiences with us and make sense through the lenses of our individual positionalities (e.g., Semin, Garb, Kuspit, & Boltanski, 1997). Narratively experiencing a visual text is a communicative act of seeing-things-together. It involves connecting ourselves with features of the artwork that calls out to us as well as perceiving an artwork in holistic ways.

Second, I have offered in this dissertation three different though interconnected strategies for rhetorically analyzing visual texts. With each artwork, I constructed a
unique theoretical framework that was grounded in close textual analysis and that best explained how Parada invited me, as a viewer, to engage narratively with her art. With *Past Recovery*, I developed a theory of visual tropologies and considered how the visual tropes of the grid and superimposition rhetorically configured the artwork. With *Transplant: A Tale of Three Continents*, I focused upon how narrative sequencing and (re)captioning enact a familial photo album aesthetic within the hypertextual space. And with *When the Bough Breaks*, I examined the different visual and material traces that embodied various absences/presences within the artwork. Collectively, these analyses provide rhetorical scholars with diverse additional conceptual approaches for examining visual art and images. As rhetorical scholars continue to interrogate visual culture, it is necessary not only to apply traditional rhetorical principles to texts, but also to develop new critical paradigms that highlight the rhetorical capacities of visual artifacts. In the words of Edwin Black (1965), “it is only through imaginative criticism [italics added] that we are likely to learn more” (p. 177). While never losing sight of the rhetorical capacities of texts modeled on verbal strategies, rhetorical scholars can benefit from inventive, interdisciplinary attitudes drawing on concepts in such fields as media studies, art criticism, philosophy, and feminist studies. Indeed, such can yield an assortment of broad-based scholarship of visual principles and new visual rhetorical theories.

Third, this dissertation has furthered rhetorical research in collective memory. I have argued that, as rhetorical scholars, we need to continue examining the myriad of visual and material artifacts that constitute lieux de mémoire and to analyze how memories are rhetorically constructed with, in and through them. Unlike most rhetorical scholarship that has focused on metanarratives, cultural myths, and national histories
(e.g., Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Carlson & Hocking, 1988; Foss, 1986; Finnegan, 2003, 2004; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003), I sought to explore how art can perform vernacular memory work and provide an alternative location for creatively (re)constructing personal stories and collective pasts. I have argued that unlike other lieux de mémoire that trigger individual remembering, memory art invites viewers into collective memory-making spaces. Artists create memory art for public audiences, and these audiences are allowed access into the artist’s visions of the past. With each viewing of the art, multiple meanings and experiences arise. Memory art bridges the present and the past as well as private and public spheres by moving audiences to contemplate and experience issues of personal and collective remembering. Through memory art, the past becomes an interactively accomplished, intertextual mosaic of memories continually subject to new participants and cultural circumstances.

Along with these theoretical contributions, I have provided innovative methodological strategies in this dissertation. First, I have offered a visual narrative perspective that conceptualizes the role of the rhetorical critic as bricoleur. If, as McGee (1990) argues, texts are “simultaneously structures of fragments, finished texts, and fragments of themselves to be accounted for in subsequent discourse” (p. 279), then it is the responsibility of the rhetorical critic to select, interweave, and piece together intertextually these fragments towards reconstructing texts (see also Charland, 1991; Gaonkar, 1993; Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Indeed, as McKerrow (1991) explains, "Conceived in terms of performance, and appraised from the perspective of texts as unfinished fragments [italics added], a critical rhetoric allows one to 'make sense' out of the pastiche of discourse that mark our postmodern experience" (p. 76).
A text, then, is a bricolage of images, narratives, and arguments (McGee, 1990), and rhetorical criticism becomes a “to and fro of assembly and disassembly” of these texts (Charland, 1991, p. 74). As Gaonkar (1993) notes, bricolage can function as a model for the process of rhetorical invention by the rhetorical critic. Rather than viewing the text as a completed entity crafted by the rhetor, it is (re)produced by the critic through (inter)textual analysis. The text becomes a dynamic site of interaction between rhetor and viewer in which meanings are collaboratively co-constructed (see Leff, 1986).

Recognizing the critic as bricoleur also can mean taking up a more interdisciplinary attitude towards rhetorical research. As Levi-Strauss (1966) suggested, the bricoleur’s most vital task is to discover the available means necessary for accomplishing a task. Especially in investigating visual texts, rhetorical critics as bricoleurs can draw upon and interweave theoretical concepts from media studies and art criticism while grounding their analyses within rhetorical frameworks.

Second and relatedly, I have approached photographs and visual artwork as unfinished or open texts that generate multiple interpretations and meanings (see Eco, 1979a; Leitch, 1983; Ott & Walter, 2000). If, as Hasian and Carlson (2000) argue, our collective memories and narrative histories are polysemic and polyvalent in nature, then so, too, are the sites where these shared memories and stories emerge. For example, Fiske (1986) notes that there exist particular “gaps” (p. 398) or “fissures” (p. 402) within a text that allow for multiple interpretations. Readers “fill in” these textual spaces with previous knowledges and negotiate with larger cultural discourses within the text. The stories that emerge from images are always full of gaps that are constantly being filled (and refilled) by viewers. Similarly, Kumar (2000) asserts that, “there is no finished photograph. An
image can only be a part of a continually changing narrative, interrupting the authoritative discourse of a lecture on a distant history” (p. 48).

Specifically, visual texts are continuously created, reproduced, disseminated, circulated, viewed, (re)viewed, and interpreted by multiple viewers. As new eyes are exposed to an image and an image to new eyes, a multiplicity of new narrative experiences and understandings arise. While a text may be a concrete visual product produced by an artist in one particular time and place, it is continuously read and reread in multiple settings and by various audiences. Indeed, texts are polysemic in nature (Becker, 1971; Ceccarelli, 1998; Fiske, 1986; Frow, 1990; Gaonkar, 1993). They are intertextual entities co-constructed by the polyphonic artist with the multivocal audience. The rhetorical viewer/critic, then, is but one audience member who can only ever provide a partial meaning of a text (see Heffernan, 1987). Indeed, Dewey (1934) explains that, “The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it” (p. 106). As such, viewing images becomes a dialogic process whereby the viewer is an “active participant in creating a new text” (Lewis, 1999, p. 39; see also, Iser, 2000; Morgan, 1989). By theorizing visual texts as open and polysemic entities, rhetorical scholars can embrace textual plurality and encourage diverse and sometimes contradictory perspectives.

Third, this dissertation has presented a methodological approach towards analyzing visual texts that is centered on narrative experience. Pulling from feminist scholarship that privileges subjective experiences (e.g., Haraway, 2004; Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartstock, 1983) and drawing on Brock and Scott’s (1980) “experiential perspective,” I have theorized a visual narrative perspective that promotes voice-centered
research and positions the experiential voice of the critic in the forefront. Unlike traditional notions of rhetorical criticism, a visual narrative perspective is guided by the principle that a rhetorical critic engages in an experiential dialogue with the text. As I have argued, rhetorical scholars are unique audience members whose subjective experiences inform and shape their rhetorical analyses, particularly with visual texts that are polysemic in nature and elicit multiple interpretative readings. Rather than identifying and interrogating parts of a coherent narrative presented within a text such as character and plot (Foss, 1989; Lewis, 1987), a visual rhetorical approach allows the critic to examine the visual (and sometimes verbal) components that elicit narrative sense-making. By taking up a more relational attitude with a rhetorical text, the critic utilizes close textual analysis and develops themes and theoretical frameworks formulated according to recurring patterns that she or he experienced with the text.

Thoughts for Future Research

In this dissertation, I have addressed a number of theoretical and methodological issues that further the study of visual rhetoric. Nonetheless, there are several areas of interest to consider that transcend the scope of this dissertation. First, in this dissertation I only investigated three of Esther Parada’s photographic artworks. There are numerous other visual pieces by Parada that can and should be examined rhetorically. While the works I have analyzed were centered primarily on personal narratives, many of Parada’s works have addressed larger national histories (specifically in relation to Latin America) and are considered more political in nature. For example, *The Monroe Doctrine, Part One: Theme and Variations* (1987) is a commentary on U.S. policy in Latin America. In this work, Parada digitally alters a photograph of U.S. military officers training the
Nicaraguan National Guard. By incorporating a map of North and South America in the background and foregrounding quotes by U.S. government leaders, Parada creates a critical commentary about the United States’ militaristic history with the Americas.

With Define/Defy the Frame (1989), Parada constructs a lithography book that visually and verbally depicts the contrasting perspectives of U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North and Doña Maria Medina Pavón, a Nicaraguan working class woman regarding the Nicaraguan revolution. Juxtaposing the two viewpoints, Parada critiques the mediated representations of the Nicaraguan revolution and the ways in which certain narratives are elevated while others are marginalized. And with 2-3-4-D: Digital Revisions in Time and Space (1992), Parada creates a series of photographic installation pieces that examine the hegemonic mythos of Christopher Columbus present in Cuba and the Dominican Republic. As Parada (1998) describes in Native Fruits, one of the panels in the installation, “this piece juxtaposes the patronizing colonialist and racist attitudes surrounding Columbus and the ‘discovery’ of LaCruz (Cuba) manifest in images and text published during the period of the Columbian Exposition of 1893, with a panorama of contemporary figures from the streets of Havana in 1984” (p. 36).

Not only do these artworks visually (re)narrativize Latin American history, but they also highlight Parada’s frequent use of digital technology. Further exploration of Parada’s employment of computer technology with photography and the ways in which digital technology facilitates the visual strategies used by Parada to (re)present critical perspectives about history is needed. Indeed, several scholars identify Parada as a significant contributor to new media and digital photography (Bright, 1989; Kirchman, 1990; Sampson, 2000; Ziff, 1992). Concentrating on both Parada’s utilization of these
technologies along with general issues about technology’s impact on photography can lead to such rhetorical questions as: How does the alteration of images through juxtaposition, fragmentation, recontextualization, and pixelization encourage viewers to question and expand their perceptions of visual history and collective memory? How does the (re)appropriation and reuse of images, both public and personal photographs, enable and constrain how artists critique social, cultural, and political issues? And how can the prevalence and circulation of manipulated images due to digital technology be detrimental to visual “cultural workers” like Parada who wish to resist hegemonic discourses?

Second, while this dissertation focuses upon three works by Esther Parada, there needs to be more rhetorical investigation of the enormous array of contemporary artists who delve into issues of collective memory, cultural amnesia, familial histories, and the past (e.g. June Clark, Raymonde April, Donigan Cummings, Clarissa Sligh, Marcelo Brodsky, Christian Boltanski, Joan Lyons, Jordan Crandall). While rhetorical scholars have expanded their scope to include “non-traditional” texts such as memorial sites (e.g., Blair, 1990), iconic images (e.g., Hariman & Lucaites, 2003), and museums (e.g., Zagacki & Gallagher, 2009), more attention needs to be given to the fine arts. It is auspicious that some visual rhetorical scholarship has begun to examine the rhetorical potential of the visual arts (Demo, 2000; Foss, 1988; Gallagher & Zagacki, 2005; Helmers, 2004; LaWare, 1998; Scott, 1977). Additionally, some art scholars have addressed the rhetorical potential of the visual fine arts and the various rhetorics manifested in the visual texts (e.g., Gold, 2009; Grossman, 2007; Meacock, 2008; Priimägi, 2002). These works demonstrate the expansion in rhetoric of relevant objects of
inquiry and provide scholars with suggestive bases for examining how art functions in rhetorical ways.

Unlike other types of mediated messages, artistic visual productions are often characterized as creative endeavors that “derive from imagination, rather than serve as illustration, entertainment, or propaganda” (Helmers, 2004, p. 63). In contrast, by investigating the fine arts (e.g., sculpture, paintings, textile design, photographs) from a rhetorical perspective rather than critical art perspectives, scholars can consider the persuasive force of these aesthetic texts, how these visual creations encourage memory-making, and how viewers engage with them rhetorically and narratively.

Finally, while I began to delve into installation artwork (i.e., *When the Bough Breaks*) this dissertation has focused primarily upon photographic art. Further rhetorical examination of temporary artworks (i.e., art exhibits within a limited time frame) as well as embodied rituals and performance art is needed. Scholars have begun rhetorically examining sites of performance and addressing the intersection between performance studies and rhetoric (e.g., Armstrong & Argetsinger, 1989; Helmers, 2001; Jackson, 2005; Knight, 1990; McGill, 2006; Schmitt, 2004; Taylor, 2007). For example, Jasinski (1997) borrows from Bakhtin and artfully illustrates the polyphonic dimensions of *The Federalist Papers* by casting them not just as texts but as rhetorical performances that “are a vehicle for affirming, subverting, and reconstituting such elemental aspects of a society as individual and collective identity, interests, values, political principles and concepts, historical traditions, and memories of the past [italics added]” (p. 26). Similarly, sites of memory are rhetorical performances that can accomplish what Jasinski outlines.
Several art scholars also have noted the performative aspect of visual art (Greenberg, 1962; Kramer, 1953; Rosenberg, 1952). As Rosenberg (1952) argues, canvases are “an arena in which to act—rather than a space in which to reproduce, redesign, analyze or ‘express’ an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event [italics added]” (p. 22). Further exploration of how texts are performatively and rhetorically constructed can aid rhetorical scholars in probing the temporal aspects of memory-making. Insights from performance studies may also provide rhetorical scholars with diverse strategies and critical paradigms for examining these ephemeral visual, material, and performative texts.

We collect objects and images in an effort to remember what we fear will be forgotten, to resist the passing of time, and to extend our lives after death. Lieux de mémoire serve as material evidence to guide our memories. From photomurals to hypertexts to multimedia installations, contemporary artists utilize memory artwork as a type of lieux de mémoire to urge audiences to remember in critical, creative, and sometimes mysterious ways. Their artworks can open our eyes to reexamine both the past and the present and to consider new perspectives that broaden our understanding of history and culture.

Through memory art, the voices of lost histories are heard. The brushstrokes of a painting, the curves of a sculpture, or the faces of people in photographs—each can be a potential site for recollection of and reflection upon our collective pasts. With Past Recovery, Esther Parada invited me into a familial banquet and compelled me to experience narratively the family snapshot in its altered form. In revealing ways, the photographic mural gave testimony to an event long since forgotten. With Transplant: A
Tale of Three Continents, Parada escorted me into a transnational world of British imperialism, the decadent life of Mary Curzon, and horticultural connections between three continents. And with When the Bough Breaks, Parada summoned me into a commemorative space to memorialize the loss of elm trees and critically examine the taken-for-granted ways of life in U.S. society. With all three artworks, Parada retrieved memories, revealed connections between the past and present, and questioned the ways in which we remember. Her works have helped me to examine our relationship to memory and its impact on how we conceive and shape the future.

August 7, 2009

It is the day after the defense. I have finished the final edits of the dissertation and feel a wave of relief. I have been waiting for so long, I have been working so hard, for this moment. I glide my hand over the front page of the hard copy. One chapter of my life has come to a close and another has begun. While this 184-page document is a chronicle of my journey and must come to an end, it is just the beginning of my relationship with Esther. I will continue to explore the ways we narratively experience our visual world. I will continue to examine the power of photography in shaping our lives. And I will take up Esther’s call for all of us to “enlarge the dialogue to create richer and more subtle images of the world that surrounds us.”
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