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# THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA

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SVETLANA BOYM



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Designed by Elizabeth Lahey  
Text Set in Perpetua 11.5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Boym, Svetlana, 1959-

The future of nostalgia/Svetlana Boym.

p. cm. Includes index.

ISBN 978-0-465-00708-2

1. Civilization, Modern—1950-
2. Nostalgia—Social aspects.
3. Memory—Social aspects.
4. Nostalgia in literature.
5. Authors, Exiled.
6. National characteristics.
7. Biography.
8. Identity (Psychology)
9. Post-communism—social aspects.

I. Title.

CB427 .B67 2001

909.82—dc21

00-045454

23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

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## FROM CURED SOLDIERS TO INCURABLE ROMANTICS: NOSTALGIA AND PROGRESS

The word *nostalgia* comes from two Greek roots, yet it did not originate in ancient Greece. *Nostalgia* is only pseudo-Greek, or nostalgically Greek. The word was coined by the ambitious Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688. He believed that it was possible “from the force of the sound *Nostalgia* to define the sad mood originating from the desire for return to one’s native land.”<sup>1</sup> (Hofer also suggested *nosomania* and *philopatridomania* to describe the same symptoms; luckily, the latter failed to enter common parlance.) Contrary to our intuition, nostalgia came from medicine, not from poetry or politics. Among the first victims of the newly diagnosed disease were various displaced people of the seventeenth century, freedom-loving students from the Republic of Berne studying in Basel, domestic help and servants working in France and Germany and Swiss soldiers fighting abroad.

Nostalgia was said to produce “erroneous representations” that caused the afflicted to lose touch with the present. Longing for their native land became their single-minded obsession. The patients acquired “a lifeless and haggard countenance,” and “indifference towards everything,” confusing past and present, real and imaginary events. One of the early symptoms of nostalgia was an ability to hear voices or see ghosts. Dr. Albert von Haller wrote: “One of the earliest symptoms is the sensation of hearing the voice of a person that one loves in the voice of another with whom one is conversing, or to see one’s family again in dreams.”<sup>2</sup> It comes as no surprise that Hofer’s felicitous baptism of the new disease both helped to identify the existing condition and enhanced the epidemic, making it a widespread European phenomenon. The epidemic of nostalgia was accompanied by an even more dangerous epidemic of “feigned nostalgia,” particularly among

soldiers tired of serving abroad, revealing the contagious nature of the erroneous representations.

Nostalgia, the disease of an afflicted imagination, incapacitated the body. Hofer thought that the course of the disease was mysterious: the ailment spread "along uncommon routes through the untouched course of the channels of the brain to the body," arousing "an uncommon and everpresent idea of the recalled native land in the mind."<sup>3</sup> Longing for home exhausted the "vital spirits," causing nausea, loss of appetite, pathological changes in the lungs, brain inflammation, cardiac arrests, high fever, as well as marasmus and a propensity for suicide.<sup>4</sup>

Nostalgia operated by an "associationist magic," by means of which all aspects of everyday life related to one single obsession. In this respect nostalgia was akin to paranoia, only instead of a persecution mania, the nostalgic was possessed by a mania of longing. On the other hand, the nostalgic had an amazing capacity for remembering sensations, tastes, sounds, smells, the minutiae and trivia of the lost paradise that those who remained home never noticed. Gastronomic and auditory nostalgia were of particular importance. Swiss scientists found that rustic mothers' soups, thick village milk and the folk melodies of Alpine valleys were particularly conducive to triggering a nostalgic reaction in Swiss soldiers. Supposedly the sounds of "a certain rustic cantilena" that accompanied shepherds in their driving of the herds to pasture immediately provoked an epidemic of nostalgia among Swiss soldiers serving in France. Similarly, Scots, particularly Highlanders, were known to succumb to incapacitating nostalgia when hearing the sound of the bagpipes—so much so, in fact, that their military superiors had to prohibit them from playing, singing or even whistling native tunes in a suggestive manner. Jean-Jacques Rousseau talks about the effects of cowbells, the rustic sounds that excite in the Swiss the joys of life and youth and a bitter sorrow for having lost them. The music in this case "does not act precisely as music, but as a memorative sign."<sup>5</sup> The music of home, whether a rustic cantilena or a pop song, is the permanent accompaniment of nostalgia—its ineffable charm that makes the nostalgic teary-eyed and tongue-tied and often clouds critical reflection on the subject.

In the good old days nostalgia was a curable disease, dangerous but not always lethal. Leeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, opium and a return to the Alps usually soothed the symptoms. Purging of the stomach was also recommended, but nothing compared to the return to the motherland believed to be the best remedy for nostalgia. While proposing the treatment for the disease, Hofer seemed proud of some of his patients; for him nostalgia was a demonstration of the patriotism of his compatriots who loved the charm of their native land to the point of sickness.

Nostalgia shared some symptoms with melancholia and hypochondria. Melancholia, according to the Galenic conception, was a disease of the black bile that affected the blood and produced such physical and emotional symptoms as “vertigo, much wit, headache, . . . much waking, rumbling in the guts . . . troublesome dreams, heaviness of the heart . . . continuous fear, sorrow, discontent, superfluous cares and anxiety.” For Robert Burton, melancholia, far from being a mere physical or psychological condition, had a philosophical dimension. The melancholic saw the world as a theater ruled by capricious fate and demonic play.<sup>6</sup> Often mistaken for a mere misanthrope, the melancholic was in fact a utopian dreamer who had higher hopes for humanity. In this respect, melancholia was an affect and an ailment of intellectuals, a Hamletian doubt, a side effect of critical reason; in melancholia, thinking and feeling, spirit and matter, soul and body were perpetually in conflict. Unlike melancholia, which was regarded as an ailment of monks and philosophers, nostalgia was a more “democratic” disease that threatened to affect soldiers and sailors displaced far from home as well as many country people who began to move to the cities. Nostalgia was not merely an individual anxiety but a public threat that revealed the contradictions of modernity and acquired a greater political importance.

The outburst of nostalgia both enforced and challenged the emerging conception of patriotism and national spirit. It was unclear at first what was to be done with the afflicted soldiers who loved their motherland so much that they never wanted to leave it, or for that matter to die for it. When the epidemic of nostalgia spread beyond the Swiss garrison, a more radical treatment was undertaken. The French doctor Jourdan Le Cointe suggested in his book written during the French Revolution of 1789 that nostalgia had to be cured by inciting pain and terror. As scientific evidence he offered an account of drastic treatment of nostalgia successfully undertaken by the Russians. In 1733 the Russian army was stricken by nostalgia just as it ventured into Germany, the situation becoming dire enough that the general was compelled to come up with a radical treatment of the nostalgic virus. He threatened that “the first to fall sick will be buried alive.” This was a kind of literalization of a metaphor, as life in a foreign country seemed like death. This punishment was reported to be carried out on two or three occasions, which happily cured the Russian army of complaints of nostalgia.<sup>7</sup> (No wonder longing became such an important part of the Russian national identity.) Russian soil proved to be a fertile ground for both native and foreign nostalgia. The autopsies performed on the French soldiers who perished in the proverbial Russian snow during the miserable retreat of the Napoleonic Army from Moscow revealed that many of them had brain inflammation characteristic of nostalgia.

While Europeans (with the exception of the British) reported frequent epidemics of nostalgia starting from the seventeenth century, American doctors proudly declared that the young nation remained healthy and didn't succumb to the nostalgic vice until the American Civil War.<sup>8</sup> If the Swiss doctor Hofer believed that homesickness expressed love for freedom and one's native land, two centuries later the American military doctor Theodore Calhoun conceived of nostalgia as a shameful disease that revealed a lack of manliness and unprogressive attitudes. He suggested that this was a disease of the mind and of a weak will (the concept of an "afflicted imagination" would be profoundly alien to him). In nineteenth-century America it was believed that the main reasons for homesickness were idleness and a slow and inefficient use of time conducive to day-dreaming, erotomania and onanism. "Any influence that will tend to render the patient more manly will exercise a curative power. In boarding schools, as perhaps many of us remember, ridicule is wholly relied upon. . . . [The nostalgic] patient can often be laughed out of it by his comrades, or reasoned out of it by appeals to his manhood; but of all potent agents, an active campaign, with attendant marches and more particularly its battles is the best curative."<sup>9</sup> Dr. Calhoun proposed as treatment public ridicule and bullying by fellow soldiers, an increased number of manly marches and battles and improvement in personal hygiene that would make soldiers' living conditions more modern. (He also was in favor of an occasional furlough that would allow soldiers to go home for a brief period of time.)

For Calhoun, nostalgia was not conditioned entirely by individuals' health, but also by their strength of character and social background. Among the Americans the most susceptible to nostalgia were soldiers from the rural districts, particularly farmers, while merchants, mechanics, boatmen and train conductors from the same area or from the city were more likely to resist the sickness. "The soldier from the city cares not where he is or where he eats, while his country cousin pines for the old homestead and his father's groaning board," wrote Calhoun.<sup>10</sup> In such cases, the only hope was that the advent of progress would somehow alleviate nostalgia and the efficient use of time would eliminate idleness, melancholy, procrastination and lovesickness.

As a public epidemic, nostalgia was based on a sense of loss not limited to personal history. Such a sense of loss does not necessarily suggest that what is lost is properly remembered and that one still knows where to look for it. Nostalgia became less and less curable. By the end of the eighteenth century, doctors discovered that a return home did not always treat the symptoms. The object of longing occasionally migrated to faraway lands beyond the confines of the motherland. Just as genetic researchers today hope to identify a gene not only for medical con-

ditions but social behavior and even sexual orientation, so the doctors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries looked for a single cause of the erroneous representations, one so-called *pathological bone*. Yet the physicians failed to find the locus of nostalgia in their patient's mind or body. One doctor claimed that nostalgia was a "hypochondria of the heart" that thrives on its symptoms. To my knowledge, the medical diagnosis of nostalgia survived in the twentieth century in one country only—Israel. (It is unclear whether this reflects a persistent yearning for the promised land or for the diasporic homelands left behind.) Everywhere else in the world nostalgia turned from a treatable sickness into an incurable disease. How did it happen that a provincial ailment, *maladie du pays*, became a disease of the modern age, *mal du siècle*?

In my view, the spread of nostalgia had to do not only with dislocation in space but also with the changing conception of time. Nostalgia was a historical emotion, and we would do well to pursue its historical rather than psychological genesis. There had been plenty of longing before the seventeenth century, not only in the European tradition but also in Chinese and Arabic poetry, where longing is a poetic commonplace. Yet the early modern conception embodied in the specific word came to the fore at a particular historical moment. "Emotion is not a word, but it can only be spread abroad through words," writes Jean Starobinski, using the metaphor of border crossing and immigration to describe the discourse on nostalgia.<sup>11</sup> Nostalgia was diagnosed at a time when art and science had not yet entirely severed their umbilical ties and when the mind and body—internal and external well-being—were treated together. This was a diagnosis of a poetic science—and we should not smile condescendingly on the diligent Swiss doctors. Our progeny well might poeticize depression and see it as a metaphor for a global atmospheric condition, immune to treatment with Prozac.

What distinguishes modern nostalgia from the ancient myth of the return home is not merely its peculiar medicalization. The Greek *nostos*, the return home and the song of the return home, was part of a mythical ritual. As Gregory Nagy has demonstrated, Greek *nostos* is connected to the Indo-European root *nes*, meaning return to light and life.

There are in fact two aspects of *nostos* in *The Odyssey*; one is of course, the hero's return from Troy, and the other, just as important, is his return from Hades. Moreover, the theme of Odysseus's descent and subsequent *nostos* (return) from Hades converges with the solar dynamics of sunset and sunrise. The movement is from dark to light, from unconsciousness to consciousness. In fact the hero is asleep as he floats in darkness to his homeland and sunrise comes precisely when his boat reaches the shores of Ithaca.<sup>12</sup>



Penelope's labor of love and endurance—the cloth that she weaves by day and unravels by night—represents a mythical time of everyday loss and renewal. Odysseus's is not a story of individual sentimental longing and subsequent return home to family values; rather, this is a fable about human fate.

After all, Odysseus's homecoming is about nonrecognition. Ithaca is plunged into mist and the royal wanderer arrives in disguise. The hero recognizes neither his homeland nor his divine protectress. Even his faithful and long-suffering wife does not see him for who he is. Only his childhood nurse notices the scar on the hero's foot—the tentative marker of physical identity. Odysseus has to prove his identity in action. He shoots the bow that belongs to him, at that moment triggering recollections and gaining recognition. Such ritual actions help to erase the wrinkles on the faces and the imprints of age. Odysseus's is a representative homecoming, a ritual event that neither begins nor ends with him.

The seduction of non-return home—the allure of Circe and the sirens—plays a more important role in some ancient versions of Odysseus's cycle, where the story of homecoming is not at all clearly crystallized. The archaic tales around the myth, not recorded in the Homeric rendering of the story, suggest that the prophecy will come true and Odysseus will be killed by his son—not Telemachus, but by the son he bore with Circe—who would later end up marrying Odysseus's wife, Penelope. Thus in the potential world of mythical storytelling there might be an incestuous connection between the faithful wife and the enchantress that delays the hero's homecoming. After all, Circe's island is an ultimate utopia of regressive pleasure and divine bestiality. One has to leave it to become human again. Circe's treacherous lullabies are echoed in the melodies of home. So if we explore the potential tales of Odysseus's homecoming, we risk turning an adventure story with a happy ending into a Greek tragedy. Hence even the most classical Western tale of homecoming is far from circular; it is riddled with contradictions and zigzags, false homecomings, misrecognitions.

Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world with clear borders and values; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. The nostalgic is looking for a spiritual addressee. Encountering silence, he looks for memorable signs, desperately misreading them.

The diagnosis of the disease of nostalgia in the late seventeenth century took place roughly at the historical moment when the conception of time and history were undergoing radical change. The religious wars in Europe came to an end but the much prophesied end of the world and doomsday did not occur. "It was only

when Christian eschatology shed its constant expectations of the immanent arrival of doomsday that a temporality could have been revealed that would be open to the new and without limit."<sup>13</sup> It is customary to perceive "linear" Judeo-Christian time in opposition to the "cyclical" pagan time of eternal return and discuss both with the help of spatial metaphors.<sup>14</sup> What this opposition obscures is the temporal and historical development of the perception of time that since Renaissance on has become more and more secularized, severed from cosmological vision.

Before the invention of mechanical clocks in the thirteenth century the question, What time is it? was not very urgent. Certainly there were plenty of calamities, but the shortage of time wasn't one of them; therefore people could exist "in an attitude of temporal ease. Neither time nor change appeared to be critical and hence there was no great worry about controlling the future."<sup>15</sup> In late Renaissance culture, Time was embodied in the images of Divine Providence and capricious Fate, independent of human insight or blindness. The division of time into Past, Present and Future was not so relevant. History was perceived as a "teacher of life" (as in Cicero's famous dictum, *historia magistra vitae*) and the repertoire of examples and role models for the future. Alternatively, in Leibniz's formulation, "The whole of the coming world is present and prefigured in that of the present."<sup>16</sup>

The French Revolution marked another major shift in European mentality. Regicide had happened before, but not the transformation of the entire social order. The biography of Napoleon became exemplary for an entire generation of new individualists, little Napoleons who dreamed of reinventing and revolutionizing their own lives. The "Revolution," at first derived from natural movement of the stars and thus introduced into the natural rhythm of history as a cyclical metaphor, henceforth attained an irreversible direction: it appeared to unchain a yearned-for future.<sup>17</sup> The idea of progress through revolution or industrial development became central to the nineteenth-century culture. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, the representation of time itself changed; it moved away from allegorical human figures—an old man, a blind youth holding an hourglass, a woman with bared breasts representing Fate—to the impersonal language of numbers: railroad schedules, the bottom line of industrial progress. Time was no longer shifting sand; time was money. Yet the modern era also allowed for multiple conceptions of time and made the experience of time more individual and creative.

Kant thought that space was the form of our outer experience, and time the form of inner experience. To understand the human anthropological dimension of the new temporality and the ways of internalizing past and future, Reinhart Koselleck suggested two categories: *space of experience* and *horizon of expectation*;

both are personal and interpersonal. The space of experience allows one to account for the assimilation of the past into the present. "Experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and could be remembered." Horizon of expectation reveals the way of thinking about the future. Expectation "is the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet to the non-experienced, to that which is to be revealed."<sup>18</sup> In the early modern era new possibilities of individual self-fashioning and the quest for personal freedom opened a space for creative experimentation with time that was not always linear and one-directional. The idea of progress, once it moved from the realm of arts and sciences to the ideology of industrial capitalism, became a new theology of "objective" time. Progress "is the first genuinely historical concept which reduced the temporal difference between experience and expectation to a single concept."<sup>19</sup> What mattered in the idea of progress was improvement in the future, not reflection on the past. Immediately, many writers and thinkers at the time raised the question of whether progress can ever be simultaneous in all spheres of human experience. Friedrich Schlegel wrote: "The real problem of history is the inequality of progress in the various elements of human development, in particular the great divergence in the degree of intellectual and ethical development."<sup>20</sup> Whether there was indeed an improvement in the humanities and arts, and in the human condition in general, remained an open question. Yet progress became a new global narrative as a secular counterpart to the universal aspirations of the Christian eschatology. In the past two centuries the idea of Progress applied to everything—from time to space, from the nation to the individual.

Thus nostalgia, as a historical emotion, is a longing for that shrinking "space of experience" that no longer fits the new horizon of expectations. Nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress. Progress was not only a narrative of temporal progression but also of spatial expansion. Travelers since the late eighteenth century wrote about other places, first to the south and then to the east of Western Europe as "semi-civilized" or outright "barbarous." Instead of coevalness of different conceptions of time, each local culture therefore was evaluated with regard to the central narrative of progress. Progress was a marker of global time; any alternative to this idea was perceived as a local eccentricity.

Premodern space used to be measured by parts of the human body: we could keep things "at arm's length," apply the "rule of thumb," count the number of "feet." Understanding nearness and distance had a lot to do with kinship structures in a given society and treatment of domestic and wild animals.<sup>21</sup> Zygmunt Bauman writes, somewhat nostalgically,

That distance which we are now inclined to call "objective" and to measure by comparing it with the length of the equator, rather than with the size of human bodily parts, corporal dexterity or sympathies/antipathies of its inhabitants, used to be measured by human bodies and human relationships long before the metal rod called the meter, that impersonality and disembodiment incarnate, was deposited at Sevres for everyone to respect and obey.<sup>22</sup>

Modern objectivity is conceived with the development of Renaissance perspective and the need for mapping the newly discovered worlds. The early modern state relied on a certain "legibility" of space and its transparency in order to collect taxes, recruit soldiers, and colonize new territories. Therefore the thicket of incomprehensible local customs, impenetrable and misleading to outsiders, were brought to a common denominator, a common map. Thus modernization meant making the populated world hospitable to supracommunal, state-ruled administration bureaucracy and moving from a bewildering diversity of maps to a universally shared world. With the development of late capitalism and digital technology, the universal civilization becomes "global culture" and the local space is not merely transcended but made virtual. It would be dangerous, however, to fall into nostalgic idealization of premodern conceptions of space with a variety of local customs; after all, they had their own local tradition of cruelty; the "supracommunal language" was not only that of bureaucracy but also of human rights, of democracy and liberation. What is crucial is that nostalgia was not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that made the division into "local" and "universal" possible. The nostalgic creature has internalized this division, but instead of aspiring for the universal and the progressive he looks backward and yearns for the particular.

In the nineteenth century, optimistic doctors believed that nostalgia would be cured with universal progress and the improvement of medicine. Indeed, in some cases it did happen, since some symptoms of nostalgia were confused with tuberculosis. While tuberculosis eventually became treatable, nostalgia did not; since the eighteenth century, the impossible task of exploring nostalgia passed from doctors to poets and philosophers. The symptom of sickness came to be regarded as a sign of sensibility or an expression of new patriotic feeling. The epidemic of nostalgia was no longer to be cured but to be spread as widely as possible. Nostalgia is treated in a new genre, not as a tale of putative convalescence but as a romance with the past. The new scenario of nostalgia was neither battlefield nor hospital ward but misty vistas with reflective ponds, passing clouds and ruins of the Middle Ages or antiquity. Where native ruins were not available artificial ru-

ins were built, already half-destroyed with utmost precision, commemorating the real and imaginary past of the new European nations.

In response to the Enlightenment, with its emphasis on the universality of reason, romantics began to celebrate the particularism of the sentiment. Longing for home became a central trope of romantic nationalism. The romantics looked for “memorative signs” and correspondences between their inner landscape and the shape of the world. They charted an affective geography of the native land that often mirrored the melancholic landscape of their own psyches. The primitive song turned into a lesson in philosophy. Johann Gottfried von Herder wrote in 1773 that the songs of Latvian peasants possessed a “living presence that nothing written on paper can ever have.” It is this living presence, outside the vagaries of modern history, that becomes the object of nostalgic longing. “All unpolished people sing and act; they sing about what they do and thus sing histories. Their songs are archives of their people, the treasury of their science and religion. . . . Here everyone portrays himself and appears as he is.”<sup>23</sup>

It is not surprising that national awareness comes from outside the community rather than from within. It is the romantic traveler who sees from a distance the wholeness of the vanishing world. The journey gives him perspective. The vantage point of a stranger informs the native idyll.<sup>24</sup> The nostalgic is never a native but a displaced person who mediates between the local and the universal. Many national languages, thanks to Herder’s passionate rehabilitation, discovered their own particular expression for patriotic longing. Curiously, intellectuals and poets from different national traditions began to claim that they had a special word for homesickness that was radically untranslatable. While German *heimweh*, French *maladie du pays*, Spanish *mal de corazon* have become a part of nostalgic esperanto, the emerging nations began to insist on their cultural uniqueness. Czechs had the word *litost*, which meant at once sympathy, grief, remorse and undefinable longing. According to Milan Kundera, *litost* suggested a “feeling as infinite as an open accordion” where the “first syllable when long and stressed sounds like the wail of an abandoned dog.”<sup>25</sup> The whispering sibilants of the Russian *toska*, made famous in the literature of exiles, evoke a claustrophobic intimacy of the cramped space from where one pines for the infinite. *Toska* suggests, literally, a stifling, almost asthmatic sensation of incredible deprivation that is found also in the shimmering sounds of the Polish *tesknota*. Usually opposed to the Russian *toska* (even though they came from the same root), *tesknota* gives a similar sense of confining and overwhelming yearning with a touch of moody artistry unknown to the Russians, enamored by the gigantic and the absolute. Eva Hoffman describes *tesknota* as a phantom pregnancy, a “welling up of absence,” of all that had been lost.<sup>26</sup> The Por-

tuguese and Brazilians have their *saudade*, a tender sorrow, breezy and erotic, not as melodramatic as its Slavic counterpart, yet no less profound and haunting. Romanians claim that the word *dor*, sonorous and sharp like a dagger, is unknown to the other nations and speaks of a specifically Romanian dolorous ache.<sup>27</sup> While each term preserves the specific rhythms of the language, one is struck by the fact that all these untranslatable words are in fact synonyms; and all share the desire for untranslatability, the longing for uniqueness. While the details and flavors differ, the grammar of romantic nostalgias all over the world is quite similar.<sup>28</sup> "I long therefore I am" became the romantic motto.

Nostalgia, like progress, is dependent on the modern conception of unrepeatable and irreversible time. The romantic nostalgic insisted on the otherness of his object of nostalgia from his present life and kept it at a safe distance. The object of romantic nostalgia must be beyond the present space of experience, somewhere in the twilight of the past or on the island of utopia where time has happily stopped, as on an antique clock. At the same time, romantic nostalgia is not a mere antithesis to progress; it undermines both a linear conception of progress and a Hegelian dialectical teleology. The nostalgic directs his gaze not only backward but sideways, and expresses himself in elegiac poems and ironic fragments, not in philosophical or scientific treatises. Nostalgia remains unsystematic and unsynthesizable; it seduces rather than convinces.

In romantic texts nostalgia became erotic. Particularism in language and nature was akin to the individual love. A young and beautiful girl was buried somewhere in the native soil; blond and meek or dark and wild, she was the personification of nature: Sylvie for the sylvan imagination, Undine for the maritime one, Lucy for the lake region and a poor Liza for the Russian countryside. (Male heroes tended more toward bestial representations than pastoral, ranging from Lithuanian bear-counts in Prosper Mérimée's novellas to Ukrainian and Transylvanian vampires.) The romance became a foundational fiction for new national revivals in Latin America, where countless novels bear women's names.

Yet the song of national liberation was not the only melody chosen in the nineteenth century. Many poets and philosophers explored nostalgic longing for its own sake rather than using it as a vehicle to a promised land or a nation-state. Kant saw in the combination of melancholy, nostalgia and self-awareness a unique aesthetic sense that did not objectify the past but rather heightened one's sensitivity to the dilemmas of life and moral freedom.<sup>29</sup> For Kant, philosophy was seen as a nostalgia for a better world. Nostalgia is what humans share, not what should divide them. Like *Eros* in the Platonic conception, longing for the romantic philosophers and poets became a driving force of the human condition.

For Novalis, "Philosophy is really a homesickness; it is an urge to be at home everywhere."<sup>30</sup>

Like the doctors before them, poets and philosophers failed to find a precise location for nostalgia. They focused on the quest itself. A poetic language and a metaphorical journey seemed like a homeopathic treatment for human longing, acting through sympathy and similarity, together with the aching body, yet not promising a hallucinatory total recall. Heinrich Heine's poem of prototypical longing is about sympathetic mirroring of nostalgia.

A spruce is standing lonely  
in the North on a barren height.  
He drowns; ice and snowflakes  
wrap him in a blanket of white.

He dreams about a palm tree  
in a distant, eastern land,  
that languishes lonely and silent  
upon the scorching sand.<sup>31</sup>

The solitary northern spruce dreams about his nostalgic soulmate and antipode—the southern palm. This is not a comforting national love affair. The two rather anthropomorphic trees share solitude and dreams, not roots. Longing for a fellow nostalgic, rather than for the landscape of the homeland, this poem is a long-distance romance between two "internal immigrants," displaced in their own native soil.

The first generation of romantics were not politicians; their nostalgic world view was *weltanschauung*, not *real politik*. When nostalgia turns political, romance is connected to nation building and native songs are purified. The official memory of the nation-state does not tolerate useless nostalgia, nostalgia for its own sake. Some Alpine melodies appeared too frivolous and ideologically incorrect.

Whose nostalgia was it? What used to be an individual emotion expressed by sick soldiers and later romantic poets and philosophers turned into an institutional or state policy. With the development of Swiss nationalism (that coincided with the creation of a federal state in the nineteenth century), native songs were rewritten by schoolteachers who found peasant melodies vulgar and not sufficiently patriotic. They wrote for the choral repertoire and tried to embrace patriotism and progress. The word *nation* was one of the new words introduced into the native songs.

"To forget—and I would venture say—to get one's history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical study is a danger to nationality," wrote Ernest Renan.<sup>32</sup> The French had to forget the massacres of St. Bartholomew's night and massacres of the Cathars in the south in the thirteenth century. The *nostos* of a nation is not merely a lost Eden but a place of sacrifice and glory, of past suffering. This is a kind of inversion of the initial "Swiss disease": in the national ideology, individual longing is transformed into a collective belonging that relies on past sufferings that transcend individual memories. Defeats in the past figure as prominently as victories in uniting the nation. The nation-state at best is based on the social contract that is also an emotional contract, stamped by the charisma of the past.

In the mid-nineteenth century, nostalgia became institutionalized in national and provincial museums and urban memorials. The past was no longer unknown or unknowable. The past became "heritage." In the nineteenth century, for the first time in history, old monuments were restored in their original image.<sup>33</sup> Throughout Italy churches were stripped of their baroque layers and eclectic additions and recreated in the Renaissance image, something that no Renaissance architect would ever imagine doing to a work of antiquity. The sense of historicity and discreteness of the past is a new nineteenth-century sensibility. By the end of the nineteenth century there is a debate between the *defenders of complete restoration* that proposes to remake historical and artistic monuments of the past in their unity and wholeness, and the lovers of unintentional memorials of the past: ruins, eclectic constructions, fragments that carry "age value." Unlike total reconstructions, they allowed one to experience historicity affectively, as an atmosphere, a space for reflection on the passage of time.

By the late nineteenth century nostalgia acquired public style and space. The "archive" of traditions that Herder found in folk songs was no longer to be left to chance. The evasive locus of nostalgia, the nomadic hearth of the imagination, was to be fixed for the sake of preservation. Memorative signs of the nation were to be found in card catalogues. The elusive temporality of longing was encased and classified in a multitude of archival drawers, display cases and curio cabinets. Private collections allow one to imagine other times and places and plunge into domestic daydreaming and armchair nostalgia. The bourgeois home in nineteenth-century Paris is described by Walter Benjamin as a miniature theater and museum that privatizes nostalgia while at the same time replicating its public structure, the national and private homes thus becoming intertwined. Public nostalgia acquires distinct styles, from the empire style favored by Napoleon to the



new historical styles—neo-Gothic, neo-Byzantine, and so on—as the cycles of revolutionary change are accompanied by restorations that end up with a recovery of a grand style.

Nostalgia as a historical emotion came of age at the time of Romanticism and is coeval with the birth of mass culture. It began with the early-nineteenth-century memory boom that turned the salon culture of educated urban dwellers and landowners into a ritual commemoration of lost youth, lost springs, lost dances, lost chances. With the perfection of album art, the practice of writing poems, drawing pictures and leaving dried flowers and plants in a lady's album, every flirtation was on the verge of becoming a memento mori. Yet this souvenirization of the salon culture was playful, dynamic and interactive; it was part of a social theatricality that turned everyday life into art, even if it wasn't a masterpiece. Artificial nature begins to play an important part in the European imagination since the epoch of baroque—the word itself signifies a rare shell. In the middle of the nineteenth century a fondness for herbariums, greenhouses and aquariums became a distinctive feature of the bourgeois home; it was a piece of nature transplanted into the urban home, framed and domesticated.<sup>34</sup> What was cherished was the incompleteness, the fossil, the ruin, the miniature, the souvenir, not the total recreation of a past paradise or hell. As Celeste Olalquiaga observed for the nineteenth-century imagination, Atlantis was not a “golden age” to be reconstructed but a “lost civilization” to engage with through ruins, traces and fragments. The melancholic sense of loss turned into a style, a late nineteenth-century fashion.

Despite the fact that by the end of the nineteenth century nostalgia was pervading both the public and private spheres, the word itself was acquiring negative connotations. Apparently there was little space for a syncretic concept of nostalgia during a time in which spheres of existence and division of labor were undergoing further compartmentalization. The word appeared outmoded and unscientific. Public discourse was about progress, community and heritage, but configured differently than it had been earlier. Private discourse was about psychology, where doctors focus on hysteria, neurosis and paranoia.

The rapid pace of industrialization and modernization increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition. Yet this new obsession with the past reveals an abyss of forgetting and takes place in inverse proportion to its actual preservation. As Pierre Nora has suggested, memorial sites, or “lieux de memoire,” are established institutionally at the time when the environments of memory, the *milieux de memoire*, fade.<sup>35</sup> It is as if the ritual of commemoration could help to patch up the irre-

versibility of time. One could argue that Nora's own view is fundamentally nostalgic for the time when environments of memory were a part of life and no official national traditions were necessary. Yet this points to a paradox of institutionalized nostalgia: the stronger the loss, the more it is overcompensated with commemorations, the starker the distance from the past, and the more it is prone to idealizations.

Nostalgia was perceived as a European disease. Hence nations that came of age late and wished to distinguish themselves from aging Europe developed their identity on an antinostalgic premise; for better or worse they claimed to have managed to escape the burden of historical time. "We, Russians, like illegitimate children, come to this world without patrimony, without any links with people who lived on the earth before us. Our memories go no further back than yesterday; we are as it were strangers to ourselves," wrote Petr Chaadaev in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>36</sup> Not accidentally, this self-critical statement could well apply to the young American nation too, only with a change in tone that would supplant Russian eternal fatalism with American eternal optimism. Ignoring for a moment the massive political differences between an absolute monarchy and a new democracy, we can observe a similar resistance to historical memory (albeit with a different accent). Early-nineteenth-century Americans perceived themselves as "Nature's Nation," something that lives in the present and has no need for the past—what Jefferson called the "blind veneration of antiquity, for customs and names to overrule the suggestions of our own good sense."<sup>37</sup> The lack of patrimony, legitimacy and memory that Chaadaev laments in the state of the Russian consciousness is celebrated in the American case as the spirit of the new, at once natural and progressive. Intellectuals of both new nations share an inferiority-superiority complex vis-à-vis old Europe and its cultural heritage. Both are antihistorical in their self-definition, only Russians lag behind and Americans run ahead of it. Chaadaev, discoverer of the nomadic Russian spirit, was declared a madman upon his return from abroad and became an internal immigrant in his motherland. Slavophiles appropriated Chaadaev's critique of the Russian mentality and turned spiritual longing (*toska*) and the lack of historical consciousness into features of the Russian soul and a birthmark of the chosen nation. In the American case this youthful forgetfulness allowed for the nationalization of progress and the creation of another quasi-metaphysical entity called the American way of life. On the surface, little could be more different than the celebration of Russian spiritual longing and the American dream. What they share, however, is the dream of transcending history and memory. In the Russian nineteenth-century tradition it is the writer and peasant who become carriers of the national

dream, while in the American case the entrepreneur and cowboy are the ultimate artists in life. Unlike their Russian counterparts, they are strong and silent types, not too good with words. Wherein in Russia classical literature of the nineteenth century viewed through the prism of centralized school programs became a foundation of the nation's canon and repository of nostalgic myths, in the United States it is popular culture that helped to spread the American way of life. Somewhere on the frontier, the ghost of Dostoevsky meets the ghost of Mickey Mouse. Like the characters from *The Possessed*, they exchange wry smiles.

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# THE ANGEL OF HISTORY: NOSTALGIA AND MODERNITY

How to begin again? How to be happy, to invent ourselves, shedding the inertia of the past? How to experience life and life alone, “that dark, driving, insatiable power that lusts after itself?” These were the questions that bothered the moderns. Happiness, and not merely a longing for it, meant forgetfulness and a new perception of time.

The modern opposition between tradition and revolution is treacherous. *Tradition* means both delivery—handing down or passing on a doctrine—and surrender or betrayal. *Traduttore, traditore*, translator, traitor. The word *revolution*, similarly, means both cyclical repetition and the radical break. Hence tradition and revolution incorporate each other and rely on their opposition. Preoccupation with tradition and interpretation of tradition as an age-old ritual is a distinctly modern phenomenon, born out of anxiety about the vanishing past.<sup>2</sup> Bruno Latour points out that “the modern time of progress and the anti-modern time of ‘tradition’ are twins who failed to recognize one another: The idea of an identical repetition of the past and that of a radical rupture with any past are two symmetrical results of a single conception of time.”<sup>3</sup> Thus there is a codependency between the modern ideas of progress and newness and antimodern claims of recovery of national community and the stable past, which becomes particularly clear at the end of the twentieth century in light of its painful history.

The word *modernity* was first explored by the poets, not political scientists; Charles Baudelaire elaborated this term in his essay “The Painter of Modern Life” (1859–60).<sup>4</sup> Baudelaire gives a dual image of modern beauty and the experience of modernity: “Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art of which the other half is eternal and the immutable.” Baudelaire’s project is to “represent the present,” to capture the transience, the excitement, the protean qualities of the modern experience. Modernity is impersonated by an un-

known woman in the urban crowd with a veil and lots of makeup. This happened to be a love at last sight:

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.  
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,  
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse  
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.  
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,  
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,  
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Un éclair . . . puis la nuit!—Fugitive beauté  
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître  
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?

Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! Trop tard! Jamais peut-être!  
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,  
O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais

The traffic roared around me, deafening!  
Tall, slender, in mourning—noble grief—  
A woman passed, and with a jewelled hand  
gathered up her black embroidered hem;

stately, yet blithe, as if the statue walked . . .  
and trembling like a fool, I drank from eyes  
as ashen as the clouds before the gale  
the grace that beckons and the joy that kills.

Lightning . . . then darkness! Lovely fugitive  
whose glance has brought me back to life! But where  
is life—not this side of eternity?

Elsewhere! Too far, too late or never at all!  
Of me you know nothing, I nothing of you—you  
whom I might have loved and who knew it too!<sup>5</sup>

The poem is about a pursuit of modern happiness that results in an erotic failure. Happiness—*bonheur* in French—is a matter of good timing, when two peo-

ple meet at a right time, in a right place and somehow manage to arrest the moment. The time of happiness is like a time of revolution, an ecstatic modern present. For Baudelaire the chance of happiness is revealed in a flash and the rest of the poem is a nostalgia for what could have been; it is not a nostalgia for the ideal past, but for the present perfect and its lost potential. At the beginning the poet and the unknown woman move in the same rhythm of the descriptive past tense, the rhythm of howling Parisian crowds. The encounter brings the poet a shock of recognition followed by spatial and temporal disorientation. The time of their happiness is out of joint.

I am reminded of the early-twentieth-century photographs of Jacques-Henri Lartigue, who used still images to capture motion. He worked against the media; instead of making his photographic subjects freeze in a perfect still, he captured them in motion, letting them evade his frame, leaving blurry overexposed shadows on the dark background. Fascinated by the potential of modern technology, Lartigue wanted photography to do what it cannot do, namely, capture motion. Intentional technical failure makes the image at once nostalgic and poetic. Similarly, Baudelaire, fascinated by the experience of a modern crowd, wanted it to do what it couldn't: to arrest the moment. Modern experience offers him an erotic encounter and denies consumation. In revenge, Baudelaire tries to turn an erotic failure into a poetic bliss and fit the fleeing modern beauty into the rhythm of a traditional sonnet. Intoxicated by transience, nostalgic for tradition, the poet laments what could have been.

The unknown woman is an allegory of *modernité*; at once statuesque and fleeing, she exemplifies eternal beauty and the modern transience. She is in mourning, possibly a widow, but for a poet her veil is that of anticipatory nostalgia for the lost chance for happiness. Her mourning mirrors his, or the other way around. The poet and the woman recognize each other's fleeing nostalgias. Desiring to arrest time, he mixes opposites in a fury; in one moment he experiences a new birth and death, a pleasure and pain, darkness and light, the present and the eternal. The woman is lost and found and then lost again and then found again in the poem. Rhyming functions like a form of magic; it slows the reader down, making the poem reflect on itself, creating its own utopian temporality where the fleeing erotic fantasy of a lonely urban dweller can be remembered and even memorized. Rhyming delays the progression of the poem toward an inevitable unhappy ending. The time it takes to read the poem is longer than it might have taken the poet to encounter and lose his virtual beloved. The urban crowd is not merely a background but an actor in the scene, its collective anonymity highlighting the singularity of the encounter. The modern city is the poet's imperfect home.<sup>6</sup>

Baudelaire's definition of poetic beauty is politically and aesthetically incorrect on many contemporary counts. In "The Painter of Modern Life" he compares modern beauty to women's makeup, and writes that artifice and artificiality are far preferable to the "original sin" of nature (Baudelaire here goes against Rousseau); and, of course, his poetic muse was of doubtful virtue. For Baudelaire, art gives new enchantment to the disenchanting modern world. Memory and imagination, perception and experience are intimately connected. The poet writes at night after wandering all day in the urban crowd that is his cocreator. Modern art, then, is a mnemonic art, not merely an invention of a new language.

While Baudelaire identified modern sensibility and coined the noun *modernity*, the adjective *modern* has its own history. Derived from *modo* (recently just now), it comes into usage in the Christian Middle Ages; initially it meant "present" and "contemporary," and there was nothing radical about it. The militant and oppositional use of the word is what was "modern" and new. Modern acquires polemical connotations in seventeenth-century France during the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns.<sup>7</sup> The word did not refer to technological progress but to the argument about taste and classical antiquity. In the eighteenth century "to modernize" often referred to home improvement.<sup>8</sup> By the early twentieth century modern experience became identified by George Lukacs as "transcendental homelessness." The home improvement must have gone too far.

It is crucial to distinguish *modernity* as a critical project from *modernization* as a social practice and state policy that usually refers to industrialization and technological progress. Modernity and modernisms are responses to the condition of modernization and the consequences of progress. This modernity is contradictory, critical, ambivalent and reflective on the nature of time; it combines fascination for the present with longing for another time. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the last instance of dialogue between artists, scientists, philosophers and critics in an attempt to develop a comprehensive understanding of the modern condition and a new conception of time. Albert Einstein and Pablo Picasso, Nikolai Lobachevsky—the inventor of an alternative geometry—and Velemir Khlebnikov—the founding father of the Russian avant-garde—shared the same preoccupations.

Three exemplary scenes of reflective modern nostalgia are at the center of this discussion: Baudelaire's love at last sight, Nietzsche's eternal return and Alpine forgetting and Benjamin's confrontation with the angel of history. Baudelaire looks back at urban transience, Nietzsche, at the cosmos and the wilderness, and Benjamin, at the wreckage of history. Baudelaire tried to "represent the present" through a shock experience and juxtaposition of opposites, Nietzsche, through

self-conscious and involuntary irony, and Benjamin, through a dialectic at a standstill and the unconventional archeology of memory. All three poetic critics of modernity are nostalgic for the present, yet they strive not so much to regain the present as to reveal its fragility.

Baudelaire's encounter with modern experience was full of ambivalence; his poetry is populated with nostalgic Sphinxes and Swans—from antiquity to old Paris. He dreams of exotic pastoral utopias where aristocratic idleness, languor and voluptuousness are uncorrupted by the vulgarity of the bourgeoisie. Yet unlike the romantics he does not scorn the urban experience and, on the contrary, becomes electrified in the urban crowd. It is this elusive, creative, deafening urban theatricality that gives him the promise of happiness. Had Baudelaire left Paris for a while he might have been nostalgic for that particularly electrifying experience. Baudelaire, however, is critical of the belief in the happy march of progress that, in his view, enslaves human nature. For Baudelaire, present and new are connected to openness and unpredictability, not to the teleology of progress. Baudelairean Paris becomes a capital of ambivalent modernity that embraces the impurities of modern life.

Curiously, Dostoevsky visited Paris at around the same time and returned to Russia outraged. He described Paris not as a capital of modernity but rather as a whore of Babylon and the symbol of Western decadence: "It is a kind of Biblical scene, something about Babylon, a kind of prophecy from the Apocalypse fulfilled before your very eyes. You feel that it would require a great deal of eternal spiritual resistance not to succumb, not to surrender to the impression, not to bow down to the fact, and not to idolize Baal, not to accept it as your ideal."<sup>9</sup> For Dostoevsky, modern urban life becomes apocalyptic, and modernity is idol worship; he translates it back into the language of religious prophecy, opposing the Western fall from grace to the Russian "eternal spiritual resistance." No wonder the word *modernity* still lacks its equivalent in Russian, in spite of the richness and variety of artistic modernism. Both modern nostalgics and critics of progress, Baudelaire and Dostoevsky parted ways and did not share the same urban love at last sight.

The confusion and proliferation of derivatives around the word *modern* demonstrates how difficult it is to represent the present. Baudelaire was a melancholic and affectionate modern artist who mourned the vanished "forest of correspondences" in the world yet also explored the creative potentials of the modern experience. Baudelaire, in Marshall Berman's formulation, was a modernist of impurity who did not try to free his art from the contradictions of modern urban life.<sup>10</sup>



The ambivalent experience of modernity and nostalgia inspires not only nineteenth-century art but also social science and philosophy. Modern sociology was founded on the distinction between traditional community and modern society, a distinction that tends to idealize the wholeness, intimacy and transcendental world view of the traditional society. Tönnies writes: "In *Gemeinschaft* (community) with one's family, one lives from birth on, bound to it in well and woe. One goes into *Gesellschaft* (society) as one goes into a foreign country."<sup>11</sup> Thus modern society appears as a foreign country, public life as emigration from the family idyll, urban existence as a permanent exile. Most of the nostalgic modern sociologists, however, are not antimodern, but rather they are critical of the effects of modernization; objectivization of human relationships through the forces of capitalism and growing bureaucratization of daily life. Max Weber dwelled on the tragic ambivalence of the modern "rationalization" and bureaucratic subjugation of individual and social relations to the utilitarian ethics that resulted in the "disenchantment of the world," the loss of charisma and withdrawal from public life.<sup>12</sup> The retreat into a newly found religion or reinvented communal tradition wasn't the answer to the challenge of modernity, but an escape from it.

For Georg Simmel, some forces of modernization threatened the human dimensions of the modern project—those of individual freedom and creative social relations. His is the Baudelairian version of nostalgia, based firmly in the life of a modern metropolis. Simmel sees a growing cleavage between the objectified forms of exchange and open-ended and creative sociability that is at once a "play-form" and an "ethical force" of the society. This modern ethics consists in preserving the noninstrumental quality of human relationships, the unpredictable living, feeling existence, an ability to carry ourselves through eros and social communication "beyond the threshold of our temporary bounded life."<sup>13</sup> Simmel is nostalgic for the vanishing potentials of modern adventure of freedom. His is an erotic sociology that longs for an artistic rather than institutional or economic conception of modern social relations.

The object of nostalgia can vary: traditional community in Tönnies, "primitive communism" of the prefeudal society in Marx, the enchanted public life in Weber, creative sociability in Georg Simmel or the "integrated civilization of antiquity" in early Georg Lukacs. Lukacs coined the term of modern "transcendental homelessness" and defined it through the development of art as well as social life. Lukacs's *The Theory of the Novel* (1916) opens with an elegy of epic proportions: "Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths—ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and

yet it is like home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars."<sup>14</sup> This is no longer nostalgia for one's local home but for being at home in the world, yearning for a "transcendental topography of the mind" that characterized presumably "integrated" ancient civilization. The object of nostalgia in Lukacs is a totality of existence hopelessly fragmented in the modern age. The novel, a modern substitute for the ancient epic, is a sort of "half-art" that has come to reflect the "bad infinity" of the modern world and the loss of a transcendental home. Lukacs moved from aesthetics to politics, from Hegelianism to Marxism and Stalinism, erring through many totalizing utopias of the twentieth century, faithful only to a nostalgia for a total worldview that emerged early in his work.

Nietzsche looks for happiness beyond the integrated civilization and traditional communities of the past. The encounters with an unknown woman of doubtful virtue in the crowded city didn't quite work for him. Nietzsche's modernity was not metropolitan, but individual and cosmic. His conception of eternal return suggests a way of overcoming the very premise of nostalgia, the irreversibility of time and unrepeatability of experience. Promising an escape from modern transience, it challenges the opposition between chaos and control, linear and circular time:

This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not extend itself, but only transforms itself . . . a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without income . . . a sea of forces flowing and flushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back with tremendous years of recurrence, with ebb and a flow of its forms.<sup>15</sup>

Nietzsche's poetic fragments about eternal return evoke Greek philosophy; however, like the word *nostalgia*, this kind of eternal return is only nostalgically Greek. Moreover, it has a distinct modern aspect: self-creating modern subjectivity characterized by the "will to power." Nietzsche scholars continue to argue over the contradictory notion of eternal return and whether it is primarily subjective or cosmological.<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche returned many times to the idea of eternal return but always with a difference, always recreating a new aspect of it, remaining at the end a tantalizing modern ironist, not a systematic or scientific philosopher.

Yet nostalgia creeps into Nietzschean images, haunting the scenes of ultimate oblivion when the hero hopes to move beyond memory and forgetting into cosmos and wilderness. Nietzsche did not succeed in being at home in a household "without expenses and without losses." Homesickness overcomes him. Only his

icon of modern nostalgia is not a statuesque unknown woman but a well-known superman, Zarathustra, at home only in his own soul: "One should live upon mountains. With happy nostrils I breathe again mountain freedom. At last my nose is delivered from the odour of all humankind. The soul tickled by sharp breezes as with sparkling wine, sneezes—sneezes and cries to itself: Bless you!" Thus the refuge of the modern philosopher is not so modern. Rather, this is an Alpine landscape of the romantic sublime and Swiss souvenir postcards. Nietzsche plays a drama of social theatricality—of sneezing and saying "bless you" in the theater of his soul. The philosopher and his hero-supermen are no urban flâneurs. Nietzsche called himself a "good European," but he never visited Baudelaire's Paris, "the capital of the nineteenth century." The Nietzschean "perfect moment" is not an urban epiphany, but a soulful recollection on a mountaintop.

In the "Uses and Abuses of History" Nietzsche offers a critique of monumental and antiquarian history and presents an argument for reflective history and life's healthy forgetfulness. In the description of that healthy forgetfulness Nietzsche reproduces another pastoral setting of nostalgia, that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, complete with cowbells. A modern man is described as a "deprived creature racked with homesickness for the wild" whom the philosopher invites to contemplate his fellow animals and learn to be happy without the burden of the past:

Observe the herd as it grazes past you: it cannot distinguish yesterday from today, leaps about, eats, rests, digests, leaps some more, and carries on like this from morning to night and from day to day, tethered by the short leash of its pleasures and displeasures to the stake of the moment, and thus is neither melancholy nor bored. . . . The human being might ask the animal: "Why do you just look at me like that instead of telling me about your happiness?" The animal wanted to answer, "Because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say,"—but it had already forgotten this answer and hence said nothing, so that the human being was left to wonder.<sup>17</sup>

The philosopher longs for the cows' unphilosophical worldview but alas, the unthinking animal doesn't reciprocate. The philosophical dialogue with the happy cows is a comic failure. Nostalgic for a prenostalgic state of being, the philosopher falls back on irony. The irony in this case displaces the philosopher from his own vision. The cows graze past him, taking away the vision of happiness. Remembering forgetting proves to be even more difficult than representing the present that Baudelaire attempted to do in his poetry. Irony, in Nietzsche's case, reflects the

ambiguity of the condition of modern man, who sometimes appears as a demiurge of the future and sometimes as an unhappy thinking animal.

"It is precisely the modern which always conjures up prehistory," wrote Walter Benjamin.<sup>18</sup> Benjamin partook in the critique of progress and historic causality in a somewhat different manner. Haunted by the burden of history, he couldn't escape into nature or prehistory. Nietzsche's happy cows or Marx's primitive communities held little fascination for Benjamin. Like Nietzsche, Benjamin was an eccentric modern thinker, only his modern Arcadia wasn't the Alpine peak but the Parisian shopping arcades and urban flea markets. Benjamin's modern hero had to be at once a collector of memorabilia and a dreamer of future revolution, the one who doesn't merely dwell in the bygone world but "imagines a better one in which things are liberated from the drudgery of usefulness."

The ultimate test for Benjamin's modern hero was the trip to Moscow in the winter of 1926–27. Benjamin went to the Soviet capital three years after Lenin's death for both personal and political reasons to see his woman friend, Asja Lacis, and to figure out his relationship to the Communist Party. The journey resulted in erotic failure and ideological heresy. Benjamin's romance with official communism followed the same slippery streets of wintry Moscow as his romance with Asja. Instead of personal happiness and intellectual belonging, Benjamin gained a paradoxical insight into Soviet life with uncommon flashes of lucidity. Benjamin surprised his leftist friends for whom Moscow was supposed to be a capital of progress and a laboratory of the future world revolution by describing the outmoded collection of village toys and bizarre assortment of objects sold at the flea market: exotic dream birds made of paper and artificial flowers, the main Soviet icon, the map of the USSR and the picture of the half-naked mother of God with three hands next to the images of saints, "flanked by portraits of Lenin, like a prisoner between two policemen." Somehow these bizarre everyday juxtapositions of past and future, images of premodern and industrial, of a traditional Russian village playing hide-and-seek in the Soviet capital were for Benjamin important clues that defied ideological representations. The incongruent collage of Moscow life represented an alternative vision of eccentric modernity that had a profound influence on the later twentieth century development. In spite of its minor errors, Benjamin's account of Moscow in the late 1920s in retrospect is more lucid and understanding than many other foreign accounts of the time.

Benjamin thought of Past, Present and Future as superimposing times, reminiscent of contemporary photographic experiments. In his view, every epoch dreams the next one and in doing so revises the one before it. Present "awakens" from the dreams of the past but remains "swollen" by them. Swelling, awakening,

constellation—are Benjaminian images of the interrelated times. Thus Benjamin, like Nietzsche and other modern nostalgics, rebelled against the idea of irreversibility of time, only instead of the image of the Nietzschean waves of eternal return, he proposed pearls of crystallized experience. Nor does Benjamin ever entertain the ideal scenes of nostalgia—integrated civilization or wilderness of oblivion. Instead he plays with a “fan of memory” that uncovers new layers of forgetting but never reaches the origin: “He who had once begun to open the fan of memory, never comes to the end of its segments. No image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside.”<sup>19</sup> Benjamin wished to “fan a spark of hope in the past,” to wrest a historical tradition anew from an empty continuum of forgetting. Constellations are the instance when the past “actualizes” in the present and assumes the “now of recognizability” in a flash. They result in revolutionary collisions or profane illuminations. Benjamin’s method can be called archeology of the present; it is the present and its potentialities for which he is most nostalgic.

Benjamin loved Baudelaire’s poem dedicated to the unknown passerby. The poet experiences a shock of recognition that provides a pang of pleasure and pain. She might be lost as a love at first sight, but not as a “love at last sight,” in Benjamin’s expression. She is recovered by the poem that finds new resonances in the future. In the same way, stories of the oppressed people or of those individuals who were deemed historically insignificant, as well as souvenirs from the arcades and discarded objects from another era can thus be rescued and made meaningful again in the future. This could have struck us as an oddly optimistic vision of someone who resists the chaos and disposability of objects and people in the modern age, had Benjamin not had his own catastrophic premonition. Faithful to his method of material history, Benjamin accumulated in his little notebooks a great number of observations, snapshots of daily life, quotes and clippings that were supposed to distill his historical insights and offer “constellations” in which the past merges with the present or the present prefigures the future. Among those pearls that he shared with his friends was a report from Vienna dated 1939 about the local gas company that stopped supplying gas to the Jews. “The gas consumption of the Jewish population involved a loss for the gas company, since the biggest consumers were the ones who didn’t pay their bills. The Jews used the gas especially for committing suicide.”<sup>20</sup>

After all, the birth of the nostalgic ailment was linked to war. In the twentieth century, with its world wars and catastrophes, outbursts of mass nostalgia often occurred following such disasters. At the same time, the experience of mass destruction precludes a rosy reconstruction of the past, making reflective minds

suspicious of the retrospective gaze. Benjamin offers us an icon of catastrophic modernity in his description of a Paul Klee painting.

A Klee painting, "The Angel of History," shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>21</sup>

If we suspend for a moment this messianic vision, we might confront this angel of history just as Benjamin describes him: on the threshold of past and future, framed by the modern painting. The angel doesn't touch us directly, he looks toward us but not at us; diverting our gaze from the stormy vision of progress, yet not allowing us to turn back. The angel can neither make whole the past nor embrace the future. The storms of paradise mirror the wreckage of history, inverting the vectors of past and future. The angel of history freezes in the precarious present, motionless in the crosswinds, embodying what Benjamin called "a dialectic at a standstill." Yet even here a messianic premodern vision collides with the visual dialectics of modern painting, where contradictory meanings and images coexist without any possible resolution or synthesis and where a new geometry of space allows for many alternative planes of existence. The angel's hair unfolds like indecipherable sacred scrolls; his wings are turned inside-out like a Möbius strip where future and past, left and right, back and front appear reversible.

This angel of history exemplifies a reflective and awe-inspiring modern longing that traverses twentieth-century art and goes beyond *isms*. The local versions of the history of modern art, such as those of Clement Greenberg, influential primarily in the American context, or Peter Bürger, that apply mostly to the Western European artistic movements—particularly surrealism—excommunicated by Greenberg, received enough critical attention. There is another tradition of nineteenth- and twentieth-century art and thought that needs to be rescued in a Benjaminian manner, a hybrid tradition of impure modernity. In this tradition the search for a new language could explore the dialects of the past, not only the es-

perantos of the future (Stravinsky versus Schoenberg, in music); estrangement can be not only an artistic but also an existential principle; politics can vary from utopian to dystopian and anarchic, sabotaging both the bourgeois common sense and the new revolutionary orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

Twentieth-century art was enamored of the prefixes *neo* and *post* and multiple *isms*. Postmodernism was the latest of such movements.<sup>23</sup> Postmodernists rehabilitated nostalgia together with popular culture, but nostalgia remained restrained within quotation marks, reduced to an element of historic style; it was not a quest for another temporality. At the end, even the postmodernism of resistance admitted its paradoxical failure. As Hal Foster remarks, postmodernism did not lose, but “a worse thing happened; treated as fashion, post-modernism became *demodé*.”<sup>24</sup>

Instead of being antimodern or antipostmodern, it seems more important to revisit this unfinished critical project of modernity, based on an alternative understanding of temporality, not as a teleology of progress or transcendence but as a superimposition and coexistence of heterogeneous times. Bruno Latour wonders what would happen if we thought of ourselves as having “never been modern” and studied the hybrids of nature and culture, of past and present, that populate the contemporary world. Then we would have to retrace our steps and slow down, “deploy instead of unveiling, add instead of subtracting, fraternize instead of denouncing, sort out instead of debunking.”<sup>25</sup>

Off-modern art and lifestyle explores the hybrids of past and present. Some of the meanings of the adverb *off* relevant to this discussion include: “aside” and “off-stage,” “extending and branching out from,” “somewhat crazy and eccentric” (off-kilter), “absent or away from work or duty,” “off-key,” “offbeat,” occasionally off-color but not offcast. In this version of modernity, affection and reflection are not mutually exclusive but reciprocally illuminating, even when the tension remains unresolved and longing incurable. Many off-modernist artists and writers come from places where art, while not marketable, continued to play an important social role and where modernity developed in counterpoint to that of Western Europe and the United States, from Rio de Janeiro to Prague. Russian writer and critic Victor Shklovsky, inventor of estrangement, wrote his most nostalgic texts right after the revolution during his brief exile in Berlin. Instead of marching in step with the revolutionary time, looking forward to the bright future, the writer followed a zigzag movement, like the knight in a chess game, facing up to unrealized potentials and tragic paradoxes of the revolution: the knight can move vertically and horizontally, cross black and white squares, challenge the authority. Shklovsky suggested that cultural evolution doesn’t always happen through a direct line from parents to children but through a lateral line, from uncles and

aunts. Marginalia of a given époque doesn't simply become its memorabilia; it might contain the kernels of the future. Among the off-modern artists there are many exiles, including Igor Stravinsky, Walter Benjamin, Julio Cortázar, Georges Perec, Milan Kundera, Ilya Kabakov, Vladimir Nabokov, who never returned to their homeland, as well as some of the most sedentary artists, such as the American Joseph Cornell, who never traveled but always dreamed of exile. For them, an off-modern outlook was not only an artistic credo but a lifestyle and a world-view. The off-modernists mediate between modernists and postmodernists, frustrating the scholars. The eccentric adverb *off* relieves the pressure of being fashionable and the burden of defining oneself as either pre- or postmodern. If at the beginning of the twentieth century modernists and avant-gardists defined themselves by disavowing nostalgia for the past, at the end of the twentieth century reflection on nostalgia might bring us to redefine critical modernity and its temporal ambivalence and cultural contradictions.



"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism," wrote Walter Benjamin. These words appear on the writer's tombstone in Port Bou, Spain, in a seaside Catholic cemetery enjoying a panoramic view of the Pyrenees.<sup>26</sup> In fact, this is not really a tombstone but a memorial to the writer whose grave remains unmarked. Benjamin, a German Jewish war refugee, who lived the last decade of his life in voluntary exile in France, committed suicide on the French-Spanish border in 1940 when his passage into safety was denied. He once ironically referred to himself as "the last European," incapable of emigrating to the promised land (be it Palestine or the United States).

"Why are you looking for Benjamin?" the man in the local Chamber of Commerce asked me, when I visited Port Bou in 1995. "He is not even from here. There are many other interesting things to see in town." Indeed, Port Bou, a bustling Catalan frontier town with a large migrant population from southern Spain, has little to do with Benjamin. That insurmountable border Benjamin was not allowed to cross now amounts to an old customs shack, a Coca-Cola stand and a few multilingual ads for the new borderless Europe. I read the inscription on the memorial in Catalan: "To Walter Benjamin, a German philosopher." (The same inscription is translated into German.) Somehow it upsets me that Benjamin, who was never accepted as a philosopher in his lifetime (certainly not in Nazi Germany), received this posthumous, nostalgic title from Catalan and German gov-



ernments. Why not at least “German-Jewish man of letters,” as Hannah Arendt called him, or even “a European writer”? Next to the stone is an unfinished monument to the writer, a contested ruin and construction site whose sponsorship is debated between the German, Spanish and Catalan regional governments. For now it is called a monument to the European exiles in all three languages to avoid international conflict. The work, by Dana Karavan, represents a passageway, Benjamin’s favorite metaphor (as in *Passage*, a nineteenth-century shopping arcade, where he discovered much of his longing). Only this chimneylike metallic passageway resembles more closely a staircase to death or even a gas chamber, not a display of urban souvenirs and commodities. Finding this image too grim and unfortunately predictable, *I walk down the staircase of sorrow toward the sea where Benjamin’s ashes might have found their resting place. Here a surprise awaits me.*

Down below there is no exit. Yet neither is there a dead end. Instead I see breaking waves, white foam shimmering in the twilight and my own uncanny reflection. There is no wall at the end of the passage reminding us of the wreckage of the past, but a reflective glass, a screen for transient beauty, a profane illumination. An homage to modern nostalgics.

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## THE DINOSAUR: NOSTALGIA AND POPULAR CULTURE

Benjamin's idea of modernity conjuring up prehistory has a paradoxical echo in American popular culture. It can be dubbed a Jurassic Park syndrome, in which the most modern science is used for the recovery of the prehistoric world.<sup>1</sup> Technostalgia doesn't reflect on itself; futuristic and prehistoric, it appears all-embracing, escaping from contemporary history and local memories. Popular culture made in Hollywood, the vessel for national myths that America exports abroad, both induces nostalgia and offers a tranquilizer; instead of disquieting ambivalence and paradoxical dialectic of past, present and future, it provides a total restoration of extinct creatures and a conflict resolution. American popular culture prefers a technopastoral or a techno-fairy tale to a mournful elegy. Yet even in a techno-fairy tale, an attempt to make the past come alive turns into a horror movie, where the adventures of science and progress barely skirt irrational fears. Jurassic Park becomes a terrifying version of the Garden of Eden that the hero and heroine revisit and leave voluntarily.

Dinosaurs are ideal animals for the nostalgia industry because nobody remembers them. Their extinction is a guarantee of commercial success; it allows for total restoration and global exportability. Nobody will be offended by improper portrayal of the dinosaur, not even animal rights activists. (As a warning, the tyrannosaur in Jurassic Park made a preemptive strike and ate the lawyer.) Dinosauromania started as an American national obsession; exploration of nature and achievements in science were later matched by cinematic special effects that together conspired to reanimate the extinct creature. America became the promised land of the dinosaurs. The dinosaur is America's unicorn, the mythical animal of Nature's Nation. Asians and Europeans had their folklore and their dragons; Americans have their scientific fairy tales that often involve love and

death of some prehistoric monster. The blond beauty usually loves the beast and the man tries to conquer both. Paleontology and fossil archeology was a parallel to classical archeology. While the Renaissance in Europe occupied itself with unearthing its classical heritage, America's renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century (and thus the beginning of American global prominence) needed a prehistoric heritage—to outdo Europe in scale and age.

*Jurassic Park* is not an obvious nostalgia film and may be a puzzling choice as such for Americans. The film is oriented largely to children, who are not known to be nostalgic. It has neither Proustian moments of individual longing for a lost place and time, nor total Disney-style recreation of small-town life with period-clothed teenagers kissing on the spacious back seats of 1950s cars. The film exemplifies a different kind of nostalgia, not psychological but mythical, that has to do with a heroic American national identity. This kind of mythical nostalgia has geopolitical implications, since the dinosaur is a creature of global popular culture exported all over the world. What might appear as an expensive children's game, innocuous and universal in the United States, strikes viewers in other parts of the world as an exemplary staging of the American myth, the myth of a new world that forgot its history and recreated prehistory brand-new.

*Jurassic Park* exhibits a variety of nostalgic creatures and artifacts. The living biological wonder sprung from an amber fossil, a fragment of the intangible past. "Qué lindo," says the Hispanic manager of the mythic construction site. "How beautiful"—those words remain in Spanish, not translated for the gringos. For a moment, the everyday management of the construction site and the lawyer's petty preoccupation with insurance policies are interrupted for a transient epiphany. The tiny translucent fossil with a prehistoric insect is blown up by the camera as a vision of mysterious beauty. The amber fossil is a typical nineteenth-century souvenir, a miniature fragment of melancholic beauty, a memento mori that would find its place in a cozy home collection of an old-world bourgeois. In nineteenth-century culture the amber fossil would have been something to be cherished for its own sake, an object of insatiable longing, reminding one of lost civilizations and of limits of modern knowledge.

The creator of *Jurassic Park* doesn't have time to dust his jewels. Popular culture has little patience for ambivalence. The grandpa-entrepreneur who started his American career with building conventional attractions such as a flea circus got tired of creating illusions. He intended to bring the past back to life, to make something real, that one "could see and touch." *Jurassic Park* is a nostalgic version of an ultimate colonial paradise behind computer-guarded barbwire, only the colonial dream is displaced into prehistory. The creator of *Jurassic Park* destroys

the amber fossil, extracts the prehistoric insect who supposedly bit the dinosaur, obtaining from a drop of its preserved blood the DNA to recreate the extinct giant. The director wasn't going to waste film time on lingering close-ups of the amber fossil just to ponder its beauty (that's for foreign films with subtitles); rather, the amber is a necessary piece of the scientific puzzle, the origin of the miracle of restored past. From miniature fragment comes total reanimation of the extinct creature; the beauty of miniature is destroyed for the creation of the gigantic theater of the sublime. The sublime, as defined by Edmund Burke, usually relies on superhuman scale and its capacity to induce horror. The reanimated dinosaur is the vision of the American sublime. Indeed, the biggest challenge for the film's actors is to feign astonishment, to look awe-stricken and astounded. There are peaceful moments here too, when harmony with prehistoric nature appears possible and the humans find a bond with their extinct brothers. Stealing among the roots of a tropical tree and safely concealed within its branches, the scientist and kids witness an Edenic world lost to modern man, the undisturbed life of prehistoric herds, not Nietzschean cows (too prosaic and not physically fit) but graceful swanlike reptiles.

In Hollywood cinema the creatures of special effects sometimes appear more believable and "realistic" than humans. Monsters and aliens must look plausible; the Mohicans must have historically correct hairdos. The most sympathetic and humane characters in those movies are half beasts or half machines who are allowed to long for their lost or never achieved humanity.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, humans are represented stereotypically and in accordance with the strict rules of political correctness of the moment. What is nostalgic in *Jurassic Park* is not the reconstruction of the past but the vision of the film itself: it is the fairy-tale world ruled by a patriarch-entrepreneur who invites two scientists who need funds to sponsor their outdated digs for the adventure of a lifetime. Allan, the scientist-hero, is a man of traditional values. His entry line in the film is "I hate computers," and after the first glimpse of *Jurassic Park* he admits that his brand of science is extinct, like the dinosaur. In his didactic hero's journey he encounters the dragon (here, dinosaur) as well as his own inner self (not the inner child, but the potential father). The hero overcomes the dragon, saves the children and wins a princess. His rival, "chaotician-mathematician" Dr. Malcolm, looks like an upscale immigrant from the independent cinema of the 1970s–1980s with a more expensive leather jacket. Malcolm questions the patriarch's directorial control, reflects on life versus lifelikeness and tries to seduce the woman scientist by explaining to her the theory of unpredictability. In the Hollywood movie, however, the intellectual never gets the girl; he should be grateful that at least he is spared the humiliating

death of the lawyer. The world of Jurassic Park is the world where justice triumphs, where each man gets his dinosaur encounter that reveals his true self. Both the woman and the girl in the film are traditionally feminine and scientifically inclined. Yet the most politically correct creature is the dinosaur herself. Created all female, the dinosaurs develop the capacity to mutate into males if they so choose, disturbing the male scientist-entrepreneur's view of the impossibility of female-only animal reproduction.

*Jurassic Park* is a kinder, gentler version of didactic techno-fairy tale: it incorporates the debate about the limits of human control over nature and the responsibility of entrepreneurs who spare no expense to make the past come alive, yet the film itself never shies away from doing just that with the help of expensive computer animation. If the hero and heroine are made of the right stuff, nature and technology can coexist in harmony; thus in the last shots of the film the couple of scientists marvel at the beauty of the sky, where natural birds and steel birds, the airplanes, hover happily together over the human world.

It turns out that the restoration of the dinosaur in its full glory has its own history and coincides with America's own growing prominence.<sup>3</sup> The dinosaur becomes a figure for American greatness. Thus when the Empire State Building was completed in New York City right after the stock market crash of 1929, it was described as a "lonely dinosaur," the belated American monument. At the turn of the nineteenth century there was a real vogue for the dinosaur fossils that represented new advances in science. The reconstruction of Brontosaurus took place in 1906 and Tyrannosaurus in 1912, on the eve of World War I, when America was on the verge of becoming a world power.<sup>4</sup> The hunt for dinosaur was a belated cowboy adventure that fostered dinosaur hucksterism and the so-called bone wars. The bone warriors had little concern for historic and natural preservation; their goal was money and spectacle, so they often broke the bones they found to make their creature more spectacular, more appealing to the museum curators. The dinosaurs were exhibited in the gigantic halls of the newly established National Museum of Science, and it took special iron armatures to keep them erect. The iron and steel armatures made in Pittsburgh were themselves a great achievement of the American industrial revolution. Whether scientifically correct or not, the armatures managed to put the dinosaur "back on his feet" for the first time in a hundred million years. During World War I the skeletons of reconstructed dinosaurs were protected as the national heritage and safeguarded against supposed German attack, on a par equal with that of the president and the U.S. Constitution.

The representation of the dinosaur evolved with the progress of industry. The Tyrannosaurus with steel armature gave way to the mass-produced plastic di-

nosaurus of the 1950s, the cute heralds of postwar American pop culture. The plastic dinosaur became a toy of international kitsch, virtually indestructible, flexible, made of the progressive substance of the future. By the 1980s, computer technology made the prehistoric past most vivid and sublime. In the view of one commentator, the *Tyrannosaurus-rex* dinosaur became a kind of “predator-entrepreneur, sleek and swift, the monster of global capitalism.” In the late 1980s dinosaur revisionists began to question the veracity of computer animation and made subversive claims that actual extinct *Tyrannosaurus* might have been incapable of eating a lawyer, unless the lawyer was already dead, since in the revisionist view there is no definitive evidence that the creatures were carnivorous and not scavengers. (This might invite a Hitchcockian resolution to the *Jurassic Park* series, in which the *Jurassic Park* disaster was a coverup for the lawyer’s murder.) In the 1990s doubt was cast on the happy world of reconstructed dinosaurs. The most recent displays in the American Museum of Natural History in New York represent a new “sensitive dinosaur”; the exhibits now are about eggs, parenting, scientists’ dilemmas. It is a “warmer and greener tale of a creature” who “saw the light of the family values and the beauty of biodiversity.”<sup>75</sup> In 2000 a new discovery shook the scientific world: the heart of a dinosaur. The extinct giant might have been closer to us than we thought, in all respects. Indeed, the *Tyrannosaurus rex* from *Jurassic Park* already may have become a nostalgic dinosaur, the extinct creature of turn-of-the-century special effects and their global appeal.

If original nostalgia was a disease of Swiss mercenary soldiers who didn’t wish to fight and die away from their motherland (even for its honor), pop nostalgia is often a disease of war buffs, not war veterans who prefer to fight staged battles on their own terms. Civil War battlefields have been turned into nostalgic sites where history might be buried but the “experience of battle” can be thoroughly recreated. The attention to detail is great: every element of the uniforms and type of gun is catalogued with utter precision, to make the experience of the battle “as real as possible.” Everything short of killing. Matters of race and other ideologies do not enter the picture. Not surprisingly, the majority of participants prefer to be Confederates, for their uniforms are more exotic. The battle often occurs within one’s own ranks between “hard cores” and “farbs” (as in “far be it from me to know”). The hard core resent the casualness of the other’s demeanor and brand them outright traitors for such sins as wearing modern glasses, zippers, shoes, and, worst of all, for daring to come to the battlefield in cotton underwear instead of wearing nothing, like the real men of the past. This is a grass roots equivalent of the hi-tech conception of victimless war, equally unreal. As in the romantic conception of the

nineteenth-century American Nature's Nation, "experience" has come to be a substitute for history in twentieth-century popular culture. Recreated battles do not approximate the actual experience of war as much as another real-life experience—that of being an extra on a movie set. Authenticity here is visual, not historical. There is a deep-seated fear of reflection on history and its blank spots, on the irreversibility of time, that challenges the dream of eternal youth and possibility of eternal recreation. As Umberto Eco observed, the "frantic desire for Almost Real arises only as a neurotic reaction to the vacuum of memories, the Absolute Fake is offspring of the unhappy awareness of present without depth."<sup>6</sup>

Nostalgic longing was defined by loss of the original object of desire, and by its spatial and temporal displacement. The global entertainment industry of nostalgia is characterized by an excess and complete availability of desirable souvenirs that often surprised Eastern European visitors. Whereas the objects of past regimes were carefully purged from sight in Eastern Europe as well as in China and Southeast Asia (an oblivion enforced by destruction), in the West objects of the past are everywhere for sale. The past eagerly cohabits with the present. Americans are supposed to be antihistorical, yet the souvenirization of the past and obsession with roots and identity here are ubiquitous. One could speak about "inculcation of nostalgia" into merchandise as a marketing strategy that tricks consumers into missing what they haven't lost. Arjun Appadurai defines it as "ersatz nostalgia" or armchair nostalgia, "nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory."<sup>7</sup> Obviously, any nostalgia has a utopian or atopian element, but commercialized nostalgia forces a specific understanding of time. Time is money. The present costs as much as the past. Transience itself is commodified in passing. All artifacts of civilization are made available and disposable through mass reproduction; thus the consumer enjoys both the modern convenience and primitive pleasure of fetish possession. Ersatz nostalgia promoted by the entertainment industry makes everything time-sensitive and exploits that temporal deficit by giving a cure that is also a poison.

There is one inviolable code in Hollywood cinema—that of fast-paced editing. The character can be of any race, class or sexual orientation, in any stage of undress, but to show him, her or it act in the real time of cinema verité is an ultimate taboo that no producer will allow. The viewer always has the option of leaving the movie theater or changing channels; yet there is something about the timing of popular entertainment that takes hold of his mind. It is no longer the content of the images but the pace of editing itself that has a visceral impact on the viewer and puts an invisible taboo on any form of reflective longing. Consumer nostalgia has a short attention span and both are encouraged by the media;

attention deficit disorder indeed might become a cure for old-fashioned longing that took too much time for daydreaming and thinking.

American popular culture is growing more and more self-referential and all-embracing; it quickly absorbs the inventions of high culture, but as in Clement Greenberg's good old definition of kitsch, the entertainment industry still mass-reproduces the effects of art and stays away from exploring the mechanisms of critical consciousness. Unless you are a hopelessly nostalgic foreigner, you cannot even long for anything outside of pop culture. American popular culture has become a common coin for the new globalization. Cultural differences are often masked behind visual similarities. While the availability of American entertainment in Eastern Europe and Asia was greeted at first as a sign of new openness, its expansion and ubiquity became more problematic over time, especially when Western popular culture gradually became synonymous with democratization and supplanted other experiments with democracy. Moreover, local nostalgics skillfully appropriated global language to air their discontent. Mafia bosses borrow global nostalgic fashions and style themselves à la *Godfather III*. Now they call themselves *biznesmeny* and send their children to England, where they play with baby Tyrannosaurus.

Yet when the global dinosaur is transplanted outside its American homeland, the nostalgic technopastoral acquires a different meaning. Looking through the Russian newspapers from August 1999, I came across the title "The Agony of the Dinosaur." This, however, was not a sequel to *Jurassic Park*, but an account of a recent political crisis, Yeltsin's latest reshuffling of the cabinet and the appointment of a new prime minister, Vladimir Putin. Other cultures are not so obsessed with prehistoric or futuristic visions. Godzilla is a historical monster that allowed Japan to speak about the trauma of World War II and the nuclear attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, sublimating both shame and blame. In the Soviet Union there is no equivalent to the dinosaur or Godzilla (if we don't count the Olympic Bear of 1980s); in fact, after the collapse of Stalinism children's monsters were miniature, not gigantic. In a well-known poem the girlish fly Mukha-Tsokotukha and her brave friend little mosquito defeat the spider with a suggestive Stalinesque mustache. After the dictatorship, the subversive cultural tendency is to miniaturize, not aggrandize.

In the late 1990s two fantastic creatures of nostalgia dominated the Moscow market: dinosaur toys and the image of Moscow patron St. George killing the dragon, an emblem chosen by Mayor Luzhkov for the celebration of Moscow's 850th anniversary. Was Umberto Eco right, that we are approaching a new Middle Ages with up-to-date technology? The next century's battle between global and local culture might be fought between global dinosaurs and local dragons, hopefully, in virtual space.



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## RESTORATIVE NOSTALGIA: CONSPIRACIES AND RETURN TO ORIGINS

I will not propose a wonder drug for nostalgia, although a trip to the Alps, opium and leeches might alleviate the symptoms. Longing might be what we share as human beings, but that doesn't prevent us from telling very different stories of belonging and nonbelonging. In my view, two kinds of nostalgia characterize one's relationship to the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one's own self-perception: restorative and reflective. They do not explain the nature of longing nor its psychological makeup and unconscious undercurrents; rather, they are about the ways in which we make sense of our seemingly ineffable homesickness and how we view our relationship to a collective home. In other words, what concerns me is not solely the inner space of an individual psyche but the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance. A psychiatrist won't quite know what to do with nostalgia; an experimental art therapist might be of more help.

Two kinds of nostalgia are not absolute types, but rather tendencies, ways of giving shape and meaning to longing. Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps. Reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance. The first category of nostalgics do not think of themselves as nostalgic; they believe that their project is about truth. This kind of nostalgia characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time.

To understand restorative nostalgia it is important to distinguish between the habits of the past and the habits of the restoration of the past. Eric Hobsbawm differentiates between age-old "customs" and nineteenth-century "invented traditions." Customs by which so-called traditional societies operated were not invariable or inherently conservative: "Custom in traditional societies has a double function of motor and fly wheel. . . . Custom cannot afford to be invariant because even in the traditional societies life is not so."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, restored or invented tradition refers to a "set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past." The new traditions are characterized by a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization than the actual peasant customs and conventions after which they were patterned. Here are two paradoxes. First, the more rapid and sweeping the pace and scale of modernization, the more conservative and unchangeable the new traditions tend to be. Second, the stronger the rhetoric of continuity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is presented. The novelty of invented tradition is "no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity."<sup>2</sup>

Invented tradition does not mean a creation *ex nihilo* or a pure act of social constructivism; rather, it builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing. There is a perception that as a result of society's industrialization and secularization in the nineteenth century, a certain void of social and spiritual meaning had opened up. What was needed was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.<sup>3</sup> Yet this transformation can take different turns. It may increase the emancipatory possibilities and individual choices, offering multiple imagined communities and ways of belonging that are not exclusively based on ethnic or national principles. It can also be politically manipulated through newly recreated practices of national commemoration with the aim of reestablishing social cohesion, a sense of security and an obedient relationship to authority.

Cultural identity is based on a certain social poetics or "cultural intimacy" that provides a glue in everyday life. This was described by anthropologist Michael Herzfeld as "embarrassment and rueful self recognition" through various common frameworks of memory and even what might appear as stereotypes. Such identity involves everyday games of hide-and-seek that only "natives" play, unwritten rules of behavior, jokes understood from half a word, a sense of complicity. State propaganda and official national memory build on this cultural intimacy, but there is

also a discrepancy and tension between the two.<sup>4</sup> It is very important to distinguish between political nationalism and cultural intimacy, which, after all, is based on common social context, not on national or ethnic homogeneity.

National memory reduces this space of play with memorial signs to a single plot. Restorative nostalgia knows two main narrative plots—the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory, characteristic of the most extreme cases of contemporary nationalism fed on right-wing popular culture. The conspiratorial worldview reflects a nostalgia for a transcendental cosmology and a simple pre-modern conception of good and evil. The conspiratorial worldview is based on a single transhistorical plot, a Manichaean battle of good and evil and the inevitable scapegoating of the mythical enemy. Ambivalence, the complexity of history and the specificity of modern circumstances is thus erased, and modern history is seen as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. “Home,” imagine extremist conspiracy theory adherents, is forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy.

To conspire means literally to breathe together—but usually this collective breath doesn’t smell very good. Conspiracy is used pejoratively, to designate a subversive kinship of others, an imagined community based on exclusion more than affection, a union of those who are not with us, but against us. Home is not made of individual memories but of collective projections and “rational delusions.”<sup>5</sup> Paranoid reconstruction of home is predicated on the fantasy of persecution. This is not simply “forgetting of reality” but a psychotic substitution of actual experiences with a dark conspiratorial vision: the creation of a delusory homeland. Tradition in this way is to be restored with a nearly apocalyptic vengeance. The mechanism of this kind of conspiracy theory is based on the inversion of cause and effect and personal pronouns. “We” (the conspiracy theorists) for whatever reason feel insecure in the modern world and find a scapegoat for our misfortunes, somebody different from us whom we don’t like. We project our dislike on them and begin to believe that they dislike us and wish to persecute us. “They” conspire against “our” homecoming, hence “we” have to conspire against “them” in order to restore “our” imagined community. This way, conspiracy theory can come to substitute for the conspiracy itself. Indeed, much of twentieth-century violence, from pogroms to Nazi and Stalinist terror to McCarthy’s Red scare, operated in response to conspiracy theories in the name of a restored homeland.

Conspiracy theories, like nostalgic explosions in general, flourish after revolutions. The French Revolution gave birth to the Masonic conspiracy, and the first Russian revolution of 1905 was followed by mass pogroms inspired by the spread of the theories of Judeo-Masonic conspiracies exacerbated after the October revo-

lution and recovered during *perestroika*. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which supposedly relate the Jewish plot against the world, is one of the best-documented fakes in world history. The original text, entitled *Dialogues Between Montesquieu and Machiavelli*, was written by a liberal French journalist, Maurice Joly, as a political invective against the policies of Napoleon III (the Elders of Zion were nowhere present). The pamphlet was prohibited and taken out of print, with one copy only remaining in the British Museum—that will later prove the fictional origins of the *Protocols*. The pamphlet was appropriated by an agent of the Tsarist secret police, transported to Russia, and rewritten by a devoted Russian monk, Nilus Sergius (a pro-Western libertine in his youth turned extreme nationalist), who transformed a political text into a quasi-religious invective of the Antichrist by attributing the words of Machiavelli to the Jewish conspiracists. This presumed Jewish conspiracy was used to instigate and legitimize mass pogroms that were supposed to restore purity to the corrupt modern world. In this extreme case, conspiracy theory produced more violence than conspiracy itself, and a premodern restorative nostalgia turned out to be bloody.

The end of the second millennium has witnessed a rebirth of conspiracy theories.<sup>6</sup> Conspiracy theories are as international as the supposed conspiracies they are fighting against: they spread from post-Communist Russia to the United States, from Japan to Argentina and all around the globe. Usually there is a secret, sacred or conspiratorial text—*The Book of Illuminati*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or, for that matter, the *Turner Diaries*, which functions like a Bible among the American militia movement.<sup>7</sup> Russian ultranationalists used to claim, for instance, that a truly sacred book, not the Bible but *The Book of Vlas*, had been long concealed from the Russian people. This book supposedly dates back to about 1000 B.C. and contains the true gospel and protocols of pre-Christian pagan Slavic priests. Were the book to be recovered, the primordial Slavic homeland could be recovered as well, were it not for the evil “Jewish Masons” intent on distorting Russian history.<sup>8</sup> It is not surprising that many former Soviet Communist ideologues have embraced a nationalist worldview, becoming “red-and-browns,” or Communist-nationalists. Their version of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism was revealed to have the same totalizing authoritarian structure as the new nationalism.

Nostalgia is an ache of temporal distance and displacement. Restorative nostalgia takes care of both of these symptoms. Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. Never mind if it’s not your home; by the time you reach it, you will have already forgotten the difference. What drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about

those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition.

Even in its less extreme form, restorative nostalgia has no use for the signs of historical time—patina, ruins, cracks, imperfections. The 1980s and 1990s was a time of great revival of the past in several projects of total restoration—from the Sistine Chapel to the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow—that attempted to restore a sense of the sacred believed to be missing from the modern world.

### *The Sistine Chapel: Restoration of the Sacred*

That intimate and forever suspended touch between God and Adam on Michelangelo's frescoes of the Sistine Chapel is perhaps the best known artistic image of all time. There is a crack in the fresco, right above Adam's fingers, like the thunderbolt of history that underscores that familiar gesture of longing and separation. The artist strove to paint the act of divine creation itself and to play God for his artistic masterpiece. Michelangelo's image of spiritual longing turned into the ultimate site of the European sacred, both the religious sacred and the sacred of art, guarded in the world-famous chapel-museum. Later it became a tourist sacred, expensive but not priceless. The crack right above the two longing figures of God and man is now reproduced on innumerable T-shirts, plastic bags and post-cards.

That scar on the fresco that threatened to rip apart God and the first man highlights the mysterious aura of the painting, the patina of historical time. *Aura*, from the Hebrew word for light, was defined by Benjamin as an experience of distance, a mist of nostalgia that does not allow for possession of the object of desire. If aura is intangible, patina is visible: it is that layer of time upon the painting, the mixture of glue, soot, dust and incense from the candles. When it became clear that the Sistine Chapel was in need of restoration, the Vatican's museum authority made a radical decision: to return "back to Michelangelo," to the original brightness of the frescoes. The restoration of the Sistine Chapel became one of the remarkable superprojects of the 1980s that made sure that historical time would no longer threaten the image of sacred creation. The Museums of the Vatican made the deal of the century with Nippon TV Networks of Japan, known primarily for its quiz shows. In return for the millions needed for the restoration, Nippon Networks acquired exclusive rights to televise the restoration all over the world. It seemed to be a mutually beneficial transaction: the treasure of the Vatican was restored in the sacred museum space and at the same time democratized through mass reproduction and televisual projection.

With the help of advanced computer technology, most of the cracks in the background and even the loincloths on the male figures in the foreground were removed to get back to the original “nakedness” and freshness of color. The restorers left no seams, no signs of the process of restoration that is so common for restoration work in the other Italian museums. They had no patience for the patina of time made of candle smoke, soot, cheap Greek wine and bread used by ingenious seventeenth-century restorers and a few hairs from the artist’s brush that were stuck in the painting. Actual material traces of the past might disturb the total recreation of the original, which was to look old and brand-new at the same time. The total restoration and the return “to the original Michelangelo” attempted to extinguish the myth of dark romantic genius in agony and ecstasy, forever haunted by Charlton Heston. The new, improved Michelangelo was presented as a rational man, a modern craftsman who did not merely display the miracle of genius, but performed a feat of exceptional labor that was reenacted by twentieth-century scientists. The bright, almost cartoonish colors of the restored fresco bestowed upon Michelangelo the gift of eternal youth.

The work of restoration was not a self-conscious act of interpretation, but rather a transhistoric return to origins with the help of computer technology—a Jurassic Park syndrome all over again. Only this time contemporary scientists did not reconstruct a primordial natural habitat but the vanishing Garden of Eden of European art itself.<sup>9</sup>

The restoration provoked controversy, in which all sides accused the other of distorting Michelangelo and engaging either in nostalgia or in commercialism.<sup>10</sup> One argument by a group of American art historians brought forth the issue of re-making the past and returning to origins. They claimed that the contemporary restorers in their search for total visibility had removed Michelangelo’s “final touch,” “*l’ultima mano*” creating a Bennetton Michelangelo.” Through that “final touch” Michelangelo might have projected the historical life of the painting, as if partaking in the aging process. While the accuracy of this accusation is open to discussion, it raises the question of the artist’s testimony. If indeed the original painting projected its own historical life, how can one remove the last wish of the artist who left his masterpiece open to the accidents of time? What is more authentic: original image of Michelangelo not preserved through time, or a historical image that aged through centuries? What if Michelangelo rejected the temptation of eternal youth and instead reveled in the wrinkles of time, the future cracks of the fresco?

In fact, Michelangelo himself and his contemporaries loved to restore and recreate the masterpieces of antiquity that survived in fragments and ruins. Their

method of work was the opposite of the total restoration of the 1980s. The artists of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century viewed their contribution as a creative collaboration with the masters of the past. They attached their sculptural limbs right to the body of the ancient statues, adding a missing nose or an angel's wing, or even a contemporary mattress, as did Bernini in his sculpture of reclining Hermaphrodite. Renaissance and early Baroque artists never disguised their work as the past. They left the scars of history and reveled in the tactile intimacy of marble and the mystery of distance at the same time. They conscientiously preserved different shades of marble to mark a clear boundary between their creative additions and the fragments of the ancient statues. Moreover, unlike the computer craftsmen of the twentieth century, Michelangelo's contemporaries did not shy away from the individual touch of artistic whim, imperfections and play. While adhering to the time-tested technique, they never strove for blandness and homogeneity that plagued the new restoration of the "original."

When I visited the Sistine Chapel after the restoration, I was struck by a strange and moving spectacle. In spite of the vivid corporeality of the fresco, it revealed a mysterious cosmological vision, an allegory that escapes modern interpreters. Inside the Chapel hundreds of people were staring up at the blindingly bright artwork equipped with all kinds of binoculars and tape recorders, trying to make sense of what they could and could not see. Semi-dark, the space was drowned in multilingual whispers, transforming the Sistine Chapel into a Tower of Babel. The moment the whispers mounted to a crescendo, armed guards loudly admonished the tourists, requesting silence. The tourists here felt like disobedient high school children in front of an incredible miracle. They were in awe and never sure in awe of what—Michelangelo's oeuvre or the tour de force of the modern restorers.

Why was the Chapel so poorly lit? After all, so much money and effort went into brightening up the masterpiece. A guide explained to me that the museum had to save on the electricity after such an expensive restoration. The mystique had its price tag. Keeping the Chapel semi-dark was the most economic way of recreating the aura, of having it both ways, bright in the exclusive light of the TV camera and mysterious in the heavily guarded museum space. The total restoration of the Sistine Chapel found a permanent cure for romantic nostalgia and accomplished the definitive repackaging of the past for the future. After this scientific restoration, the original work has been laid bare to the extreme, the protective coating that had shrouded it in mystery having been permanently removed. There is nothing more to discover in the past. The restorers, however, might not have reached their desired end. Believing that their own final touch is

invisible, the scientists didn't take into account that modern airborne toxins might begin to corrode the perfect work of restoration in ways that Michelangelo could never have predicted.



My journey to the restored sacred culminated with an embarrassment, if not a sacrilege. On my way to St. Peter's Cathedral, I was stopped by the Vatican fashion police. A young guard indicated to me very politely that my bare shoulders would be completely inappropriate for the visit to the cathedral. I joined a group of other miserable rejects, mostly American tourists in shorts or in sleeveless tops, hiding in the shade on that exhaustingly hot day. Unwilling to take no for an answer, I remembered the old Soviet strategy of camouflage and found a hiding place where I fashioned for myself short sleeves out of a plastic bag adorned with a reproduction of Michelangelo's frescoes (with the crack) and the elegant inscription *musei di Vaticano*. I then passed nonchalantly by the group of other rejected tourists, paying no attention to their comments about my fashion statement. Mounting the majestic staircase I again came face to face with the vigilant young policeman. My far-from-seamless outfit would have fallen apart with a single touch. But my shoulders were covered and the dress code was restored. Besides, I was wearing the name of the Vatican on my sleeve. The guard let me pass in a ceremonial fashion, maintaining the dignity of the ritual and not condescending to a wink of complicity.



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## REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA: VIRTUAL REALITY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

*Restoration* (from *re-staure*—re-establishment) signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. The past for the restorative nostalgia is a value for the present; the past is not a duration but a perfect snapshot. Moreover, the past is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay; it has to be freshly painted in its “original image” and remain eternally young. Reflective nostalgia is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. *Re-flection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and passage of time. To paraphrase Nabokov, these kind of nostalgias are often “amateurs of Time, epicures of duration,” who resist the pressure of external efficiency and take sensual delight in the texture of time not measurable by clocks and calendars.<sup>1</sup>

Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory. The two might overlap in their frames of reference, but they do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity. In other words, they can use the same triggers of memory and symbols, the same Proustian madelaine pastry, but tell different stories about it.

Nostalgia of the first type gravitates toward collective pictorial symbols and oral culture. Nostalgia of the second type is more oriented toward an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself.<sup>2</sup> If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space. Restorative nostalgia takes itself dead seriously. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, can be ironic and humorous. It reveals that longing and critical thinking are not

opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection.

Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is “enamored of distance, not of the referent itself.”<sup>3</sup> This type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. Nostalgics of the second type are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future. Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn’t exist anymore, but, to quote Henri Bergson, the past “might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality.”<sup>4</sup> The past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding of some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historic development. We don’t need a computer to get access to the virtualities of our imagination: reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

The virtual reality of consciousness, as defined by Henri Bergson, is a modern concept, yet it does not rely on technology; on the contrary, it is about human freedom and creativity. According to Bergson, the human creativity, *élan vital*, that resists mechanical repetition and predictability, allows us to explore the virtual realities of consciousness. For Marcel Proust, remembrance is an unpredictable adventure in syncretic perception where words and tactile sensations overlap. Place names open up mental maps and space folds into time. “The memory of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years,” writes Proust at the end of *Swann’s Way*.<sup>6</sup> What matters, then, is this memorable literary fugue, not the actual return home.

The modern nostalgic realizes that “the goal of the odyssey is a rendez-vous with oneself.”<sup>7</sup> For Jorge Luis Borges, for instance, Ulysses returns home only to look back at his journey. In the alcove of his fair queen he becomes nostalgic for his nomadic self: “Where is that man who in the days and nights of exile erred around the world like a dog and said that Nobody was his name?”<sup>8</sup> Homecoming does not signify a recovery of identity; it does not end the journey in the virtual space of imagination. A modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once.

As most of the stories in this book suggest, the nostalgic rendezvous with oneself is not always a private affair. Voluntary and involuntary recollections of an individual intertwine with collective memories. In many cases the mirror of

reflective nostalgia is shattered by experiences of collective devastation and resembles—involuntarily—a modern work of art. Bosnian poet Semezdin Mehmedinovic offers one of such shattered mirrors from his native Sarajevo:

Standing by the window, I see the shattered glass of Yugobank. I could stand like this for hours. A blue, glassed-in facade. One floor above the window I am looking from, a professor of aesthetics comes out onto his balcony; running his fingers through his beard, he adjusts his glasses. I see his reflection in the blue facade of Yugobank, in the shattered glass that turns the scene into a live cubist painting on a sunny day.<sup>9</sup>

### *Bar Nostalgija: Reflecting on Everyday Memories*

In 1997 I visited a café in the center of Ljubljana, located not far from the famous Cobbler's Bridge decorated by stylized freestanding columns that supported nothing. The ambiance was vaguely familiar and comforting, decorated in the style of the 1960s. The music was Beatles and Radmila Karaklaic. The walls were decorated with Chinese alarm clocks, boxes of Vegeta seasoning (which was considered a delicacy in the Soviet Union) and posters of Sputnik carrying the unfortunate dogs Belka and Strelka, who never came home to earth. There was also an enlarged newspaper clipping announcing Tito's death. When I got my bill, I didn't believe my eyes. The name of the place was Nostalgija Snack Bar.

"There would never be a bar like that in Zagreb or Belgrade," a friend from Zagreb told me. "'Nostalgija' is a forbidden word."

"Why?" I asked. "Isn't the government in Zagreb and Belgrade engaging precisely in nostalgia?"

"'Nostalgija' is a bad word. It is associated with the former Yugoslavia. Nostalgia is 'Yugo-nostalgia.'"

The Nostalgija Snack Bar was a friendly place. Its very definition was international—"snack bar"—something that the current owners might have dreamed about in their youth while watching old American movies on Yugoslav TV. The American version of the Nostalgija Snack Bar would not arouse much scandal. One could imagine a cozy place decorated with 1950s lamps, jukeboxes and pictures of James Dean. This is an American way of dealing with the past—to turn history into a bunch of amusing and readily available souvenirs, devoid of politics. More provocative would be to refer to the emblems of the divided past, especially the imagery of segregation. The Nostalgija Snack Bar plays with the shared Yu-

goslav past that still presents a cultural taboo in many parts of the former Yugoslavia. Nationalist restorers of tradition find unbearable precisely this casualness in dealing with symbolic politics, in mixing the political with the ordinary.

Dubravka Ugrešić, a native of Zagreb who declared herself “anational,” wrote that the people of the former Yugoslavia, especially those who now live in Croatia and Serbia, suffer from the “confiscation of memory.” By that she means a kind of everyday memory, common corpus of emotional landmarks that escapes a clear chart. It is composed of both official symbols and multiple fragments and splinters of the past, “a line of verse, an image, a scene, a scent, a tune, a tone, a word.” These memorial landmarks cannot be completely mapped; such memory is composed of shattered fragments, ellipses and scenes of the horrors of war. The word *nostalgija*, the pseudo-Greek term common to all the new languages of the country—Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Slovene—is linked together with the word *Yugoslavia* that Milosevic had confiscated from the common memory.

The ordinary fearful citizen of former Yugoslavia, when trying to explain the simplest things, gets entangled in a net of humiliating footnotes. “Yes, Yugoslavia, but the former Yugoslavia, not this Yugoslavia of Milosevic’s . . .” “Yes, nostalgia, perhaps you could call it that, but you see not for Milosevic, but for that former Yugoslavia . . .” “For the former communist Yugoslavia?” “No, not for the state, not for communism . . .” “For what then?” “It’s hard to explain, you see . . .” “Do you mean nostalgia for that singer, Djordje Balasevic, then?” “Yes, for the singer . . .” “But that Balasevic of yours is a Serb, isn’t he!”<sup>10</sup>

One remembers best what is colored by emotion. Moreover, in the emotional topography of memory, personal and historical events tend to be conflated. It seems that the only way to discuss collective memory is through imaginary dialogues with dispersed fellow citizens, expatriates and exiles. One inevitably gets tongue-tied trying to articulate an emotional topography of memory that is made up of such “humiliating footnotes” and cultural untranslatables. The convoluted syntax is part of the elusive collective memory.

The notion of shared social frameworks of memory is rooted in an understanding of human consciousness, which is dialogical with other human beings and with cultural discourses. This idea was developed by Lev Vygotsky and Mikhail Bakhtin, who criticized Freud’s solipsistic view of the human psyche.<sup>11</sup> Vygotsky suggested that what makes us human is not a “natural memory” close to perception, but a memory of cultural signs that allows meaning to be generated without external

stimulation. Remembering doesn't have to be disconnected from thinking. I remember therefore I am, or I think I remember and therefore I think.

Psychic space should not be imagined as solitary confinement. British psychologist D. W. Winnicott suggested the concept of a "potential space" between individual and environment that is formed in early childhood. Initially this is the space of the play between the child and the mother. Cultural experience is to be located there, and it begins with creative living first manifested in play.<sup>12</sup> Culture has the potential of becoming a space for individual play and creativity, and not merely an oppressive homogenizing force; far from limiting individual play, it guarantees it space. Culture is not foreign to human nature but integral to it; after all, culture provides a context where relationships do not always develop by continuity but by contiguity. Perhaps what is most missed during historical cataclysms and exile is not the past and the homeland exactly, but rather this potential space of cultural experience that one has shared with one's friends and compatriots that is based neither on nation nor religion but on elective affinities.

Collective memory will be understood here as the common landmarks of everyday life. They constitute shared social frameworks of individual recollections. They are folds in the fan of memory, not prescriptions for a model tale. Collective memory, however, is not the same as national memory, even when they share images and quotations. National memory tends to make a single teleological plot out of shared everyday recollections. The gaps and discontinuities are mended through a coherent and inspiring tale of recovered identity. Instead, shared everyday frameworks of collective or cultural memory offer us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives. These narratives have a certain syntax (as well as a common intonation), but no single plot. Thus the newspaper clipping with Tito's portrait in the *Nostalgija* Snack Bar might evoke the end of postwar Yugoslavia, or merely a childhood prank of a former Yugoslav, nothing more. According to Maurice Halbwachs, collective memory offers a zone of stability and normativity in the current of change that characterizes modern life.<sup>13</sup> The collective frameworks of memory appear as safeguards in the stream of modernity and mediate between the present and the past, between self and other.

The historians of nostalgia Jean Starobinski and Michael Roth conclude that in the twentieth century nostalgia was privatized and internalized.<sup>14</sup> The longing for home shrunk to the longing for one's own childhood. It was not so much a maladjustment to progress as a "maladjustment to the adult life." In the case of Freud, nostalgia was not a specific disease but a fundamental structure of human desire linked to the death drive: "The finding of an object is always a refinding of it."<sup>15</sup>

Freud appropriates the vocabulary of nostalgia; for him, the only way of “returning home” is through analysis and recognition of early traumas.

In my view, nostalgia remains an intermediary between collective and individual memory. Collective memory can be seen as a playground, not a graveyard of multiple individual recollections. The turn, or rather return, to the study of collective memory in contemporary critical thought, both in the social sciences and the humanities, is in itself a recovery of a certain framework of scholarly references that has been debated for two decades and now appears to have been virtually forgotten. Collective memory is a messy, unsystematic concept that nevertheless allows one to describe the phenomenology of human experience. The study of collective memory defies disciplinary boundaries and invites us to look at artistic as well as scholarly works. It brings us back to the reflections on “mental habitus” (Panofsky and Léfévre) and “mentality” defined as “what is conceived and felt, the field of intelligence and of emotion,” and on “cultural myth, understood as a recurrent narrative, perceived as natural and commonsensical in a given culture, seemingly independent from historical and political context.”<sup>16</sup> Cultural myths, then, are not lies but rather shared assumptions that help to naturalize history and makes it livable, providing the daily glue of common intelligibility.

Yet no system of thought or branch of science provides us a full picture of human memory. The interpretation of memory might well be a “conjectural science,” to use Carlo Ginzburg’s term.<sup>17</sup> Only false memories can be totally recalled. From Greek mnemonic art to Proust, memory has always been encoded through a trace, a detail, a suggestive synecdoche. Freud developed a poetic concept of a “screen memory,” a contextual contiguous detail that “shades the forgotten scene of private trauma or revelation.” Like a screen of a Viennese writing pad, it keeps traces, doodles, conjectures, distracting attention from the central plot imposed by an analyst or interpreter of memory. Often collective frameworks function as those screen memories that determine the contexts of an individual’s affective recollections. In exile or in historic transistion, the signposts from the former homeland themselves acquire emotional significance. For instance, former East Germans launched a campaign to save their old traffic signs representing a funny man in a cute hat, Ampelmann, which was supplanted by a more pragmatic West German image. Nobody payed much attention to Ampelmann before, but once he vanished from the street signs, he suddenly became a beloved of the whole nation.

One becomes aware of the collective frameworks of memories when one distances oneself from one’s community or when that community itself enters the moment of twilight. Collective frameworks of memory are rediscovered in

mourning. Freud made a distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is connected to the loss of a loved one or the loss of some abstraction, such as a homeland, liberty or an ideal. Mourning passes with the elapsing of time needed for the "work of grief." In mourning "deference to reality gains the day," even if its "behest cannot be at once obeyed." In melancholia the loss is not clearly defined and is more unconscious. Melancholia doesn't pass with the labor of grief and has less connection to the outside world. It can lead to self-knowledge or to continuous narcissistic self-flagellation. "The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, draining the ego until it is utterly depleted."<sup>8</sup> Reflective nostalgia has elements of both mourning and melancholia. While its loss is never completely recalled, it has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory. Reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future.

The Nostalgija Snack Bar restores nothing. There was never such a café in the former Yugoslavia. There is no longer such a country, so Yugoslav popular culture can turn into self-conscious style and a memory field trip. The place exudes the air of Central European café culture and the new dandyism of the younger generation that enjoys Tito-style gadgets and *Wired* magazine. This is a new kind of space that plays with the past and the present. The bar gently mocks the dream of greater patria while appealing to shared frameworks of memory of the last Yugoslav generation. It makes no pretense of depth of commemoration and offers only a transient urban adventure with excellent pastries and other screen memories. As for the labor of grief, it could take a lifetime to complete.