Nostalgia and Its Discontents[1]

Svetlana Boym

The twentieth century began with utopia and ended with nostalgia. Optimistic belief in the future became outmoded, while nostalgia, for better or worse, never went out of fashion, remaining uncannily contemporary. The word "nostalgia" comes from two Greek roots, *nostos* meaning "return home" and *algia* "longing." I would define it as a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.

The word "nostalgia," in spite of its Greek roots, did not originate in ancient Greece. "Nostalgia" is only pseudo-Greek, or nostalgically Greek. The word was coined by the ambitious Swiss student Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation in 1688. (Hofer also suggested *nosomania* and *philopatridomania* to describe the same symptoms; luckily, these failed to enter common parlance.) Contrary to our intuition, "nostalgia" came from medicine, not from poetry or politics. It would not occur to us to demand a prescription for nostalgia. Yet in the seventeenth century, nostalgia was considered to be a curable disease, akin to a severe common cold. Swiss doctors believed that opium, leeches, and a journey to the Swiss Alps would take care of nostalgic symptoms. Among

[1] This essay is adapted from my book *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic, 2001), which includes a more thorough discussion of the topic.

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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. The epidemic of nostalgia was accompanied by an even more dangerous epidemic of "feigned nostalgia," particularly among soldiers tired of serving abroad.[2]

The nostalgia that interests me here is not merely an individual sickness but a symptom of our age, an historical emotion. Hence I will make three crucial points. First, nostalgia is not "antimodern"; it is not necessarily opposed to modernity but coeval with it. Nostalgia and progress are like Jekyll and Hyde: doubles and mirror images of one another. Nostalgia is not merely an expression of local longing, but a result of a new understanding of time and space that makes the division into "local" and "universal" possible.

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Second, nostalgia appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to turn history into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition. Hence the past of nostalgia, to paraphrase William Faulkner, is not even past. It could be merely better time, or slower time—time out of time, not encumbered by appointment books.

Third, nostalgia, in my view, is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future. The consideration of the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes

[2] Hofer 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" (Johannes Hofer, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia," trans. Carolyn Kiser Anspach, *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine,* vol. 2 [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1934] 381). Hofer concedes that "gifted Helvetians" had a vernacular term for "the grief for the lost charms of the Native Land," *das Heimweh*, and the afflicted Gauls (the French) used the term *la Maladie du Pays* (380). But Hofer was the first to give a detailed scientific discussion of the ailment. For the history of nostalgia, see Jean Starobinski, "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 81–103; Fritz Ernst, *Vom Heimweh* (Zurich: Fretz & Wasmuth, 1949); and George Rosen, "Nostalgia: A Forgotten Psychological Disorder," *Clio Medica* 10.1 (1975): 28–51. For psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to nostalgia, see James Phillips, "Distance, Absence and Nostalgia," *Descriptions*, ed. Don Ihde and Hugh J. Silverman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985) 64–75; Willis H. McCann, "Nostalgia: A Descriptive and Comparative Study," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 62 (1943): 97–104; Roderick Peters, "Reflections on the Origin and Aim of Nostalgia," *Journal of Analytic Psychology* 30 (1985): 135–48. For a very interesting study of the sociology of nostalgia that examines nostalgia as a "social emotion" and suggests the examination of three ascending orders of nostalgia, see Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free, 1979).

of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory. While futuristic utopias might be out of fashion, nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension—only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes it is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space.

In fact, there is a tradition of critical reflection on the modern condition that incorporates nostalgia. It can be called "off-modern." The adverb "off" confuses our sense of direction. It makes us explore side shadows and back alleys, rather than the straight road of progress; it allows us to take a detour from the deterministic narratives of history. Off-modernism offers a critique of both the modern fascination with newness and the no-less-modern reinvention of tradition. In the off-modern tradition, reflection and longing, estrangement and affection, go together. Moreover, for some twentieth-century off-modernists who came from traditions that were considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream (from Eastern Europe to Latin America), as well as for many displaced people from all over the world, creative rethinking of nostalgia was not merely an artistic device but a strategy for survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming.

Historians often consider "nostalgia" to be a negative word, or an affectionate insult at best. "Nostalgia is to longing as kitsch is to art," writes Charles Maier.[3] The word is frequently used dismissively. "Nostalgia...is essentially history without guilt. Heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than shame," writes Michael Kammen.[4] In this understanding, nostalgia is seen as an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure. Nostalgia produces subjective visions of afflicted imagination that tend to colonize the realm of politics, history, and everyday perception.

Modern nostalgia is paradoxical in the sense that the universality of its longing can make us more empathetic towards fellow humans, and yet the moment we try to repair that longing with a particular belonging—or the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity and especially of a national community and unique and pure homeland—we often part ways with others and put an end to mutual understanding. *Algia* (or longing) is what we share, yet *nostos* (or the return home) is what divides us. The promise to rebuild the ideal home lies at the core of many powerful ideologies today, tempting us to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding. The danger of nostalgia is that

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[3] Charles S. Maier, "The End of Longing? Notes toward a History of Postwar German National Longing," *The Postwar Transformation of Germany: Democracy, Prosperity, and Nationhood*, ed. John S. Brady, Beverly Crawford, and Sarah Elise Wiliarty (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999) 273.

[4] Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991) 688.

it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflective nostalgia can breed monsters. Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very core of the modern condition. While claiming a pure and clean homeland, nostalgic politics often produces a "glocal" hybrid of capitalism and religious fundamentalism, or of corporate state and Eurasian patriotism. The mix of nostalgia and politics can be explosive.

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The alluring object of nostalgia is notoriously elusive. The ambivalent sentiment permeates popular culture where technological advances and special effects are frequently used to recreate visions of the past, from the sinking *Titanic* to dying gladiators and extinct dinosaurs. While many nineteenth-century thinkers believed progress and enlightenment would cure nostalgia, they have exacerbated it instead. Technology that once promised to bridge modern displacement and distance and provide the miracle prosthesis for nostalgic aches has itself become much faster than nostalgic longing. More precisely, technology and nostalgia have become co-dependent: new technology and advanced marketing stimulate *ersatz* nostalgia—for the things you never thought you had lost—and anticipatory nostalgia—for the present that flees with the speed of a click. Similarly, globalization encourages stronger local attachments. In counterpoint to our fascination with cyberspace and the virtual global village, there is a global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. But this defense mechanism has its own side effects.

Outbreaks of nostalgia often follow revolutions; the French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution, and the "Velvet" revolutions in Eastern Europe were accompanied by political and cultural manifestations of longing. In France it was not only the *ancien régime* that produced revolution, but, in some respect, the revolution that produced the *ancien régime*, giving it a shape, a sense of closure, and a gilded aura. Similarly, the revolutionary epoch of *perestroika* and the end of the Soviet Union produced an image of the last Soviet decades as a time of stagnation, or alternatively as a Soviet Golden Age of stability, strength, and "normalcy"—the view that was prevalent in Russia by the year 2000. Yet the nostalgia that I explore here is not always for the *ancien régime*, stable superpower, or fallen empire, but also for the unrealized dreams of the past and visions of the future that have become obsolete. A history of nostalgia might allow us to look back at modern history not solely searching for newness and technological progress but for unrealized possibilities, unpredictable turns and crossroads.

The most common currencies of the globalism exported all over the world are money and popular culture. Nostalgia, too, is a feature of global culture, but it demands a different currency. After all, the key words defining globalism—progress, modernity, and virtual reality—were invented by poets and philosophers: "progress" was coined

by Immanuel Kant; the noun "modernity" is a creation of Charles Baudelaire; and "virtual reality" was first imagined by Henri Bergson, not Bill Gates. In Bergson's definition, however, "virtual reality" referred to planes of consciousness, potential dimensions of time and creativity that are distinctly and inimitably human. When they failed to uncover the exact locus of nostalgia, eighteenth-century doctors recommended seeking help from poets and philosophers. Nostalgia speaks in riddles and puzzles, and one has to face it in order not to become its next victim, or the next victimizer.

The study of nostalgia does not belong to any specific discipline; it frustrates psychologists, sociologists, literary theorists, and philosophers—even computer scientists who thought they had gotten away from it all until they too took refuge in their home pages and the cyber-pastoral vocabulary of the global village. The sheer overabundance of nostalgic artifacts marketed by the entertainment industry, most of them sweet ready-mades, reflects a fear of untamable longing and non-commodified time. Oversaturation, in this case, underscores nostalgia's fundamental insatiability. With the diminished role of art in Western societies, the self-conscious exploration of longing—without a quick fix and sugar-coated palliatives—has significantly dwindled.

In the good old days, nostalgia was a curable disease, dangerous but not always lethal. Leeches, warm hypnotic emulsions, opium, or a trip to the Alps usually soothed the symptoms, but nothing compared to the return to the motherland, which was 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. The outbreak 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 afflicted soldiers during foreign campaigns who loved their motherland so much that they never wanted to leave it, or for that matter die for it. When the epidemic of nostalgia spread beyond the Swiss garrison, a more radical treatment was undertaken. During the French Revolution of 1789, the French doctor Jourdain Le Cointe suggested 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 be sick would be buried alive." This was a kind of literalization of a metaphor, as life in a foreign country seemed a lot 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.[5] (No wonder longing became such an important part of the Russian national identity.)

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[5] Starobinski 96. The reference comes from Dr. Jourdan Le Cointe (1790).

As a public epidemic, nostalgia was based on a sense of loss not limited to personal history. It was not necessarily a loss that was properly remembered, and nor did one necessarily know where to look for what was lost. 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. In fact, once at home, the patients often died. The object of longing occasionally migrated to faraway lands beyond the confines of the motherland. Just as today genetic researchers hope to identify genes for specific medical conditions, social behavior, and even sexual orientation, so doctors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries looked for one pathological bone for nostalgia. Yet they failed to find the locus of nostalgia in their patients' minds or bodies. One doctor claimed that nostalgia was a hypochondria of the heart that thrives on its symptoms. From a treatable sickness, nostalgia turned into an incurable disease. A provincial ailment, *maladie du pays*, turned into a disease of the modern age, *mal du siècle*.

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My hypothesis is that the spread of nostalgia had to do not only with dislocation in space but also with the changing conception of time. 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, but we should not smile condescendingly upon the diligent Swiss doctors. Our progeny might poeticize depression and see it as a metaphor for a global atmospheric condition, immune to treatment with Prozac. 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, for a home that is both physical and spiritual, for 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.

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."[6] It is not surprising that national awareness comes from outside the community rather than from within it. The nostalgic is never a native, but rather a displaced person who mediates between the local and the universal. Many national languages, thanks to Herder's passionate rehabilitation, had 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 home-

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[6] Johann Gottfried von Herder, "Correspondence on Ossian," *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1689–1860*, ed. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972) 229–30.

sickness that was radically untranslatable: the Portuguese had their *saudade*, Russians *toska*, Czechs *litost'*, Romanians *dor*—to say nothing of the German *heimweh* and the Spanish *mal de corazon*. All those untranslatable words of national uniqueness proved to be synonyms of the same historical emotion. While the details and flavors differ, the grammar of romantic nostalgias all over the world is quite similar. "I long, therefore I am" was the Romantic motto.

Nostalgia as a historical emotion came of age during the time of Romanticism and is coeval with the birth of mass culture. In the mid-nineteenth century, nostalgia became institutionalized in national and provincial museums, heritage foundations, and urban memorials. The past was no longer unknown or unknowable. The past became "heritage." The rapid pace of industrialization and modernization increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for social cohesion and tradition. Yet this obsession with the past revealed an abyss of forgetting and took place in inverse proportion to its actual preservation. As Pierre Nora has suggested, memorial sites, or "*lieux de mémoire*," are established institutionally when the environments of memory, the *milieux de mémoire*, fade.[7] It is as if the ritual of commemoration could help to patch up the irreversibility of time.

Instead of a magic cure for nostalgia, I will offer a typology that might illuminate some of nostalgia's mechanisms of seduction and manipulation. I distinguish between two main types of nostalgia: the restorative and the reflective. Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately. These distinctions are not absolute binaries, and one can surely make a more refined mapping of the grey areas on the outskirts of imaginary homelands. I want to identify the main tendencies and narrative structures in "plotting" nostalgia, in making sense of one's longing and loss. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt.

Restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious revivals. It knows two main plots—the return to origins and the conspiracy. Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones. It loves details, not symbols. At best, it can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholias. This typology of nostalgia allows me to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single

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[7] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24.

version of national identity, on the one hand, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define individual memory, on the other hand. The rhetoric of restorative nostalgia is not about "the past," but rather about universal values, family, nature, homeland, truth. The rhetoric of reflective nostalgia is about taking time out of time and about grasping the fleeing present.

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 "custom" and nineteenth-century "invented" traditions.[8] New traditions are characterized by a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization than were the actual peasant customs and conventions after which they are patterned. There are two paradoxes here. 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 usually presented. "The novelty" of invented tradition is "no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity."[9] Of course, "invented tradition" does not mean a creation *ex nihilo*, or a pure act of social constructivism. 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 beginning in the nineteenth century, a certain void of social and spiritual meaning has opened up. What is needed is a secular transformation of "fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning."[10] But this transformation can take different turns. It may increase the emancipatory possibilities and individual choices, offering multiple "imagined communities" and means of belonging, which 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 re-establishing social cohesion, a sense of security, and an obedient relationship to authority.

Restorative nostalgia knows two main plots: the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory. The conspiratorial worldview reflects a nostalgia for a transcendental cosmology and a simple premodern conception of good and evil. This 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, the variety of contradictory evidence, and the specificity of modern circumstances are thus erased, and modern history is seen as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. Extremist conspiracy

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[8] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 2.

[9] Hobsbawm 5.

[10] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1991) 11.

theory adherents imagine that "home" is forever under siege, requiring defense against the plotting enemy.

Restoration (from *re-staure*—re-establish) signifies a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment. While restorative nostalgia returns and rebuilds one homeland with paranoic determination, reflective nostalgia fears return with the same passion. Instead of recreation of the lost home, reflective nostalgia can foster the creation of aesthetic individuality.

Reflective nostalgia is concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude. Re-flection means new flexibility, not the re-establishment of stasis. The focus here is not on the recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth, but on the meditation on history and the passage of time. Nostalgics of this kind are often, in the words of Vladimir Nabokov, "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.[11]

Restorative and reflective nostalgia might overlap in their frames of reference but 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 madeleine cookie, 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 towards an individual narrative that savors details and memorial signs, yet perpetually defers homecoming itself. 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.

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Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is "enamored of distance, not of the referent itself."[12] 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

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[11] Vladimir Nabokov, "On Time and its Texture," *Strong Opinions* (New York: Vintage, 1990) 185.

[12] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) 145.

just been renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. It is precisely this defamiliarization and sense of distance that drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future. Through that longing, they discover that the past is not that which no longer exists, but, to quote Bergson, the past is something that "might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality."[13] The past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, non-teleological possibilities of historic development. We do not need a computer to get access to the virtualities of our imagination: reflective nostalgia opens up multiple planes 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*.[14] It is this memorable literary fugue, then, that matters, not the return home.

In the twenty-first century millions of people find themselves displaced from their place of birth, living in voluntary or involuntary exile. Immigrants' stories are the best narratives of nostalgia—not only because they suffer through nostalgia, but also because they challenge it. These stories are often framed as projections for the nostalgia of others who speak from a much safer place. Immigrants understand the limitations of nostalgia and the tenderness of what I call "diasporic intimacy," which cherishes non-native, elective affinities.[15] Diasporic intimacy is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but is constituted by it. So much has been made of the happy homecoming that it is time to do justice to the stories of non-return and the reluctant praise of exile. Non-return home in the case of some exiled writers and artists turns into a central artistic drive, a homemaking in the text and artwork, as well as a strategy of survival. Ordinary exiles often become artists in life who remake themselves and their second homes with great ingenuity. Inability to return home is both a personal tragedy and an enabling force. That does not mean that there is no nostalgia there, only that this kind of nostalgia precludes the restoration of the past. Diasporic intimacy does not promise an unmediated emotional fusion, but only a precarious affection—no less deep, yet aware of its transience.

Contemporary architectural constructions and reconstructions offer different material embodiments of nostalgia. In post-Soviet Moscow the beginning of the nostalgic turn in the public realm was marked by the reconstruction of the Cathedral of Christ the

[13] Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Zone, 1988) 240.

[14] Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage International, 1989) 462.

[15] See "intimacy," *American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982) 672.

Saviour (1994–7), which had been brutally destroyed in the 1930s. The initial fruitful debate about the architectural possibilities for the site, which inspired various grand projects and much destruction, was closed off with the construction of an exact replica of the Cathedral in concrete and the erasure of all contested political and architectural memories connected to the site. Similarly, in the territories of the former Yugoslavia, one finds that old churches and mosques are falling into disrepair, while new huge cathedrals and mosques are built outside urban centers that historically have been ethnically mixed. While global in style and in financing, they assert reconstructed local ethnic and religious identities, often imagined from abroad—examples of restorative nostalgia that go beyond and often against the restoration of surviving mixed urban fabric. In contrast, reflective nostalgics in the realm of architecture cherish a certain kind of ruinophilia in the public realm, a love and toleration for modern ruins that keep alive memories of destruction and of multiple contested histories and coexisting temporalities. Various contemporary buildings—from the Tate Modern to smaller projects of temporary and transitional architecture—incorporate and preserve industrial ruins, creatively reinhabiting and recycling them. The ruins of modernity point at blunders of modern technology and teleology alike, reminding us of our common worldliness and material history.

It is always important to ask the question: Who is speaking in the name of nostalgia?

The first decade of the twenty-first century is not characterized by the search for newness, but by the proliferation of nostalgias that are often at odds with one another. Nostalgic cyberpunks and nostalgic hippies, nostalgic nationalists and nostalgic cosmopolitans, nostalgic enviromentalists and nostalgic metrophiliacs (city lovers) exchange pixel fire in the blogosphere. Nostalgia, like globalization, exists in the plural. Studying the sociology, politics, and ethnography of nostalgia, its micropractices and meganarratives, remains as urgent as ever. It is always important to ask the question: Who is speaking in the name of nostalgia? Who is its ventriloquist? Twenty-first century nostalgia, like its seventeenth-century counterpart, produces epidemics of feigned nostalgia. For example, the problem with nostalgia in Eastern Europe is that it seems more ubiquitous than it actually is. This might appear counterintuitive. Western Europeans often project nostalgia onto Eastern Europe as a way of legitimizing "backwardness" and not confronting the differences in their cultural history.

A symptomatic example was the success of the recent film *Good Bye, Lenin!*, which spoke about the paradoxes of *ost-algia* in Germany and strove for broad nostalgic appeal. *Good Bye, Lenin!* had a humorous conceit: an East German true believer, who embodies the dreams of the Honecker regime, has a fateful accident and remains in a coma while the Wall is coming down. When she wakes up, her loving children work hard at preserving her nostalgic illusion, complete with vanishing East German pickles and censored television reports. In the eyes of some former "ossies," *Good Bye, Lenin!* was the work of "wessie" filmmakers who tried to imagine and package the *ost-algia* of their extra-mural fellow citizens. The *ost-algia* of the film is a joint venture: it mixes

Western dreams of the third way and Eastern mythologies of the cosmos. The mimetic desire for the nostalgias of the other goes beyond the East-West of Europe: often conscientious Europeans and Americans, in their more or less genuine desire to understand the Eastern "other," turn the dream of multiculturalism into a reverse exoticism. They exaggerate the otherness of the other, preserving nostalgic difference while disregarding differences within the foreign culture and its forms of political authoritarianism and media manipulation. Whether it is a matter of past grievances or present self-assertion, one always has to recognize the modernity of the other, the shared world of modern reinvented traditions and transnational individual dreams for reform and improvement. While the story that nostalgics tell is one of local homecoming, the form of that story is hardly local. Contemporary nostalgias can be understood as a series of migrating cross-cultural plots that go beyond national attachments.[16]

In conclusion, there is not much that is new about contemporary nostalgia. Contrary to the great actress Simone Signoret, who entitled her autobiography *Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be*, the structure of nostalgia is in many respects what it used to be, in spite of changing fashions and advances in digital technology. In the end, the only antidote for the dictatorship of nostalgia might be nostalgic dissidence. Nostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a cure. It is up to us to take responsibility for our nostalgia and not let others "prefabricate" it for us. The prepackaged "usable past" may be of no use to us if we want to co-create our future. Perhaps dreams of imagined homelands cannot and should not come to life. Sometimes it is preferable (at least in the view of this nostalgic author) to leave dreams alone, let them be no more and no less than dreams, not guidelines for the future. While restorative nostalgia returns and rebuilds one's homeland with paranoic determination, reflective nostalgia fears return with the same passion. Home, after all, is not a gated community. Paradise on earth might turn out to be another Potemkin village with no exit. The imperative of a contemporary nostalgic is to be homesick and sick of home—occasionally at the same time.

[16] Nostalgia tends to colonize politics and history. Like the conspiratorial imagination, the nostalgic viewpoint does not allow us to see anything beyond nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia is often closely linked to politics. In today's press one frequently encounters references to Cold War nostalgia when discussing the contemporary Russian situation. Paradoxically, it is this very fear of falling back into the Cold War narrative that deferred discussion of the political changes in Russia and of the remarkable political persistence of the former Soviet state security apparatus in a new attire. Free market economy proved to be no panacea for democratic change; in Putin's Russia many democratic institutions and non-state-sponsored media channels were closed under economic pretexts like the "dispute of business partners." It is by now obvious that a capitalist economy can peacefully coexist with the authoritarian state and its nostalgic nationalist ideology. To understand the situation in Russia, one can no longer stay at the level of cultural representation; one needs to look into the politics. Restorative nostalgia is often sponsored from above, however populist, homey, and "grass roots" it appears to be.