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Screening nostalgia: time, memory, and the moving image

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Dissertation

**SCREENING NOSTALGIA:
TIME, MEMORY, AND THE MOVING IMAGE**

by

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We are all haunted houses.

- H.D., Tribute to Freud

For Hank and Mary Lou Turner

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In a sense, this entire project reckons with what it means to acknowledge, with what it means to recognize or appreciate—belatedly—those formative figures and guiding forces that continue to animate and (re)mark. The inherent difficulties in locating or identifying a place to begin such an endeavor will become more apparent in due course. For now, an attempt at retracing the trail and its lineaments must suffice.

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my maternal grandparents who passed while I was working on this project but whose animating spirits mark and re-mark me still.

**SCREENING NOSTALGIA:
TIME, MEMORY, AND THE MOVING IMAGE**

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ABSTRACT

Modern understandings of nostalgia sharply distinguish it from memory and often construe its relationship to the past as reactionary, fanciful, or retrograde. This dissertation reconsiders that valuation by engaging the formative sources that contribute to philosophical understandings of nostalgia and provide resources for thinking it otherwise. It reexamines time and memory in continental philosophy and U.S. cinema to argue that nostalgia does important work often overlooked in present conceptions, work that repositions relations with the past to generative, animating effect. The project analyzes the temporal issues nostalgia elicits, highlights its affective contours, and repositions its power to mediate and rework memory. It maintains that the role nostalgia plays in human experience is more propulsive than regressive, making it more attuned to time's tensions and demands than previously thought.

Chapter one narrates the history of nostalgia, beginning with the work of Johannes Hofer. Origins in medical nosology establish a diagnostic frame of reference that grounds nostalgia's reception as pathology while also revealing its persistent instabilities. Martin Heidegger and, especially, Jacques Derrida bring the temporal vectors of those instabilities into sharper focus. Chapter two shows how Heidegger's

work provides a useful understanding of time and moods, but ultimately remains tethered to a nostalgia for presence (*nostos*). Chapter three brings Derrida's thinking on time and the trace into conversation with psychoanalysis to isolate a more capacious approach, one that indulges nostalgic desire but also frustrates it (*algos*).

The remaining chapters turn to film and develop an understanding of the moving image based on its ability to capture passing time, the eminent object of modern nostalgic experience. Chapter four engages critical literature on the uses of nostalgia in film and reconsiders George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), a pivotal work often reproached by critics and scholars. Chapter five advances a close reading of Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011) and his estranged relationship with philosophy. That relationship informs his work and often takes nostalgic recollection as an orienting concern. The film in question situates nostalgia as a propulsive screen affect that facilitates the work of mourning in the wake of loss and discontinuity. The dissertation concludes by sketching out horizons for future research and turning to insights contained in Augustine's *Confessions* that further illustrate the form of nostalgia explored throughout.

Preface

What does nostalgia do and what is it for? How does it move us and to what end? This project probes these questions in an effort to think through how we inhabit nostalgia and how it comes to affect us. At stake in this thinking through is a broader, more capacious understanding of how nostalgia vivifies our experience and motivates our engagement with the world in ways previously overlooked. To that end, the close readings of films, texts, and figures contained in this project delineate the more generative features of nostalgia by examining how it interacts with our perceptions of time and memory. They identify instances of nostalgic expression illustrative of those features and highlight how a nostalgia aware of itself turns us more fully and openly toward the world. Each reading shows that by transporting us to our pasts and providing some opportunity for reflective reworking, nostalgia returns us more vigilantly to our present, forging a deeper attunement to future horizons and how we might intervene within them. It is in this sense that nostalgia *propels*. What I call propulsive or animating nostalgia throughout this work increases our openness to the world and enhances our capacities for movement and receptivity within it. Propulsive nostalgia furnishes us with a means to more readily attend to our experience, to how we negotiate our desires and manage our attachments. It prompts us to notice and address how we move about in the world with greater care and attention. This is the lighthouse signal, so to speak, the guiding through-line that steers this dissertation and unites its efforts.

In positioning nostalgia in this way and accentuating its temporal dimensions, this project draws inspiration from Saint Augustine. Augustine famously provides us with one

of the very first descriptions of temporality in the first-person, one that considers how time both shapes and exceeds our experience. He is less concerned with outlining a theory of what time is and more interested in what time does to us when we interact with it. He offers a phenomenology of time, in other words, a meditation on what time feels like, how we respond to it, and how it conditions the things we notice or ignore, especially when refracted through motivating feelings like nostalgia. For him, time is *distentio animi*, a distention of the soul that constantly, unceasingly, pulls us in opposite directions. The soul in this context is life's primary source of movement, energy, and propulsion—the seat of all animation and kinetic activity. It incites locomotion, impelling us to maneuver and enabling our response to the maneuvers of others. For the Neoplatonists who influenced Augustine, time spreads life out and stretches the soul in variance. Augustine himself goes a step further and suggests that this stretching or distending tends to unsettle us, often leaving us feeling caught in-between, entangled amid the unfurling temporal processes that form us. We anchor ourselves in the (moving) present with divided attention, stretched out in opposite directions: backward toward the past in memory and forward toward the future in expectation. For Augustine, this means the experience of time is nothing if not disjunctive and often presents as a series of scattered fragments. That disjunction means the past can and often does return to us through the tautness of the tension and the stretchiness of the in-between. This project shows how nostalgia often takes hold when that in-between-ness is most noticeable, and the tension most acutely felt.

Augustine's image of time as distention emerges in response to a key question that underlies the *Confessions*, his most influential work. "*Quid est ergo tempus?*" So writes the bishop of Hippo in Book XI. "What, then, is time?" He continues, encapsulating with great elegance and lucidity, how time may seem obvious to us at first, but ultimately recedes when we attempt to fix it as an object of analysis. As our lives unfold, the flux and flow of time continue in the background and become more or less noticeable depending on the circumstances. We have some intuitive awareness of this, but Augustine's point is that when we focus our attention on that awareness—or when experiences like nostalgia do that for us—we are beset with redundancies, contradiction, and confusion. "What, *then*, is time," he asks. "Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know."

Borne of much distress and consternation, this line is one of the most famous epigrams in the history of philosophy. Phenomenologists since at least Immanuel Kant quote it, reproduce it, and repeat it. Edmund Husserl opens his 1905 lectures on time-consciousness by extracting and citing the line, going on to suggest that no thinker since Augustine has managed to surpass his insight. Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, lectured extensively on the problem of time in 1930, concluding his talks with an extended meditation on Augustine. Paul Ricoeur is constantly ruminating on Augustine's conundrum in his sprawling, three volume work on time and narrative. In the concluding sections of that work, he suggests that Augustine's question reveals an aporia that remains deeply hidden even though—and especially when—it affects us most intimately. Time cultivates life and change but conceals itself when we attempt to grasp it or

demarcate a given moment. This leads Ricoeur to conclude that there has never been a philosophy of time completely free of aporia and that this explains why we often turn to metaphors and the language of myth when discussing time. He goes on to suggest that what Augustine ultimately offers us through notions like *distentio animi* is a means of approaching or mobilizing the paradox. So, rather than solving the aporia, the question becomes one of how to inhabit it and turn around in it, how to keep its tension open and taut—how to make it *work*, in other words.

This project begins in a similar position. It attempts to make Augustine's aporia work by taking up nostalgia as a useful analytic site for exploring how the tensions of time and memory contribute to what we notice in the world and how we engage that noticing. I return to Augustine at the conclusion of this study, both his framing of that aporia and his own motivations for construing *distentio animi* as a response to it. The chapters below show how nostalgia leavens that aporia by heightening our experience of the world and turning us more openly to its exigence.

Nostalgia always comes after, and the form of desire it engenders often follows instances of loss or discontinuity not easily workable. Such experiences of feeling call for a better feel for experience, and a more supple approach to the aporia Augustine so beautifully outlines. This project contends that nostalgia can provide both. Emerging as an intimate response to Augustine's aporia, nostalgia attempts to solve it, gains strength and momentum when it cannot, and, by virtue of that failure, puts the aporia itself to animating work. That work summons our most generative capabilities and propels us more fully and attentively to the world.

This dissertation's fundamental starting point—that nostalgia offers us a facility with experience unnoticed in familiar conceptions—imposes certain limits. A lack of counterexamples that bolster those familiar conceptions will, hopefully, have the overall effect of decentering them enough for an alternative to come into view. That absence does not amount to a lack of engagement with the conceptions themselves, however. Such examples are no doubt widely available and have been well documented, to be sure. This project is interested in approaching a view beyond. It positions nostalgia as a useful, motivating occasion for critical reflection and it does so by taking up a problem (time and memory) first identified by a religious figure (Augustine). As such, its significance is twofold. First, its most immediate yield is to dislodge nostalgia from familiar, constrictive valuations and chart a different path guided by key examples in philosophy, film, and religion. Second, and more broadly, this project makes contributions to modes of humanistic inquiry that draw on questions and concepts taken from religious discourse to better understand human experience.

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Chapter 1: Nostalgia's Live Burial

Nostalgia is a 'poisoned itch'...its real cause buried, perhaps invisibly, within us.¹
- Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies

Nostalgia...evokes the past only in order to bury it alive.²
-Christopher Lasch

In the year 1733, General Praxin led a Russian army to the banks of the Rhine. At this remote distance from their native country, five or six soldiers became unfit for duty every day from *nostalgia*. The General issued an order to bury alive all who were affected with it.³
-Benjamin Rush

Nostalgia's Vivisepture, Then and Now

In November 1984 an essay titled "The Politics of Nostalgia" appeared in *Harper's* magazine. Its author, the American historian Christopher Lasch, provides a highly critical overview of recent literature on nostalgia. A 1960s Neo-Marxist turned family values champion, Lasch summarily dismisses the figure of the nostalgic as "an incurable sentimentalist...cling[ing] to an idealized past...that exists only in his head."⁴ Putting an even finer point on it elsewhere, he suggests that the hallmark of "the nostalgic attitude" includes a wholesale "disparagement of the present." This attitude results in a noxious "abdication of memory" that calcifies images of a past that "stand outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection."⁵ Lasch targets populist appeals to nostalgia that bolstered progressive politics at the time, but the core of his argument supports a familiar

¹ Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies, "Nostalgia and the Shapes of History: Editorial," *Memory Studies* 3, no. 3 (July 1, 2010), 181.

² Christopher Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia," *Harper's* 269, no. 1614 (1984), 70.

³ Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia, PA: Grigg and Elliot, 1835), 111.

⁴ Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia," 65.

⁵ Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 82-83, 14, 118.

conflation of nostalgia with regression or reversion.⁶ This position takes nostalgic experience and the form of desire it engenders to be shortsighted, all too often resulting in individual romanticism or collective fantasy. The *Harper's* piece rehearses these moves and builds, finally, to a memorable if not revealing claim. "Nostalgia," Lasch writes, "evokes the past only in order to bury it alive."⁷ That evocative turn of phrase expresses more than he realized, conjuring both nostalgia's fraught history and its continued dismissal as an aspect of human experience that occludes genuine acts of memory and serious reckoning with the past.

This project takes fundamental issue with such statements and the underlying assumptions they depend upon, seeking instead to highlight generative characteristics of nostalgic experience otherwise buried or occluded. Nostalgia, I argue, need not prohibit legitimate access to the past, nor impede meaningful engagement with it. It can, on the contrary, encourage such engagement in incredibly compelling ways by virtue of what I call its more animating and propulsive features. Those features are often overlooked in critical assessments (like Lasch's) that do not attend to the often slow and unhurried work they perform upon nostalgic subjects. That work, I maintain, contributes to incremental increases in our capacities to move and be moved by the experiences indexed within us. To that end, the propulsive, animating features of nostalgic experience this project unfolds circulate in what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls "the middle ranges of agency."

⁶ His interlocutors here include paragons of various forms of populist nostalgia like Richard Hofstadter, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Jim Houghan, and Richard Louv, among others. For Lasch, each figure mobilizes nostalgia to bolster ideological retrievals of the past that elide genuine historicity and authentic memory. I discuss additional sources that perpetuate Lasch's conflation below.

⁷ Lasch, "The Politics of Nostalgia," 70.

They generate tiny, often unspectacular exchanges or shifts in disposition that “offer space for effectual creativity and change,”⁸ or, to put it in a register I develop throughout this dissertation, they open up unturned possibilities for increased movement in time. In other words, they shape and inform how we move about in the world in response to the experiences of loss and discontinuity to which nostalgia so often attends.

For Sedgwick, these middle ranges of agency deal in “small differentials” that often lodge themselves between the fixed, zero-sum dyad of self and structure, a dichotomy that “dramatiz[es] only the extremes of compulsion and voluntariness.”⁹ These differentials result in fragile, accumulative achievements that require discovery over and over again. Because they are so small and muted, those differentials can only show up for us if they are recognized as such. This may seem obvious, but a major preliminary concern of this study is to show how nostalgia’s history and transmission contribute to valuations that cannot recognize those differentials and instead position the feeling as erroneous, deviant, or retrograde. I contest this normative sentiment in an effort to both dislodge nostalgia from its longstanding pathological associations and highlight its capacity to intervene in temporal awareness and rework memory, ultimately interrogating what expect the experience of time to do for us. To the extent that nostalgia follows loss and discontinuity, my argument is that its propulsive, animating features function as a generative strategy for responding to those conditions in their often-protracted wake. That strategy, both necessary and ongoing, serves to reorient subjects in time and impel

⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michèle Aina Barale, and Jonathan Goldberg, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2003), 13.

⁹ *Ibid.*

movement, offering a means of incorporating experiences that may indeed be terminal but need not be debilitating or immobilizing.

The argument develops in conversation with key textual and filmic sources in 20th century continental thought and American cinema, sources that help bring nostalgia's neglected features into clearer view. Those features must be carefully unfolded in order to become fully intelligible. The close textual readings of Lasch, Johannes Hofer, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida contained below initiate that work and the analyses of films by directors George Lucas and Terrence Malick bring it to fruition. Together they comprise a sustained effort to make nostalgic experience more legible, to make the forms of movement and desire it engenders "readable in new ways," to borrow from Barbara Johnson.¹⁰

This chapter lays the groundwork for that effort by tracing nostalgia's history, development, and transmission as a form of pathologized desire. I take up the image of live burial referenced by Lasch above as an effective tool with which to probe nostalgia's history and a useful shorthand for conceptions that continue to construe it as a problem to be fixed or a disease to be cured rather than a resource for movement in time. At issue in this history is the manner in which nostalgia is thought to constitute an errant type of desire that ultimately impels spurious forms of movement subject to diagnosis, suspicion, and even punishment in some cases. Valuations of this kind form what I call gestures of vivisepture (live burial) that contribute to nostalgia's impoverished position and

¹⁰ Barbara Johnson, *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race, and Gender* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 13.

occlude its broader range of expression in instances that often yield animating, propulsive effects. Lasch best exhibits these gestures but they enjoy additional moments of exceeding historical resonance. I map them onto two different valences that lie at nostalgia's etymological roots—*nostos* (homecoming) and *algos* (pain)—and further anchor both sets of coordinates to two phases in nostalgia's development. The first phase involves nostalgia's initial emergence as a medical disease rooted in homesickness (*nostos*). The second coalesces around key transformations that takes place in nostalgia's confrontation with burgeoning modernity. Those transformations deal with a great many things but the most germane to nostalgia is the shift in perceptions of time and temporality that ultimately recast the feeling as the form of wistful melancholy we know it as today (*algos*).

This mapping demonstrates how, prior to the Enlightenment, the practice of live burial and variations upon it acted as a means of eliminating nostalgia along with the errant desires and spurious forms of movement it engenders. It is only later, under the new temporal conditions of modernity, when it is removed from its initial context, that nostalgia is buried alive once more through subjective interiorization, where the experience is transposed within the inner life of the individual and the outworking of memory. As Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies put it, after modernity nostalgia becomes a type of “poisoned itch,” its “real cause...*buried*, perhaps invisibly, within us.”¹¹ That interiorization, to be clear, brings the temporal dimensions of nostalgic experience into sharper focus but it does not fundamentally alter the conditions that generate the

¹¹ Atia and Davies, “Nostalgia and the Shapes of History,” 181.

experience. Nostalgia emerges in response to loss, discontinuity, and restlessness. The form, texture, and character of that response drives nostalgia's development across time, an evolution best exemplified in a shift in focus from localized space to passing time. Lasch's assumption that nostalgia forestalls serious acts of memory, for example, take time and temporization as a major point of departure even if he does not center them in his discussion. He makes certain temporal assumptions and argues that what he calls authentic memory rightly comports with those assumptions. Nostalgia, on the other hand, does not—and because it doesn't, it remains pathological. This position owes a great debt to nostalgia's origins and history, but before exploring that development more fully we first need to establish some additional context that explains why Lasch acts as such a representative figure of what we might call nostalgiphobia.

In the early 80s Lasch was experiencing a brief yet illuminating rise to national prominence. His 1979 book *The Culture of Narcissism* was a bestseller and had just won the National Book Award. Richard Locke of *The New York Times* called the work “a sardonic and often condescending survey of 20th century social theories about the family.”¹² In its review of the book *Time* magazine likened Lasch to a sort of modern-day biblical prophet. His work was praised for its “formidable intellectual grasp and the kind of moral conviction rarely found in contemporary value-neutral history and sociology.”¹³ Later that same year President Carter invited Lasch to join a group of public intellectuals to discuss the state of the American psyche following the tumultuous 60s, Vietnam, and

¹² Richard Locke, “The Literary View: In the Cage Literary View,” *New York Times Book Review*, Mar. 26, 1978, 3.

¹³ R.Z. Sheppard, “The Pursuit Of Happiness,” *Time* 113, no. 2 (January 8, 1979), 72.

the Watergate scandal. The result of those conversations was Carter's infamous "malaise speech" where he scolded the American public for their lack of confidence in governmental institutions. The speech backfired and was seen in hindsight as a failure and a grave tactical mistake.¹⁴ The next year, of course, Carter lost his reelection bid in a massive landslide that ushered in the Reagan Revolution.

1979 was also the year that nostalgia theory or what we might call nostalgia studies began to emerge. Fred Davis' seminal *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* was published on New Year's Day, marking the beginning of what would eventually become a widespread proliferation of scholarship concerned with nostalgia, a development Lasch found to be excessive and wrongheaded. Davis suggested that the so-called "nostalgia boom" of the 1970s was essentially a large-scale response to the decade prior, citing the same list of cultural shifts and political events that led President Carter to his "crisis of confidence" address. Major nationwide periodicals at the time approached nostalgia with a heightened degree of fascinated skepticism. "How much more nostalgia can America take?" asked *Time* in 1971, going on to suggest that nostalgia is merely "utopia in reverse," selecting only what is agreeable in the past and distorting it into sanguine myth or fantasy.¹⁵ Earlier that same year *LIFE* published a special half-issue devoted to the nostalgia craze. "Everybody's just wild about nostalgia," its cover read. The issue featured pieces on the recent revival of Vincent Youman's 1925 musical "No, No, Nanette," the resurgence of Art Deco and the fashion trends of the 30s and 40s, and a

¹⁴ For more on the speech, its background, context, and legacy as well as Lasch's influence upon it see Kevin Mattson, *"What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?": Jimmy Carter, America's 'Malaise,' and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury USA, 2009).

¹⁵ Gerald Clarke, "The Meaning of Nostalgia," *Time* 97, no. 18 (May 3, 1971), 91.

retrospective post-mortem on the lavish movie palaces that flourished between World War I and the Great Depression. These exposés drew attention to new vectors of nostalgia while at the same time suggesting, in a manner that anticipates Lasch, that “the sentimental craze for the past” impedes any serious exercise of memory and instead paints an inaccurate picture.¹⁶ Provoked by future uncertainty and a general sense of restlessness, Americans were fascinated by the pastness of the past and began looking back to the quaint equanimity of time gone by with rose-tinted, sepia-toned glasses. In this context, nostalgia constituted a response to disjointed time, a reaction to socio-political upheaval, and a protest against discontinuity.

This brings us back to the 1984 *Harper's* piece, specifically the vivid and evocative phrase Lasch's uses to distill his argument: “nostalgia evokes the past only in order to *bury it alive*.” The implication here is that nostalgia delivers a facile version of the past, conjuring it for the purposes of self-gratification while ignoring its complexities. But the rancor and historical resonance run much deeper. The image evoked is that of vivisepture—live burial—and it acts as more than mere rhetorical flourish. It conjures historical precedence that sheds further light on nostalgia's origins and how those origins contribute to its fraught position in critical thought. A full 250 years before Lasch penned his critique, a Russian General named Praxin faced a massive outbreak that jeopardized his troops' health. One after another soldiers fell victim to a strange new ‘wasting’ disease that wreaked havoc on his company's health and morale. Forced from their homelands to serve on the Rhine during the War of Polish Succession, these troops

¹⁶ *LIFE* 70, no. 6 (Feb. 19, 1971): 39-78.

exhibited intense symptoms of fatigue, appetite loss, and decreased motivation. Laypeople understood this ailment as a particularly severe case of homesickness, but medical professionals at the time offered a more technical diagnosis: *nostalgia*. Historical reports indicate that in order to treat this nostalgia epidemic, “the General issued an order *to bury alive* all who were affected with it.”¹⁷ Dislocated and forced into new conditions of imposed mobility, these nostalgics were subject to the same advancements in industrialization and urbanization as Lasch’s pastoral figures who lament “the eradication of unspoiled nature by the irresistible forces of progressive change.”¹⁸ New military mandates pertaining to flexibility, transportation, and increased maneuverability helped propel this change as soldiers were asked to leave the dwellings of their youth and make their homes abroad as productive and capable enlistees. These innovations had profound and long-lasting effects that contributed to nostalgia outbreaks like those reported in Praxin’s company.

Doctors at the time observed that these nostalgics longed to return home. What does this mean, to re-turn? At its most simple, the desire to return or go back means these nostalgics want to *move*. They long to re-turn by *moving away* from their current location and *moving back* home. The form of desire involved here is not one of stasis or stagnation. Nostalgia does not seize all movement. It is not as if these soldiers cannot move at all; they cannot move, or, better, are prohibited to move, in the direction of their desire, a desire deemed unruly if not completely impossible. Praxin’s nostalgics long to

¹⁷ Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations Upon the Diseases of the Mind*, 111. Italics mine. See also Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2002), 5.

¹⁸ Lasch, “Memory and Nostalgia, Gratitude and Pathos,” *Salmagundi*, no. 85/86 (1990), 20.

reverse their current form of movement and perform a return that orients them back toward the familiar—they yearn for homecoming. In question is an unsanctioned form of desire that excites their capacities for movement, not the capacities themselves; nostalgia is not tantamount to sheer paralysis. In this context, the experience comprises a revolt against the control and manipulation of movement by new social forces of deracination and estrangement.

By interring his nostalgia-ridden soldiers alive within an enclosed space, Praxin performs an especially cruel act that further solidifies his victims' increasing alienation: subjecting them to the slow, suffocating deterioration of their own capacities for movement and, finally, their own asphyxiation. Their insubordinate capacities for movement are too unruly and non-compliant, they must therefore be neutralized—slowly. All this because the soldiers' desired form of movement refuses easy instrumentalization and is thus taken to be inoperative and useless. Nostalgia thus incites movement and engenders propulsion but in this instance those possibilities are rendered problematic, unproductive, and errant. The desire nostalgia generates both impels movement and poses a movement problem, hence the need for immediate cessation and a compelling show of force through live burial. These measures were “inflicted in two or three instances...in consequence of which the disease instantly disappeared from the army.” Praxin's order was successful and amenable to larger military concerns on two fronts: effective fear tactics deterred future cases and worthless, deficient soldiers were sent to living tombs as tragic but necessary collateral damage.

This little-known historical event casts Lasch's accusation in new light. "Nostalgia evokes the past only in order to bury it alive." The Russian General's situation so long ago imbues this line with an eerie, apparitional ambience. The turn of phrase encapsulates the tumultuous history of a feeling that has gone from victim to perpetrator vis-a-vis live burial within the span of only 250 years. Praxin's entombed victims haunt Lasch's text in this regard, or, at the very least, his rhetoric re-animates their remains through the image of vivisepture—live burial—and its concealed associations with nostalgia. The polarity is reversed, of course. Praxin buried nostalgics alive; Lasch says that nostalgics bury the past alive. Praxin delivered his orders at the dawn of the eighteenth century; Lasch pens his critique at the close of the twentieth. Both figures stand on either side of modernity and while modernity does change nostalgia's valences—the way it inspires and inflects movement, as we shall see—the critical response remains the same: erasure and antagonism. Praxin executed nostalgics because of their unacceptable attachments, inefficient yearning, and unproductive, errant forms of desire. For Lasch, two centuries later, nostalgic desire still reads as errant, relegated to the sphere of noxious fantasy alone, burying the past alive by evoking it through fallacious, deceptive means. By connecting nostalgia and live burial in his piece, Lasch unwittingly conjures a long history in which the pathologized nostalgic, a figure of the obsolete and outmoded past, functions as an entombed reminder of all that has been lost—or buried—due not only to the passage of time, but the values of progress and modernization through which that passage is interpreted. Both figures, Praxin and Lasch, linked here through

their appeal to live burial, take nostalgia and the forms of movement it facilitates to be fundamentally problematic and thus cause for suspicion, if not outright abolition.

My contention throughout this project is that those assumptions and the gestures of vivisepture they enable make it exceedingly difficult to see how nostalgia might facilitate more propulsive and animating forms of movement. The Praxin-Lasch apparatus cannot fully recognize those forms and therefore deems them errant or spurious because it depends on an additional, more foundational assumption that associates nostalgia with pathology. That association stems from nostalgia's conceptual genesis in medical nosology, a discourse that establishes a clear diagnostic frame of reference. That frame first emerges in the late seventeenth century through the work of Johannes Hofer. Hofer is the first to coin the word nostalgia, positioning it as an "affliction of the imagination" (*imaginatio laesa*) induced by internal "animal spirits" (*spiritus animales*) that generate errant desires and spurious forms of movement. In essence, he thought nostalgics suffered from a type of monomania due to increased, nearly obsessive contemplation of impressed memory traces containing images of a lost home. This conception situates nostalgia as a type of pathology and its diagnostic residue persists well beyond Hofer as Lasch's assessment indicates. The remainder of this chapter unfurls that diagnostic frame using the image of vivisepture as a guiding thread. It also sketches some methodological concerns with additional help from affect theory and more recent assessments of nostalgia. It concludes by returning to Hofer to identify moments in his text suggestive of different possibilities that run counter to familiar valuations. That reading sets the stage for the remainder of the project outlined in brief below.

Map of the Project

The chapters ahead offer some conceptual and cinematic texture to the more propulsive and animating features of nostalgic experience this project aims to thematize. Chapters two and three offer interventions in continental philosophy, affect theory, and psychoanalysis in order to lay the conceptual groundwork necessary to see how those features surface in cinema. The second chapter begins by characterizing philosophy's longstanding suspicion of feeling and emotionality, noting that while philosophy famously begins in feeling (wonder) it almost immediately works to excise movements feeling in favor of movements toward reason and rationality. I show how the feelings that lie at philosophy's roots closely orbit nostalgia and express a desire to access or recover forgotten origins or lost beginnings. Those nostalgic feelings form what Martin Heidegger first called philosophy's *Grundstimmung*, its most basic mood or fundamental disposition.

The bulk of the chapter works to further unfold Heidegger's thought to the extent that it offers some preliminary insights into considering how temporality interacts with motivating feelings like nostalgia. I argue that Heidegger's work on time and moods, an admittedly minor moment in his work, begins to set us along the path toward understanding how nostalgic desire intervenes in time. He connects these insights to one of nostalgia's antecedents, homesickness, through compelling phenomenological examples like anxiety and, especially, the uncanny or the unhomely which he examines through a highly unusual reading of Sophocles' *Antigone*, a reading informed by his turn

to the poetics of Friedrich Hölderlin. Antigone brings us even closer to historical nostalgic experience given her fate of live burial. But, as useful as Heidegger is in this regard, these examples reveal the deep limitations of his thought. His romance with Ancient Greek beginnings, authenticity, and primordially reveal his own surreptitious nostalgia for presence—he remains a thinker of *nostos* (homecoming) alone.

Chapter three brings the temporal dimensions of nostalgia into sharper focus through sustained engagement with the work of Jacques Derrida, a figure who extends and radicalizes Heideggerian insights. At first blush, Derrida seems to be one of the least amenable thinkers to a reevaluation of nostalgia. Yet, while he vehemently rejects various forms of nostalgia for presence, he does offer the resources necessary to decouple nostalgia from a dynamic of regression and sentimentality. Once decoupled, a clearer understanding of nostalgia's intrinsic bittersweetness comes into view, one where nostalgia emerges as a consequence of the insoluble interval between presence and absence. I begin by introducing and situating Derrida's work through a reading of one of his final seminars, a text representative of his thought as a whole that takes nostalgia as a minor theme. I claim that Derrida ironizes and frustrates nostalgic desire without denying the experience to which it responds.

I argue that these insights are part and parcel of his larger deconstructive project, a project that engages in what Derrida calls *re-marking*. I show how this gesture stands commensurate with the experience of nostalgia, an experience that forges an intimate correspondence with past experiences by spotlighting them and allowing them to be re-inscribed or re-ordered. *Re-marking* serves to clarify the stakes of several key notions—

différance, the trace, and afterwardness—that often occupy the majority of Derrida’s work. That body of work, I argue, takes time and temporality as its major leitmotif, and develops piecemeal in conversation with interlocutors like Heidegger and Sigmund Freud. I examine how Derrida positions himself with and against Heidegger and take special care to underscore the manner in which that conversation is often interrupted by psychoanalytic insights that hold the key to understanding the idiomatic conceptions of time and memory that unfold throughout Derrida’s final seminars. Unlike Heidegger, those insights, and the broader phenomenology of time to which they connect position Derrida as a thinker of *algos* (grief, ache).

The next two chapters turn to film in full force. Chapter four places the foregoing insights in conversation with film theory to explore what Alessia Ricciardi calls the “inherently nostalgic function of film.”¹⁹ It begins by discussing the birth of cinema in 1895 which serves to illustrate the medium’s capacity to offer up images commensurate with the transient nature of human experience: images of past and passing time. That transience, I claim, is often the space in which nostalgia emerges to mobilize memory and *re-mark* upon time’s passage. I show how film makes productive temporal use of the long-standing philosophical tension between referent and representation, between the real and its (moving) image. I argue that this matrix between time, movement, and representation supplies a crucial link between cinema and nostalgia. Cinema not only offers time and experience back up to us for reflection—belatedly, as in nostalgic

¹⁹ Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 141.

experience—it also traverses the initial problematic of nostalgia first identified by Hofer, i.e., the lacunae between movement and the image.

In order to unpack those connections, I turn to the influential category of the “nostalgia film” first introduced by Fredric Jameson in his reading of George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973). Drawing on critiques from Linda Hutcheon and Catherine Constable, I show how that category relies on the pathological connotations of nostalgia discussed below and work to expand its parameters to include more active understandings of spectatorship and intertextual practices like pastiche, allusion, and the deconstructive *re-mark*. This requires engagement with key antecedents in philosophy and film theory who offer versions of realism that inform received valuations of filmic nostalgia. I first examine André Bazin’s argument for cinematic realism and connect his insights to Plato’s allegory of the cave, a foundational scene of ontological realism that also functions as a primitive analogue for the movie-going experience. The chapter concludes by engaging the work of Vera Dika and Frances Smith on “nostalgia film” to leverage a reassessment of *American Graffiti* that highlights the productive, propulsive understanding of nostalgia that forms the overall basis of this project.

The final chapter synthesizes the preceding insights by turning to the work of the American director Terrence Malick, specifically his 2011 Palme d’Or winner *The Tree of Life*. I begin by observing Malick’s close filiation with philosophy and note how his early interest in Heidegger continues to enliven and inform his work. Extending insights first offered by Stanley Cavell, I show how Malick’s films perform a *re-mark* upon Heidegger’s thought, representing objects such that “their presence refers to their

absence.”²⁰ Beginning with *Badlands* (1973) and *Days of Heaven* (1978), I argue that Malick’s cinematic oeuvre offers a sustained and compelling meditation on the accretion of memory and the temporized nature of the human condition. In *The Tree of Life*, these themes achieve new significance through affectively charged images that depict and elicit nostalgia. Malick creates and assembles these images in a manner that both acknowledges and complicates straightforward notions of successive movement and linear temporality, mobilizing what Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky has called cinema’s unique power to sculpt time.²¹

I unfold this idea throughout the chapter by engaging in a close reading of the film that draws attention to how Malick constructs the past and uses those constructions to facilitate propulsive movement in the film’s main protagonist, a character previously stricken by immobility and grief. That transformation works, in part, because nostalgia functions as a screen affect in the film, a notion that resonates with the development of screen theory in film studies as well as the psychoanalytic and deconstructive insights regarding temporality, belatedness, and retroactivity explored in chapter three. As a screen affect, nostalgia mobilizes, reworks, and *re-marks* earlier feelings of bereavement in the wake of a profound loss. The film both *screens nostalgia*, evoking it in viewers through transference, while at the same time *offering nostalgia up as a screen*, a surrogate that facilitates the work of mourning in its main protagonist, allowing him to move forward by turning back. Like Derrida’s reflections in his final seminar, the film

²⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), xvi.

²¹ Cf. Andrey Tarkovsky and Kitty Hunter-Blair, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (Austin, T.X.: University of Texas Press, 1987).

accomplishes this without positioning nostalgia as a form of redemption or recompense and, especially, without providing any sense of temporal closure or narrative finality. In cinema, Malick offers an exceptionally arresting portrayal of *re-marked* nostalgic desire that gestures toward an increased receptivity toward temporal experience and all the vicissitudes it entails.

Nostalgia's Diagnostic Frame of Reference: The Invention of a Dis-eased Feeling

One of the reasons why this project maintains a vested interest in nostalgia is because it serves a microcosm for the opacity of affective life, demonstrating the difficulties inherent in any effort to render experiences of feeling immediately transparent. "Feelings are always the feelings of feelings," Adrian Johnston observes.²² They arise as responsive reactions to stimuli not always easily identified. They come to us late and our understanding even later. If we feel happy or sad, to what do we attribute these feelings? How do they come to us and move us in the ways they do? At times, these feelings bury or conceal their trail as quickly as they emerge. They often arise through connections and associations that make it hard to retrace their provenance or isolate a referent. Time rushes ahead and comprehension lags behind. Both constitute the intricate, unfurling tapestry of accreting experience and enable us to better understand how we

²² Adrian Johnston and Catherine Malabou, *Self and Emotional Life: Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Neuroscience* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), 85. Silvan Tomkins, who pioneered the field of affect theory, offers similar remarks: "Affective responses seem to the individual to be aroused easily by factors over which he has little control, with difficulty by factors over which he can control, and to endure for periods of time which he controls only with great difficulty, if at all. They are in these respects somewhat alien to the individual." See Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition* (New York, N.Y.: Springer Publishing Company, 2008), 80.

come to find ourselves feeling this way or that. I further develop this thematic over the course of the next several chapters, but for now it will suffice to note that nostalgia takes this belated structure of emotional life and formalizes it. If the apprehension of feeling emerges through deferral and delay, at least one degree removed as Johnston suggests, then nostalgia is feeling *par excellence*. It emerges in response to loss and as it unfolds it generates layers of protracted recognition, engendering a powerful form of desire that seeks to reread or objectify time and its passage. Here we have an emotion that serves to not only highlight but actively accentuate the profound difficulty of going back, returning, or repeating. Nostalgia is a feeling whose entire purpose seems to be to retrace the track of feeling itself by taking as its object a phenomenon that does not sit still and cannot be localized: temporized experience. Enamored by the pipe dream of 'going back' to revisit some previous experience, nostalgia remains at war with itself, subsisting in jittery restlessness and unsettled transience. It longs for rest and repose but thrives in conditions of unfulfillment. Infatuated by the distance or interval between origin and effect, it pines for a type of union that only makes sense under the conditions of lack and absence that so forcefully impel it. Emerging in the aftermath of loss, dislocation, or discontinuity, it seeks remediation through return and repetition, expecting some form of cathartic release only to gain further momentum when that release is deferred again and again. Propelled by a type of frustrated, restive desire, nostalgia often accompanies the experience of mourning tinged with pleasure, of memory refracted through the prisms of belated awareness and understanding. Thriving on futility, failure, and dissatisfaction,

nostalgia's enduring persistence remains as interminable as its demands, reverberating beyond the (living) grave.

It wasn't always this way. Nostalgia has a long, fraught history marked by swerves and detours. This history is punctuated by a sharp shift in focus that coincides with the dawn of modernity, a shift that created the conditions for more common understandings of the feeling popular today. It initially emerged not as the inner form of longing we often take it to be, but as a medical disease with distressing symptoms and even more disturbing treatment plans. 'Nostalgia isn't what it used to be,' or so the adage goes, expressing both its main lament and its susceptibility to what Krystine Batcho calls "semantic drift."²³ Now defined as a constellation of wistful feelings and desirous sensations associated with longing for things past, nostalgia was first called into existence in 1688 by the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer.²⁴ Drawing on Helvetian case studies, Hofer wanted to isolate a certain type of experience emerging "from the grief for the lost charm of the Native land"²⁵ [*ex dolore amissae dulcedinis Patriae desumptum*]. This experience, he admits in his Basel dissertation, has a prehistory prior to its naming, what the Germans called *das Heimweh* and Helvetian mercenaries serving abroad in Gaul *la Maladie du Pays*. Like Praxin's nostalgics less than 50 years later, these soldiers reacted to their new conditions of transience and forced mobility by expressing a

²³ Krystine Irene Batcho, "Nostalgia: The Bittersweet History of a Psychological Concept," *History of Psychology* 16, no. 3 (August 2013): 165–76.

²⁴ Carolyn Kiser Anspach and Johannes Hofer, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer, 1688. (Book Review)," *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine; Baltimore, Md.* 2 (January 1, 1934): 376–391. At present, Anspach's is the only complete English translation of Hofer's work. I have relied heavily on her work here and have only modified it in certain exceptional cases.

²⁵ Anspach and Hofer, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia by Johannes Hofer," ¶2, 380.

profound desire to go back home, to return to their place of origin. They suffered from particularly acute cases of what we now call homesickness and their ailments often produced severe even lethal effects. Hofer felt that this phenomenon, both “uncommon and ever-present,”²⁶ deserved a new name in official discourse. When searching for this new name he reached beyond the familiar German and French expressions. Instead, the former theology student returned to an ancient tradition of mourning and homecoming that can be traced back to Homer and the Psalms.²⁷ He suggests that the new name for this feeling of melancholic sadness or desiring—nostalgia—is Greek in origin, but even those origins are feigned and created *ex post facto*. The word nostalgia is only quasi-Greek, or, as the late critic Svetlana Boym observes, “nostalgically Greek.”²⁸ It did not exist as a category and had no extant linguistic use prior to Hofer’s coinage. The veracity of that coinage depends on a certain nostalgia for origins, what Jacob Taubes calls “the apotheosis of the early,” the perceived pedigree of ancient antiquity.²⁹ The word itself is

²⁶ Ibid., ¶3, 381.

²⁷ In the Hebrew Bible, nostalgia is the result of forced exile, dislocation, and the destruction of home: “By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion” (Ps. 137:1). Homer’s *Odyssey* is a piece of epic literature that takes nostalgia in the form of homecoming as its central, guiding leitmotif. Understood as proper remembrance of the past, nostalgia figures prominently in Confucian poetry and literature as well. See, for example the discussion in Kimberly K. Smith, “Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2000), 509, 515. Centuries after Homer, the Roman poet Ovid composed his elegiac “Tristia” expressing his own longing for home under the conditions of exile. Over 1500 years before Hofer first coined the word, the Greek physician Hippocrates described a type of melancholia brought on by an excess of black bile that plagued those who left their native lands. See Charles Zwingmann, “‘Heimweh’ or ‘Nostalgic Reaction’: A Conceptual Analysis and Interpretation of a Medico-Psychological Phenomenon.” (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1959), 9ff; and Anthony Brandt, “A Short Natural History of Nostalgia,” *Atlantic Monthly* 242 (1978): 58–63.

²⁸ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 1.

²⁹ Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Dana Hollander (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7. For more on this see Barbara Cassin and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *Nostalgia: When Are We Ever at Home?*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016), 5ff.

thus borne of the same predicament it seeks to name, retroactively constructing a path to provenance in hopes of achieving some clarity and understanding.

Nevertheless, by his own account, Hofer created this neologism “composed of two sounds,” *Nostos* (to return home, or reach an arrival place) and *Algos* (pain, or that which causes pain, grief, sorrow, or distress): the pain associated with returning, of arriving at a place associated with familiarity or homeliness. By generating this new name Hofer achieved something extraordinary. He created a novel disease, to be sure, but he also performed an act of translation. He transposed a previously noble emotional experience into a diagnostic tool subject to all the values and conventions attendant to its medical context.³⁰ This resulted in a new type of pathology characterized by errant desires strong enough to result in grave illness. Acts of translation such as these are not neutral and often carry with them additional acts of implicit interpretive evaluation. Both the new name and the new context establish a diagnostic frame through which nostalgia continues to be received and transmitted, the same frame assumed by Praxin and Lasch in their gestures of vivisepture. Hofer applies the word ‘nostalgia,’ a novel term at the time, to describe what he took to be a problematic pathology, a phenomenon we now associate with sheer feeling and often dismiss on the basis of excessive sentimentality as Lasch’s essay indicates.

What does it mean to call an emotion into existence, to express desirous experience in language, to name a feeling or render a sensation in speech? “Can desire

³⁰ As Batcho puts it: “Whereas Hofer’s disease model concentrated attention on symptoms, prognosis, and treatments, prior to Hofer, homesickness was presumed to be the norm, even admirable or noble.” See Batcho, “Nostalgia,” 166.

survive its naming?”³¹ What is lost in this naming? And how, precisely, is such an experience felt or expressed prior to its naming? Tracing the genealogy of certain feelings or affects inevitably faces such seemingly intractable dilemmas, what Jean Starobinski has identified as “the interplay of emotions and language” in his influential cultural history of nostalgia.³² Emotions are only accessible for analytical examination and close reading to the degree that they find adequate, commensurate expression. Yet, they are not reducible to such expressions—this is the rub phenomenologists since Kant and Husserl warned us about. The names we confer—joy, anger, sadness, nostalgia—do not, cannot, contain the entirety of the experiences to which they refer. They all too easily elide the specificity of texture, the granularity of degree, the particularity of gradation. They are not the thing itself. At best, they serve as placeholders or signposts, always running the risk of burying their own origins alive. “It is not the emotion itself which comes before us,” Starobinski writes, “only that part which has passed into a given form of expression.”³³ Identifying and naming an experience like nostalgia is, at best, an act of translation and, at worst, a crime of viviseulture. In either case, examining such experiences is always already an engagement with the artifice of their construction, the drama of their transmission, the theatrics of their circulation.³⁴

³¹ Lee Edelman, “Queer Theory: Unstating Desire,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 4 (1995), 347.

³² Jean Starobinski and William S. Kemp, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” *Diogenes* 14, no. 54 (1966), 81.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ The slippery ‘origin’ of this word—nostalgia, a retroactive Greek name and faux neologism—is itself emblematic of what an origin is, of the romance of the origin, of what it means to attempt to return to a primordial scene, its history and transmission altogether indicative of the affective experience to which it refers. Nostalgia both connotes a desire for or a return to origins and is itself plagued by the lack of a stable origin. Hofer remains the primary point of reference, but for the majority of its development beyond the seventeenth century the precise source of nostalgia remained undetermined, contested, and largely

The artifice, drama, and theatrics begin with Hofer, who saw fit to invent not only a novel word but an entire disease by placing two familiar Greek terms side by side: *nostos* and *algos*. Together, these two old words name what Hofer took to be a new experience. He thus believed it possible “from the force of the expression Nostalgia, to trace the sorrowful sensibility arising from the burning desire for the return to one’s native land”³⁵ [*vt adeò ex vi vocis Nostalgia designare possit tristem animum ex reditùs in patriam ardenti desiderio oriundum*]. A more literal translation of the first clause might read: “from the power of the voice, Nostalgia....” Thus nostalgia, according to Hofer, is a means of giving voice to the fiery, burning desire for a type of Odyssean homecoming, a movement of return to an origin that might offer some means of restitution, remediation, or repose. Incidents of actual live burial, like Praxin’s, would not emerge as a response to nostalgia for decades, but Hofer’s dissertation already establishes themes that pave the way. His short, remarkable text looks to render something intelligible. That intelligibility is local and specific to the discourse of diagnostic medicine in which Hofer is situated, a

unmoored. In 1710 Theodor Zwinger, one of Hofer’s mentors and collaborators, reedited the original dissertation replacing the word nostalgia with his own short-lived and ill-fated neologism, “pothopatridalgia.” The new title of the text read *De Pothopatridalgia vom Heimwehe*, excising nostalgia altogether in favor of a more baroque and clunky alternative. See Filiberto Fuentesbro de Diego and Carmen Valiente Ots, “Nostalgia: A Conceptual History,” *History of Psychiatry* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 2014), 405. Over a quarter-century later, in 1757, Albrecht von Haller, also one of Hofer’s teachers, reedited the text yet again, removing Zwinger’s revisions and restoring the original title. This only exacerbated things, however, as Haller erroneously dated the text to 1678, a full ten years before Hofer published his initial text. Haller attributed authorship to the physician Jean-Jacques Harder rather than Hofer, an error that is still reproduced by the *Trésor de la langue française*. Hofer himself died in the meantime, unable to plead his case. Cf. Thomas Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was: War, Empire, and the Time of a Deadly Emotion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 16-42 and Barbara Cassin *Nostalgia: When Are We Ever at Home?*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault (New York, New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 5-8 and especially 66n9. See also André Bolzinger, *Histoire de la nostalgie* (Campagne première, 2007), passim. See also, Charles Zwingmann, “‘Heimweh’ or ‘Nostalgic Reaction’: A Conceptual Analysis and Interpretation of a Medico-Psychological Phenomenon.” (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1959), 13-19.

³⁵ Anspach and Hofer, “Medical Dissertation,” ¶2, 381. Translation modified.

discourse with its own strictures, conventions, and protocols. It stands to reason, then, that this intelligibility might also ignore or render *unintelligible* those aspects of nostalgic experience that do not immediately cohere with its epistemological standards. The possibility of misrecognition lies at nostalgia's origins alongside the horizon of intelligibility. After Hofer that mis-recognition morphs into mechanisms of viviseulture—figurative in Lasch and material in Praxin—that further obscure the alternative ways of knowing, desiring, and moving nostalgia contains.

None of this is necessarily Hofer's fault, yet his text does establish a diagnostic frame of reference through which nostalgia continues to be understood. It initiates nostalgia's contested transmission by taking up an experience, previously unmarked by precise linguistic determination, and introducing or transposing it into something foreign: the lexicon of medical taxonomy and pathological classification. This moment marks the beginning of nostalgia's formal viviseulture, its live burial in thought and practice. Its nosological construction as a disease in Hofer's work solidifies its position as a problem and sets a clear trajectory for its history as an analytical, diagnostic concept. This gesture is further serviced by Praxin and perpetuated by Lasch and others, a gesture rooted in misrecognition and the need to excise the unintelligible either through measures of outright retribution or more expulsionary discursive tactics like viviseulture.

Praxin and Lasch are not the only or even the most prominent figures to engage in acts of live burial or take up its metaphoric profusion. The fear of live burial and its use as an especially dreadful form of punishment resonate throughout thought and literature. The anxieties and ambiguities embedded in those resonances offer some interesting

insights into nostalgia's own animating functions, and how those functions can be leveraged to generative effect. Antigone is probably the most recognizable figure in this regard, a heroine who responds to her sentence with clear-eyed defiance and a key example for thinkers like Heidegger (I will have more to say about this in the next chapter). Viviseulture also frequently emerges in the work of Edgar Allen Poe as means of exploring the distinction between life and death through resuscitation and reanimation. For a long time, it was rumored that the scholastic philosopher John Duns Scotus was accidentally buried alive. Servants reportedly found his corpse outside the sarcophagus with bloody, lacerated hands, indicating a possible escape attempt.³⁶

These and other textual uses of live burial serve to soften the boundary between life and death, making it more porous and malleable. They do so by refiguring the dynamics of movement that adhere between life and death. Aristotle, for example, thematizes life under the rubric of the soul or psyche, the operative Greek word being *anima* from which we draw the English terms animation (possessing life, movement, or

³⁶ Francis Bacon is probably the most famous writer to have reported this, highlighting the themes of movement and reanimation. In his 1623 *Historia vitae et mortis* he writes: "There have been many instances of men who have been left for dead, laid out, and carried forth to burial; nay, of some who have been actually buried; that have yet come to life again. In the case of those who have been buried, this has been ascertained, on opening the grave, from the wounded and bruised state of the head, by reason of the body striving and tossing in the coffin. The most recent and memorable instance thereof was the subtle schoolman Duns Scotus, who having been buried in the absence of his servant (who appears to have known the symptoms of these fits), was by him afterwards disinterred and found in this state." Cf. Francis Bacon, *The History of Life and Death* (<http://www.sirbacon.org/historylifedeath.htm>) accessed August 7, 2020. Nearly 250 years later Rev. Alban Butler dismisses this telling as a mere fable in his *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Principal Saints*. "The fable of his being buried alive is clearly confuted by Luke Wadding, the learned Irish Franciscan, who published his works, with notes, in twelve tomes, printed at Lyons in 1636. Natalis Alexander, a most impartial inquirer into this dispute, and others, have also demonstrated that story to have been a most groundless fiction." Cf. his *The Lives of the Saints, Volume VI*, 1866. (<https://www.bartleby.com/210/7/141.html>) accessed August 7, 2020.

spirit) and animus (hostility or ill sentiment; also, motivation to move or do something).³⁷ *Anima* constitutes the vital spirit or life force of a being or entity and acts as a fundamental principle of movement—to live is to move, to be animated or impelled. Death, by contrast, is the cessation of movement. Freud is a particularly useful reference point in this regard. First in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and later in *The Ego and the Id*, he characterizes his notion of *Todestrieb* as a force that “lead[s] organic life back into the inanimate state” by restoring the earlier stage from which life emerged.³⁸ The core binary at play here is between life as motion or movement and death as terminus or stasis. Live burial introduces a productive ambiguity between this set of oppositions. It preemptively forestalls the potential for movement (ending life) but in doing so also raises the question of finality: does the burial actually end life and stop animating movement? Is the victim *really* dead? These questions of closure eventually give way to a strange mixture of fear and fascination, the possibility, for example, that the corpse will *return* or *re-animate* to haunt in the future as Poe’s stories and the apocryphal legend of Duns Scotus indicate.³⁹ Live burial leaves open the possibility that the ‘dead’ will be brought back with a vengeance, their *anima* re-kindled and free to perform spurious forms of movement that incite, among other things, fear, anxiety, and confusion. Like

³⁷ See, for example, his *De Anima* and *Physics*.

³⁸ Sigmund Freud and Peter Gay, *The Ego and the Id* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19, ed. James Strachey (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 40.

³⁹ This is one of the reasons why live burial is so often associated with the experience of the uncanny, i.e., the apprehension of something strange in the familiar, the unhomely that lies at the heart of the homely. In his book-length study of the topic, the first of its kind, Nicholas Royle draws a clear connection between the uncanny, live burial, and the sort of nostalgia this project explores: “At some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or homesickness, in other words a compulsion to return....” See Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York, N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 2003), 2. I explore this nexus further in chapters two and three below.

nostalgia, it raises a question of the possibility of animating—or *reanimating*—movement.

What sort of re-kindled *anima* does nostalgia raise and what sort of (re)animating movements does it induce, given its adjacency to live burial? This homology between nostalgia and vivisepture serves to underscore one of the animating concerns of this entire project. The inadvertent connection Lasch makes in his *Harper's* piece opens up space within which to consider how the forms of movement and desire nostalgia engenders may intervene within established assumptions pertaining to time and memory and how we comport ourselves to them. Like the practices of live burial to which it is subject, nostalgia introduces a productive, (re)animating ambiguity between two structuring values according to its own register: presence (life, movement) and absence (death, stasis). It recognizes distance and laments loss while at the same time setting in motion a powerful, propulsive desire to fill in gaps that cannot be immediately closed. Still, it subsists, offering a means of approach that weakens the boundaries between past and present, there and here, absence and presence. It is in this sense that nostalgia, like live burial, connotes a certain experience of haunting; something returns to re-animate, re-awaken, or *re-mark*, as I will put it in chapter three. By intervening in temporal awareness and reworking memory this spectral experience—nostalgia—creates the conditions for forms of movement that remain spurious and erroneous under the diagnostic frame of reference.

Spurious or erroneous movement is essentially how Hofer describes both the cause and the effects of nostalgia. He attributed the new disease to “the quite continuous

vibration of animal spirits [*spiritus animales*] through those fibers of the middle brain in which impressed traces of the Fatherland [home] still cling.”⁴⁰ Drawing on innovative insights at the time from Descartes and Thomas Willis, Hofer took these animal spirits to be something of an essential substrate that governs sense perception and physical reactions in response to received stimuli. In Descartes, whose framework Hofer essentially adopts wholesale in his dissertation, the animal spirits are produced by the brain and distributed throughout the body. This, he thinks, is what accounts for *movement*, specifically automatic or habitual movements like reflexes. These animal spirits function as “messengers of sorts”⁴¹ both organizing sensory communication and impelling movement. But, crucially, they are also capable of reactivating impressed images in memory and constructing new images in the imagination. Like the moving images discussed later in this study, these images re-present something presently absent, like the idea of home or any other object of nostalgia, and their representations serve to induce motion. The animal spirits move about within the body and as a result they move us, much in the same manner as ordinary feelings. But for Hofer, the images that cause nostalgia pose a problem because they facilitate spurious and erroneous movement in the form of *return*—they want to go backward instead of forward.

Those afflicted, like the soon-to-be-entombed soldiers in Praxin’s company, long to ‘go back.’ They want to re-turn by re-orienting themselves toward the familiar and moving toward it. The images of home that motivate them were created in the past and

⁴⁰ Anspach and Hofer, “Medical Dissertation,” ¶7, 384.

⁴¹ Achim Landwehr, “Nostalgia and the Turbulence of Times,” *History and Theory* 57, no. 2 (2018), 254.

exert a force that depends on absence. Those images left indelible traces or impressions that are, according to Hofer, reactivated by the repeated and recurring vibration of quiet forces—the animal spirits—that govern movement and stimulate both memory and the imagination. As Thomas Dodman puts it in his translation, sensory stimuli trigger these vibrations “soliciting the imaginative faculties to converge on mental images impressed in memory and excite in the soul [*anima*] a recurring and exclusive idea of returning to the homeland.”⁴² In a sense, then, these *animating* forces called *animal* spirits serve to *re-animate* past impressions embedded in memory—traces, buried alive perhaps, which generate a desire for movement and return. Nostalgia thus poses a movement problem by inspiring forms of movement deemed erroneous and regressive, a movement against movement, so to speak, a reaction to new demands of increased mobility.

Against this backdrop it becomes clear that when General Praxin first sentenced nostalgics to death by live burial in 1733 he accomplished two things. First, he services nostalgia’s Hoferian status as pathology by implementing measures to both punish current nostalgics and discipline would-be victims in the future. Nostalgia engenders an unacceptable and unwieldy form of desire and must therefore be rooted out because it encourages spurious forms of movement—the return home—that do not accord with newfound military standards based on efficiency and portability. Nostalgics yearn for recursive movement and should thus not be allowed to move at all. Instead, they are subject to vivisepulture, interred in living tombs. Second, Praxin offers a material metaphor for the way the nostalgia morphs in confrontation with modernity. In the late

⁴² Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was*, 22.

nineteenth century, as new conceptions of time and temporality were just beginning to take shape, nostalgia disappeared from medical diagnostics altogether. Instead, it came to be associated with Romanticism as a trope for generalized longing and melancholic desire. This change—which Batcho attributes to semantic drift—facilitated a shift in focus away from space and place in favor of time and temporization. Corollary to this broader temporal shift is nostalgia’s subjective interiorization. No longer do nostalgics desire to return to some lost home; instead, they long for the past, for lost time and lost potential. Nostalgia is still a response to loss and a strategy for mourning, but under these conditions it is buried alive once again, this time within the mental life of the subject. Each instance of vivisepture—Praxin’s literal gesture and modernity’s figurative one—necessitate further unpacking. I will look at each in turn.

Nostos: Nostalgia, Homesickness, and Place

Praxin may have been the first to order the live burial of nostalgics, but he was not the only military official concerned with the new disease. The burgeoning malady posed a serious problem for many foreign armies stationed abroad. In Hofer’s time and up through the 18th and 19th century concerns revolved around optimal military performance.⁴³ Armies needed to move about quickly and efficiently, and in this respect nostalgics made exceptionally poor soldiers. Hofer himself makes note of this newfound interest, observing cases of nostalgia “frequent with the centurions of the forces in

⁴³ As Batcho puts it, “much of the early interest in nostalgia was motivated by the concern for optimal performance of military resources during European conflicts well into the eighteenth century.” See Batcho, “Nostalgia,” 166.

Helvetian Gaul”⁴⁴ who longed to counter their directives by initiating the move to return home. As imposed military mobility increased, so did the number of nostalgia outbreaks. By the time of the Napoleonic wars, nostalgia was second only to typhus and scurvy as the primary disease affecting military performance.⁴⁵ Responses on the part of military officers like Praxin revolved around mitigating existing cases and managing troop morale. In some instances, they took deliberate disciplinary measures to prevent further nostalgia outbreaks. Soldiers who were forced to leave their homeland for tours of duty often fell victim to acute cases of homesickness and were subject to various forms of “moral therapy” or “moral assistance” similar to Hofer’s initial treatment plan of returning home. Afflicted troops were either granted furlough or, in some cases, merely promised the possibility of future return. When such ploys did not work more drastic measures were taken. Praxin’s practice of burying diagnosed nostalgics alive is perhaps the most extreme instance, but other draconian methods proliferated. When addressing outbreaks during the French Revolution, for instance, the physician Jourdan Le Cointe cites Praxin’s measures with approval, suggesting that nostalgia is best overcome by “inciting pain or terror,” going on to offer a remedy that involved applying a red-iron to the abdominal region.⁴⁶ In order to properly treat nostalgia, it seemed, one must either assuage the longing through vague platitudes or by appealing to equally strong feelings of fear as a means of repressing or burying the desire.

⁴⁴ Anspach and Hofer, “Medical Dissertation,” ¶4, 382.

⁴⁵ Michèle Battesti, “Nostalgia in the Army (17th-19th Centuries),” in *War Neurology*, ed. Tatu L. Bogousslavsky (Basel: Karger Publishers, 2016), 135.

⁴⁶ Starobinski and Kemp, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” 96.

In the U.S., the situation was a bit different. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when European war doctors were scrambling to forestall nostalgia outbreaks and epidemics of homesickness, American officials boasted about their troops' apparent immunity to the disease.⁴⁷ Everything changed in the mid-nineteenth century with the American Civil War. Just as nostalgia was beginning to evolve in Europe—in inaugurating the shift in focus from space to time—American soldiers began to succumb to the illness *en masse*. Over 2,500 confirmed cases of nostalgia were reported during the first two years of the Civil War from Union armies alone.⁴⁸ The symptoms, etiology, and proposed treatment plan were similar to those reported earlier in Europe. Affected soldiers were said to be despondent, melancholic and depressed, emotionally detached, sad, and generally sullen or crestfallen, completely consumed by the desire to return home. In a paper given before the Medical Society of the Army of Potomac in 1864, Union Assistant Surgeon Theodore Calhoun listed numerous cases, some of which resulted in death, and outlined familiar Hoferian symptoms such as fever, loss of appetite, and general dysentery. Like Hofer, he described the disease as an “affection of the mind” and an overall state of depression. In terms of treatment, he suggested that “the patient can often be laughed out of it by his comrades, or reasoned out of it by appeals to his manhood,”⁴⁹ placing further gloss on Le Cointe's proposed solutions of forced pain and terror. Like other military physicians of the time, Calhoun speculated that young, rural soldiers were more susceptible to nostalgia than those from urban centers and suggested

⁴⁷ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 5.

⁴⁸ Batcho, “Nostalgia,” 166.

⁴⁹ S.W. Butler, *Medical and Surgical Reporter* (Philadelphia, PA: King & Baird, 1864), 132.

that this was likely brought on by correspondence with home in the form of letter-writing. In this milieu, nostalgia connoted weakness and a lack of internal fortitude, a boyish type of infirmity that was best expelled by bullying, intimidating, or antagonizing the patient—a desire so powerful that its failure to reproduce the accepted norms of masculinity appeared to threaten their validity, necessitating various mechanisms of repressive burial.

For the first several centuries of its transmission, then, nostalgia circulated as a medical diagnosis almost exclusively in military contexts (“this disease is rarely seen in civil life,”⁵⁰ one journal suggests). Moreover, unlike contemporary usage, its conceptual determination was entirely spatial. Soldiers from Hofer’s time up through the nineteenth century experienced nostalgia because they longed to return to their actual, physical homes. New conditions of forced mobility and dislocation generated their yearning, directing their desire toward a particular place or space; nostalgia and homesickness were synonymous with *nostos* as the main inflection point.⁵¹ This relation may seem counterintuitive to contemporary ears, but it was the norm for most of the nostalgia’s short lexical history. Following the U.S. Civil War, the term disappeared from medical nosology altogether, right around the same time psychiatry and psychoanalysis began to rise to prominence as a dominant diagnostic discourse. As a result, nostalgia was no longer recognized as an official disease. Instead, it was subject to live burial yet again,

⁵⁰ “Nostalgia, or Home Sickness,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 39, no. 1 (August 2, 1848): 9–10.

⁵¹ For more on development of this conflation—and eventual decoupling—within the context of American history see Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

this time through interiorization, by being transposed within the inner life of the individual and her accretive memories, a process concomitant with burgeoning modernity and its dual emphases on temporality and subjectivity.

In this context, nostalgia came to be understood as an incurable, introspective reaction to the conditions of time rather than a curable ailment related to spatial dislocation. Nostalgia settled into its more familiar set of meanings as a result, but the majority of its pathological associations were retained and also transposed or interiorized. To be nostalgic in contemporary contexts is to pine not necessarily for home in the form of a specific place or space, but for home as past or lost time. Spurious movement for Hofer and Praxin involved a physical leave-taking by returning home through unauthorized means; after this transition spurious movement came to involve a mental leave-taking characterized by a return to the past, and its homeliness, through inauthentic means. The focus shifts but in both cases the type of movement involved attempts to interrupt, halt, subvert, or reverse the normative course of direction. This is what unites Praxin's soldiers with the contemporary nostalgic dismissed by Lasch: one laments leveled off movement, the other leveled off time—both revolt against the inertia of modern progress and linearity. Both emerged as failed, yet instructive responses to the losses and discontinuities those concepts amass. Against them, nostalgia can only read as a regressive, retrograde reaction—a symptom of general backwardness. Praxin treats this symptom by laying to living rest those who long for rest that only home can provide. Lasch furthers this gesture by construing nostalgia as an insubordinate form of desire that buries the past alive.

Nostalgia's development thus involves a shift in focus from the spatial to the temporal. The shift in focus situates it less as a medical disease and more as a type of reaction to the passage of time and the linear determinations that encourage, in the wake of loss and discontinuity, a pervasive imperative to 'go forward' or 'move on.' Under these conditions, nostalgia acts as a means of longing and remembrance that often reads as pathological, excessively romantic, and otherwise specious or illegitimate. The most recent edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, defines nostalgia simply as a type of "acute longing for familiar surroundings" and goes on to specify not only the decidedly temporal nature of its character, but also its relation to memory, specifically those types of memory that we might call bittersweet: "sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past...sentimental imagining or evocation of a period of the past."⁵² This shift in focus can be attributed to at least two interlocking cultural and technological developments resulting from nascent modernity. First, a shift in medical epistemology characterized by a move away from Hippocratic psychosomatic diagnostics to anatomy and bacteriology led physicians to classify nostalgia as a psychiatric disorder rather than a physical disease.⁵³ This development recast nostalgia as a type of generalized melancholia, a determination also facilitated by the rise of psychoanalysis. Second, due to the rise of industrialization and increased mobility, significant changes in

⁵² "nostalgia, n.." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/view/Entry/128472?> (accessed March 05, 2018).

⁵³ Cf. Starobinski, "The Idea of Nostalgia," 99-101; G. Rosen, "Nostalgia: A 'Forgotten' Psychological Disorder," *Clio Medica (Amsterdam, Netherlands)* 10, no. 1 (April 1975): 28-51; Michael S. Roth, "Dying of the Past: Medical Studies of Nostalgia in Nineteenth-Century France," *History and Memory* 3, no. 1 (1991): 5-29; and Charles Zwingmann, "'Heimweh' or 'Nostalgic Reaction': A Conceptual Analysis and Interpretation of a Medico-Psychological Phenomenon." (Ph.D., Stanford University, 1959).

the conception, perception, and representation of time occurred which emphasized the supposedly inevitable entelechy of forward motion as well as individual, autonomous introspection. As Boym suggests, after the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nostalgia comes to be representative of a very specific type of response to the Enlightenment, a side effect of its constituent linear teleology and a means of mourning or lamenting its temporal implications.⁵⁴ If in Hofer's time the object of nostalgic desire persisted under the spatially localizable signifier of home, by the end of the nineteenth century it had come to be the exact opposite, that is, time itself, fleeting time gone by and lapsed duration.

Algos: Nostalgia, Introspection, and Time

Immanuel Kant, now a type of shorthand for the inauguration of modernity, ties together these new threads of time, memory, and interiorized desire, highlighting the more familiar connotations of nostalgia for the first time. Commenting on the phenomena of Swiss homesickness, Kant suggests that Hofer's treatment plan of homecoming is perhaps counterproductive. He contends that a full return does not satiate nostalgic desire because the desired object is itself conditioned by the flux and flow of time.

The homesickness [*Heimweh, nostalgia*] of the Swiss...that seizes them when they are transferred to other lands is the result of a longing for the places where they enjoyed the very simple pleasures of life—aroused by the recollection of images of the carefree life and neighborly company in their early years. For later, after they visit these same places, they are greatly disappointed in their expectations and thus also find their homesickness cured. To be sure, they think that this is because everything there has changed a great deal, but in fact it is because they cannot bring back their youth there.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 10.

⁵⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006),

¶32.

Writing here in late eighteenth century, Kant stands at the precipice of nostalgia's already shifting definition, gesturing toward the dissociation of nostalgia and homesickness achieved by the end of the next century. He keeps Hofer's spatial language, but recasts it, emphasizing the irreversibility of time, the seeming inaccessibility of the past, and, especially, the incipient notion of 'growing up' or 'coming of age' now associated with Enlightenment rationality and progress by virtue of Kant's work.⁵⁶ The Swiss suffer from a form of Peter Pan syndrome, according to Kant. They long to return home but find this return impossible or unsatisfying because they do not recognize how the conditions of time affect them as well as their objects of desire (home, youth, etc.).

This reading must be understood in the broader context of Enlightenment-era shifts in the conception of time that take subjective perception and individual experience as their primary point of departure. In Kant's own schema, time is no longer considered as an objective reality independent of the mind. He instead situates it as an *a priori* idea, a form of inner sensibility that structures sense perception and conditions experience in general, along with other elements in his transcendental aesthetic.⁵⁷ The perception of time, in other words, shapes how things show up for us and informs the process through

⁵⁶ In the opening lines of his seminal 1784 essay "What is Enlightenment?" Kant defines enlightenment as "the human being's emergence from self-incurred immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*]." Like the American military doctors almost a century later, Kant thinks this self-imposed infantilism exacerbates a lack of courage and inner fortitude. Ultimately, it squelches individual liberty and prohibits the free use of reason by indulging lower, more unproductive forms of desire. The implication here is that nostalgia, a species of childish immaturity, impedes progress and rational thinking. Cf. Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.

⁵⁷ This one of Kant's major points of departure in his first *Critique*, as is well known. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), especially part one, division one.

which objects become intelligible and recognizable. This sets the stage for later considerations, like Husserl's notion of time-consciousness which shows how all intentional acts of perception presuppose some awareness of the internal experience of time.⁵⁸ When it comes to nostalgia, however, the essential distinction opened up by Martin Heidegger stands as perhaps the most germane. I turn to Heidegger's work in detail in the next chapter; for now, it will suffice to note that his distinction between ordinary, objective, or cosmic time (clock time) and subjective, phenomenological, or inner time (lived time) allows us to speak of multiple temporalities. These multiple temporalities correlate with differing perceptions of time's flux and flow like those observable in nostalgic experience. Time may stand over and above us as a limiting condition, but our perceptions of its traces and effects don't always abide those same limits. They remain open, capacious, and malleable, subject all manner of mediation and intervention.

This helps us make a bit more sense of Kant's comment on ineffective responses to 'the homesickness of the Swiss.' These nostalgics perform Hofer's suggested remedy of return but remain unsatisfied in large part because their sense of internal time—the way they feel time's flow and experience its limitations—does not align with their desire. They remain unaware of how this inner sense of timing conditions their return home, shaping their world and how they receive objects of experience. They are "greatly disappointed" and remain so not because they cannot return home, but because home

⁵⁸ The principal text here is Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Norwell, M.A.: Kluwer Academic, 1991).

itself is no longer home, or at least no longer the home they remember. The homecoming or return (*nostos*) is unsatisfying and therefore cause for further pain, grief, and mourning (*algos*)—an experience divided against itself. What Kant’s thinking shows us, then, is that the initial nostalgic desire to move or re-turn *in space* conceals a deeper desire to move or re-turn *in time*. What we are left with is a form of longing that does indeed pine for homecoming, but ultimately desires home as it *was*. The nostalgic thus remains forlorn because she cannot return and cannot satisfy the desire to “bring back” passed time. The return that occurs is impotent—a return that doesn’t actually return, we might say. The yield here is a nascent understanding that objects of desire and the affective experiences that sustain that longing are subject to time’s limiting conditions. Its irreversible flow marks and inscribes them. This Kantian insight begins to pry open a gap that eventually transforms nostalgia’s focus, one where lost objects of desire—past time, lapsed duration, and the pastness of the past—come to be forever misplaced.

The space or place that is home—what the Swiss long for—is no more because it, too, is past. Once a curable malady, nostalgia is rendered here as commemorative reaction, an incurable condition of the human experience subject as it is to the pressure of temporization. The anticipated gratification and expected catharsis of full return or homecoming are replaced by a type of doleful remembrance that mourns the impossibility of such a homecoming. What was once considered physically impossible in space by Praxin becomes, after Kant, structurally impossible in time. Spatially errant desires become temporally errant desires. This is what nostalgia’s second syllable signals: *Algos*—the grief in longing to return, the pain involved in returning, and the distress that

results in realizing return is impossible. With this shift in focus—from space and place to time and temporality—nostalgia endures yet another moment of vivisepture, this time buried within the mind. No longer marking the spatial distance between here and there alone, it indicates the temporal distance between past and present, between the presence of feeling and the pastness of that feeling's origins in the now-longed-for object. The attachment or affection associated with the object is perceived in the present at a remove. The realization of that distance or interval inaugurates a type of belated understanding that galvanizes desire—it *moves* the nostalgic, in other words, and inspires a drive toward movement despite the absence. As we will see later on, this desire can generate propulsive, animating movement even and especially when the desired outcome—temporal return—remains impossible. To experience nostalgia in this way is to experience the impossibility of the burning, fiery desire Hofer describes without denying its demands. This emphasis on temporality allows nostalgia to subsist and even thrive in conditions of futility, mourning the lack of immediate proximity with the past as a means of maintaining relations with it *in memoriam*. These conditions indulge nostalgic desire but frustrate it, denying its drive toward closure and finality, allowing the experience to be moving, but not all-consuming.

For Kant, time is essentially a feature of the mind that serves to bring the work of the imaginative faculty into sharper focus. In his schema, the imagination—which retains both a creative and a reproductive aspect—works to recognize and then synthesize representations across time, categorizing them in accordance with existing concepts or ideas. This means that the imagination works, in part, on the basis of absence; it does not

require the immediate physical presence of intuited objects to synthesize their impressions and categorize their features. Though he writes well before Kant, Hofer uses a similar framework in his dissertation. Because nostalgia seemed to cause such distress, seizing movement or impelling movement in directions taken to be less desirable, Hofer took it to be indicative of an afflicted, betrayed, or damaged imagination.⁵⁹ The Latin expression here is *imaginatio laesae*, a classical notion of injured reason that was deployed during Hofer's time to explain various forms of mental derangement.⁶⁰ First theorized by Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as a possible cause for forms of desire related to love and the loss of love, *imaginatio laesae* refers to an imagination overrun or infected by certain passions that amplify images taken to be distortions of objective reality.⁶¹

In the case of nostalgia, representations of home dominate the imagination, engendering a deep, fiery desire for homecoming, one strong enough to induce sickness. Nostalgics thus experienced an acute state of mental and emotional lassitude. Their minds—or, better, their imaginations—were said to be playing tricks on them and were thus not to be trusted. To experience feelings of nostalgia was to experience the vagrancies of a desirous, unruly, and promiscuous imagination, the consequences of which belied normal behavior, hence the perceived pathology. Operating under the Hippocratic medical knowledge of his day,⁶² Hofer thus attributed nostalgia to a deficient

⁵⁹ Anspach and Hofer, "Medical Dissertation," ¶3, 381.

⁶⁰ Werner von Koppenfels, "*Laesa Imaginatio*, Or Imagination Infected by Passion in William Shakespeare's Love Tragedies," in *Bloom's Modern Views: William Shakespeare* ed. Harold Bloom (New York, NY: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 184-185. See also Starobinski, *The Idea of Nostalgia*."

⁶¹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Philadelphia, E. Claxton & company, 1883), 158; 246; 453.

⁶² Cf. Zwingmann, "'Heimweh' or 'Nostalgic Reaction.'"

and compromised imagination which affected the region of the brain responsible for recollected images and memory impressions. The animal spirits exacerbated this condition which resulted in obsessive contemplation of stored images and representations associated with home. He argued that incessant meditation and reflection on these images allowed the animal spirits to seize other neurological paths that normally house more healthy representations, leading, ultimately, to the pathological obsession of return to the original source (home, the Fatherland)—a problem of movement, once again.⁶³ Nostalgia, it seemed, monopolized and hijacked the imagination and, by extension, memory, directing the focus of both toward images of home.

Hofer did not yet have the language to analyze this problem's temporal features, but with the help of Kant we can already detect their contours. Nostalgia installs an *idée fixe* and demands movement in attempt to compensate for loss, engendering a type of desire that subsists on the basis of absence. Early Swiss nostalgics suffered from an afflicted imagination because they remained fixated upon past memories no longer immediately present but still powerfully persistent. Hofer thought this was because they maintained an abnormal relationship with their imaginations. He wasn't necessarily wrong at the time, but Kant helps us narrow the focus and isolate new points of friction. Today we would probably say that nostalgics have an abnormal relationship with time, an afflicted sense of time-consciousness rather than an afflicted imagination. This project is interested in exploring what such 'afflictions' allow nostalgic subjects to do, see, or feel

⁶³ Anspach and Hofer, "Medical Dissertation," ¶7, 384-385. "Animal spirits without a doubt, if they penetrate certain paths with somewhat of a strain, and enlarge them a little...easily acquire the earlier paths, quickly bring forth former motions, and thus continually rule these pristine ideas."

and how the experiences that move them might open up new, as yet unturned possibilities not just for responding to loss and discontinuity, but approaching the experience of time itself.

Recent Iterations: Diagnostic Residues and New Frontiers

Contemporary appraisals of nostalgia take these new interests in time and individual interiority as their overall point of departure. They take nostalgia to be a specific type of affective response rather than a treatable illness and generally fall into one of two typological categories, what Boym calls “reflective nostalgia” and “restorative nostalgia.” Reflective nostalgia functions as a resource for psychological health while restorative nostalgia “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition,”⁶⁴ obsessed with the return to or recreation of a mythic, fanciful past. Thus, on the one hand, there is a whole body of recent psychological research devoted to exploring and arguing the hypothesis that reflective nostalgia is a positive psychic and existential resource, providing mental stability and self-continuity to help cope with change and distress.⁶⁵ For example, a recent piece in *The New York Times* that draws upon the work

⁶⁴ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii.

⁶⁵ Cf. Tim Adams, “Look Back in Joy: The Power of Nostalgia,” *The Guardian*, November 9, 2014, sec. Society, <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/09/look-back-in-joy-the-power-of-nostalgia>; Clay Routledge, *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015); Clay Routledge et al., “The Past Makes the Present Meaningful: Nostalgia as an Existential Resource,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 101, no. 3 (September 2011): 638–52, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024292>; Constantine Sedikides et al., “Nostalgia: Past, Present, and Future,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 304–7; Constantine Sedikides et al., “Chapter Five - To Nostalgize: Mixing Memory with Affect and Desire,” in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. James M. Olson and Mark P. Zanna, vol. 51, Supplement C vols. (Academic Press, 2015), 189–273; John Tierney, “What Is Nostalgia Good For? Quite a Bit, Research Shows,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/09/science/what-is-nostalgia-good-for-quite-a-bit-research->

of social psychologists like Constantine Sedikides suggests that “the net effect” of nostalgia “is to make life seem more meaningful and death less frightening” by “counteract[ing] loneliness, boredom, and anxiety” thereby “mak[ing] people more generous to strangers and more tolerant to outsiders.”⁶⁶ Even more recently, a book-length study explores the ways in which “nostalgia is triggered by psychological threat or negative affective states,” ultimately concluding, however, that “nostalgia is a critical meaning-making resource” that “people turn to in order to regulate distress or cope with a number of life’s challenges.”⁶⁷ Literature that explores this more reflective side of nostalgia remains a minority and is a fairly recent development, typically focusing on nostalgia’s value as a ‘good’ or ‘positive’ phenomenon, leaving its genealogical associations with pathology untheorized.

On the other hand, there is an even larger body of cultural criticism that explores the ideological underpinnings and political ramifications of restorative nostalgia, the sort of nostalgia that Lasch, for example, targets in his work.⁶⁸ Concern for nostalgia’s ill

shows.html?pagewanted=all; Krystine Batcho, “The Psychological Benefits – and Trappings – of Nostalgia,” *The Conversation*, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/the-psychological-benefits-and-trappings-of-nostalgia-77766>; Matthew Hutson, “Why Nostalgia Is Good for You,” *Scientific American*, November 1, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamericanmind1116-8b>; and Paul J. Maher, Eric R. Igou, and Wijnand A. P. van Tilburg, “Nostalgia Relieves the Disillusioned Mind,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 92 (January 1, 2021): 104061, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2020.104061>.

⁶⁶ Tierney, “What Is Nostalgia Good For?”

⁶⁷ Routledge, *Nostalgia*, 25, 99 et passim.

⁶⁸ Cf. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families And The Nostalgia Trap*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993); Gary Cross, *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015); Fred Davis, “Nostalgia, Identity and the Current Nostalgia Wave,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 2 (September 1, 1977): 414–24; Simon Goldhill, “Look Back with Danger: Why Nostalgia Is Not What It Used to Be,” *The TLS*, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/look-back-with-danger/>; Allison Graham, “History, Nostalgia, and the Criminality of Popular Culture,” *The Georgia Review* 38, no. 2 (1984): 348–364; Lasch, “The Politics of Nostalgia”; Andrew R. Murphy, “Longing, Nostalgia, and Golden Age Politics: The American Jeremiad and the Power of the Past,” *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (March 2009): 125–41.

effects inspired Hofer's Basel dissertation and its genesis as a pathological diagnosis lends itself quite easily to an overall disposition of skepticism and in some cases outright hostility. This line of thought draws direct nourishment from the history and development of nostalgia outlined above and enjoys broad currency in philosophy and other forms of critical thought. It privileges nostalgia's initial status as a form of pathology, preserves many of its diagnostic associations, and wields them to leverage a critique based on regression, reversion, and general conservatism. As Lasch's work shows, nostalgia certainly can, and often does, assume these registers. Thinkers like Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, Gayle Green, and Renato Rosaldo have shown how nostalgia can be wielded as a political weapon to ensure that the machinations of power keep historically oppressed persons circumscribed within subservient subject positions—positions, to be sure, that nostalgia *can* naturalize.⁶⁹ As useful and illuminating as these evaluations may be, they remain limited. They conflate nostalgia *en toto* with various iterations of imperialistic dominance or puerile arrested development and do not adequately attend to the full breadth and depth of the role it plays in affective life—the way it sets up and maintains generative relations with different pasts and histories, multiple temporalities, and the variant possibilities each may signal. At best, such evaluations reveal how nostalgia can be instrumentalized to support oppressive politics and uneven power dynamics; at worse, they re-inscribe the gestures of viviseulture performed by Praxin and typified by Lasch.

⁶⁹ See Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *Nostalgia and Sexual Difference: The Resistance to Contemporary Feminism* (New York, NY: Methuen, Inc., 1987); Gayle Greene, "Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 16, no. 2 (January 1, 1991): 290–321; and Renato Rosaldo, "Imperialist Nostalgia," *Representations* 26 (April 1, 1989): 107–22.

Examples of this sort abound and contribute to nostalgia's impoverished position. In 1909, the German-Swiss philosopher Karl Jaspers linked nostalgic desire to juvenile criminality in his doctoral thesis (*Heimweh und Verbrechen*) at the Heidelberg School of Medicine.⁷⁰ Allison Graham refers to the nostalgia boom of the 1970s as a type of plague or illness visited upon American culture,⁷¹ while social historian Fred Davis, in his otherwise insightful and illuminating study on the same phenomenon, still acquiesces to the old saw that “nostalgic reaction can be said to be of a distinctly conservative bent.”⁷² In a different context, the philosopher Fredric Jameson calls nostalgia “the insensible colonization of the present” and situates it as one symptom of the broader logic of late capitalism, an assumption I unpack in chapter four below.⁷³ In a similar vein, the Jungian psychologist Roderick Peters regards nostalgia as a universal archetype characterized by “an overwhelming craving that persists and profoundly interferes with the individual’s attempts to cope with present circumstances.”⁷⁴ These literatures cohere with the popular notion that “nostalgia is always suspect”⁷⁵ and the conflation of nostalgia in general with Boym’s restorative nostalgia. It is no wonder, then, that Susan Stewart, in her beautifully written study on longing and the souvenir, performs a wry repetition of Hofer’s diagnosis

⁷⁰ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Gesammelte Schriften zur Psychopathologie* (New York, NY: Springer-Verlag, 2013). See also the discussion of Jaspers work in Filiberto Fuentesbro de Diego and Carmen Valiente Ots, “Nostalgia: A Conceptual History,” *History of Psychiatry* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 2014): 404–11.

⁷¹ Allison Graham, “History, Nostalgia, and the Criminality of Popular Culture,” *The Georgia Review* 38, no. 2 (1984), 348.

⁷² Fred Davis, “Nostalgia, Identity and the Current Nostalgia Wave,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 11, no. 2 (September 1, 1977), 420.

⁷³ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), 20.

⁷⁴ Roderick Peters, “Reflections on the Origin and Aim of Nostalgia,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 1985), 135.

⁷⁵ Atia and Davies, “Nostalgia and the Shapes of History,” 181.

by referring to nostalgia as a widespread “social disease.”⁷⁶ Such assessments summarily dismiss nostalgic desire on the grounds that it harbors essentially reactionary sentiments, constituting what one author calls “a dangerous form of politics and a kind of lie...*always* a poor guide to the future.”⁷⁷ Nostalgia may no longer be a medical disease, but all the associations remain firmly in place. Charles Maier’s ingratiating analogy—“nostalgia is to memory as kitsch is to art”⁷⁸—appears to be the norm. Under this diagnostic gaze, nostalgia is taken to be inherently pathological, a symptom of some broader, enfeebling cultural malaise. Instead of positioning nostalgia as a more propulsive or animating force, figures like Jaspers, Peters, Stewart, and Maier take the feeling to be, at best, a burden, an embarrassment, or an irritating nuisance. Such glosses enact Praxin and Lasch’s gesture of viviseulture. By privileging its connotations as a disease and adopting Hofer’s diagnostic frame of reference they cast an incredulous eye toward nostalgia and support its ongoing live burial by delegitimizing, repressing, or simply disavowing its broader range of expression in affective life.

Given this history, it is not difficult to see how and why nostalgia continues to circulate as a critical analytical category with deeply embedded pathological associations. It continues to function as a degenerative diagnosis because it is understood to involve or engender a type of improper longing, what I have been calling, with the help of Hofer, errant desire and spurious movement. Within this frame, nostalgia betokens a form of

⁷⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984), ix, 23 et passim.

⁷⁷ E. J. Dionne Jr., “E.J. Dionne Jr.: The New Politics of Nostalgia,” *Washington Post*, September 12, 2012, sec. Opinions, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/ej-dionne-jr-the-new-politics-of-nostalgia/2012/09/12/d134b5e6-fd04-11e1-b153-218509a954e1_story.html. Italics mine.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xiv.

weakness, the acquiescence to a form of socially unacceptable desire directed toward a bygone, damaging, or otherwise phantasmal object—an ailment of *pathos*, an affective affliction. These disciplinary and discursive presumptions suggest that there are, in fact, proper forms of desire, proper objects of longing, and, especially, that certain types of memory and movement are more useful and reliable than others. This project complicates those presumptions by investigating how nostalgia intervenes in time and memory, highlighting instances of nostalgic expression that mobilize those interventions to animating, propulsive effect. Nostalgia was and continues to be stubbornly buried alive. What would it mean to raise its specters and exhume its remains?

Thinkers like Kimberly K. Smith and Stuart Tannock offer helpful initial insights from which to explore such questions. Their efforts serve, in part, to depathologize the feeling without denying the desires to which it lays claim, without neglecting the experiences of loss and discontinuity to which it responds. They not only show how the values commonly attached to nostalgia and its attendant affective associations bear some vestigial resemblance to its initial diagnostic context, they also provide a means of making its propulsive and generative effects more legible. Smith, for example, tracks the transformation of nostalgia's pathologization in the aftermath of its confrontation with modernity, highlighting the spatio-temporal shift in desire discussed above. This shift, she thinks, solidified nostalgia's position as a counterweight to the new notion of progress. To be nostalgic is to be, at the very least, non-progressive and, at the very most, resistant to or antagonistic toward the very idea of progress. "The concept of nostalgia...helps to silence the victims of modernization," Smith writes, "to render their

emotional experiences suspect (even to themselves) and undermine their confidence in their memories, their unhappiness, and their hopes.”⁷⁹ She argues that familiar critiques of nostalgia continue to rely upon its intransigent status as a type of pathology or regressive fixation. They ultimately serve to bolster homogenous time and linear teleology, supporting the notion that any forward movement is, *ipso facto*, good movement, one step along the way of inevitable evolution and improvement. By taking these principles to be axiomatic, critiques of this nature do not recognize the role nostalgia often plays in experiences not served by such principles.

Tannock, for his part, seizes upon nostalgia’s interiorization and disappearance from official medical nosology to uncover its status as a deeply potent affect rather than a disabling pathology. Drawing on the work of Raymond Williams, he argues that nostalgia “becomes a widespread, general structure of feeling only with the massive dislocation of peoples in the modern period.” Nostalgia thus refers to, and mediates, “the distinctively modern sense of a radical separation of past from present,”⁸⁰ what Boym calls a “historical emotion” or a “symptom of our age.”⁸¹ By situating nostalgia as a structure of feeling and highlighting its affective dimensions, Tannock short-circuits familiar formulations. He situates nostalgia as a sort of counter-diagnostic, reading it with an eye for what has been excluded or buried in nostalgia’s history and transmission. This approach reverses the polarity and supplies a means of interrogating the ramifications of valuations that position nostalgia as pathological alone. Tannock also provides a

⁷⁹ Kimberly K. Smith, “Mere Nostalgia: Notes on a Progressive Paratheory,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3, no. 4 (December 1, 2000), 507.

⁸⁰ Stuart Tannock, “Nostalgia Critique,” *Cultural Studies* 9, no. 3 (October 1, 1995), 463n3.

⁸¹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

compelling avenue for considering nostalgia as an affective phenomenon, that is, as a type of motivating response that allows us to move forward by turning back or looking sideways, calling to mind elements of our accretive experience that continue to propel and animate.

Nostalgia and Affect Theory: Some Methodological Considerations

Smith and Tannock do not identify as affect theorists but their work on nostalgia bears striking methodological resemblance to the so-called “affective turn” and Tannock’s deployment of Williams’ now famous turn of phrase suggests more than a slight comparison. These authors eschew the old thought-feeling binary and instead consider feeling and affect—and specific feelings or affects like nostalgia—as a productive site for thought and analysis. By critically interrogating the transformations that take place in nostalgia’s confrontation with modernity and, especially, by resisting the temptation to convert nostalgia into some usable social good, their work closely orbits similar projects in affect theory. Sara Ahmed, Anne Cvetkovich, Heather Love, and Teresa Brennan,⁸² for example, each aim to more seriously and closely attend to feelings or affects typically labelled ‘bad,’ ‘ugly,’ ‘negative,’ ‘counterproductive,’ or, in the case of nostalgia, simply ‘pathological.’ They de-pathologize so-called negative feelings to explore their function as resources for new sensibilities and alternative modes of being in

⁸² See, for instance, Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2012); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

the world. Nostalgia is one such ‘bad’ feeling and its genealogical legacy of marginalization and viviseulture demonstrates the ways in which it continues to be dismissed as both ineffective and toxic instead of animating or vivifying. Eve Sedgwick stands as a pivotal and pioneering figure in this regard and her interest in exploring the “under theorized middle ranges of affective agency”⁸³ mentioned at the beginning of this chapter opens up a generative avenue through which to sharpen the legibility of nostalgia’s more animating features. By exploring the texture and granularity of this middle range, and how nostalgia circulates within it, we can begin to see nostalgia less as a pathology more as a propulsive force, one that increases individual capacities for movement, offering a means of internalizing the past, retaining its losses, and weathering the vicissitudes of temporal experience with increased awareness and receptivity.

Nostalgia may be many things, but at its most basic and rudimentary level it suggests a deep, intimate degree of affection for something lost, destroyed, or forgone.

Philosophy and high theory maintain a tortured, tenuous relationship with feeling and

⁸³ Cf. Chapter 8 of Adam J. Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson, *A Silvan Tomkins Handbook: Foundations for Affect Theory* (Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press, 2020). This text can also be accessed here: <https://manifold.umn.edu/read/a-silvan-tomkins-handbook/section/d6027a9d-07a4-4920-bddc-8a3503fe1eca#ch10>. For more on her understanding of this “middle range” also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michèle Aina Barale, and Jonathan Goldberg, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2003); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007): 625–642; and Eve Sedgwick, “Teaching/Depression,” *The Scholar and the Feminist Online* 4, no. 2 (2006), http://sfoonline.barnard.edu/heilbrun/sedgwick_01.htm. For more on her legacy and pioneering approach to affect theory more generally see Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013). Her essay co-written with Adam Frank in 1995 marks a clear turning point in affect studies and stands alongside the work of Brian Massumi in sketching out divergent avenues for application. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (1995): 496–522. See also Brian Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 83–109, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1354446>.

tend to harbor sedimented prejudices against affect and emotionality in general.⁸⁴ Affects that appear to cast a backward-facing glance to the determinations of temporality are taken to be especially dubious in this regard. Such a long-standing enmity can be attributed to the customary and axiomatic habits of mind that undergird many critical projects—habits, to be sure, that are themselves propelled by affective investment in the unimpeachable values of skepticism, suspicion, and incredulity. As affect theorists and literary scholars alike have shown, this association has become so painfully obvious that these values are often taken to be primary identifiers of critique itself, and what it means to engage in rigorous critical scholarship. Thinkers like Sedgwick, Love, and Rita Felski employ a cluster of textual and interpretive tactics that work both within and against the legacies of critique in post-Kantian modes of thought.⁸⁵ These modes of thought, often grouped together under the umbrella of “hermeneutics of suspicion,” place a discursive and epistemological premium on the procedures of unveiling and demystification in their approach to texts and other objects of analysis. According to these conventions, which draw methodological insights from various forms of Marxism and psychoanalysis, knowledge and the procedures of rationality and reading that attach themselves to it serve to reveal, expose, or make visible something hidden or inaccessible. This ‘something’ serves to delegitimize, unmask, or otherwise render suspect the object or cluster of objects associated with it. Thus, when subject to the fastidious hermeneutics of suspicion

⁸⁴ I look at this more closely in the next chapter.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2009); and Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago, I.L.: University Of Chicago Press, 2015).

exemplified by someone like Lasch, nostalgia is glossed as a mere symptom for deeper, more viscerally felt desires taken to be problematic, pathological, or simply backward.

As Sedgwick puts it in a now classic essay, the methodological values and critical motivations that subtend a hermeneutics of suspicion serve to privilege paranoia over other ways of knowing, reading, and attending to subjective attachment. Suspicion, incredulity, and excavation facilitate productive critical habits and reading practices, to be sure, but the issue at stake, according to Sedgwick, is that these conventions and protocols have become sedimented and calcified into a paranoid subject position that is less diagnosis and more prescription. These prescriptions often take the form of pithy, slogans or tag lines: ‘nostalgia is *always* reactionary,’ ‘nostalgia *never* historicizes the past,’ and so on. This mode of reading and analysis takes governing superstructures and insidious, tacit ideology as its primary point of departure. It displays a pronounced proclivity “to reading through experience for structure,” as Love puts it.⁸⁶ Ideology and structure are indeed operative and formative, but they are not the only or even the most significant factors and much is lost, erased, misrecognized, or simply *buried alive* in this ‘reading through.’ Sedgwick aims to mend this reductionism. In doing so, she invokes the notion of reparative reading to augment or supplement a paranoia-stricken hermeneutics of suspicion. Such an approach provides a means of attending to the minutiae of attachment and the relations that occur and emerge between structure, ideology, agency, and the subjects they form.

⁸⁶ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 23.

Nostalgia is one of the many affects that intervene between these elements, facilitating various modes of comportment and sensibility that issue from an experience of bittersweetness that is as motivating and propulsive as it is interminable and unfinished. It is difficult for these facets to show up when they are met, *prima facie*, with suspicion or incredulity. When Paul Ricoeur first coined the phrase “the hermeneutics of suspicion” he offered his own prescient insight into this tendency toward reductionism. “It is not regret for the sunken Atlantides that animates us,” he writes in the final pages of *The Symbolism of Evil*, “but hope for a re-creation of language. Beyond the desert of criticism, we desire to be called, questioned, again.”⁸⁷ Ricoeur’s desire may in fact be nostalgic but it is not facile or uncritical. It yearns to be both addressed and interrogated by that which, though it has been buried, may still have life yet: tender address as a means of interrogation, interrogation in search of a new mode of relation, a new form of address. “Why,” asks Felski, “are we so hyper articulate about our adversaries and so excruciatingly tongue-tied about our loves?”⁸⁸ Nostalgia is but one form of loving, of addressing and remembering lost loves by maintaining a vivacious and capacious relationship with them, despite their seeming inaccessibility. The chapters ahead push Felski’s image a bit further: what if nostalgia loosened the tongue instead of knotting it? They approach nostalgic desire from a more reparative vantage point, one better positioned to consider its capacity as a legitimate form of remembering and desiring, one

⁸⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston, M.A.: Beacon Press, 1986), 349. Translation modified.

⁸⁸ Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 13.

that refuses its more readily available associations in order probe its broader role within the fabric of human experience.

Nostalgia does not need to be redeemed or converted into something more ‘positive’ or ‘pragmatic’ and reparativity, to be clear, does not entail a simple reversal of habit that might supplant critical suspicions with some cloyingly sanguine opposite, whatever that might be. There will always be manipulative and toxic forms of nostalgia, just as there will always be Laschian critics eager to find and ferret them out. In reading nostalgia, one is always already dealing with these specters along with those of Hofer’s case studies and Praxin’s prematurely buried troops. Scholars like Lee Edelman, Heather Love, and Judith Butler have shown⁸⁹ that the enduring legacy of Sedgwick’s work lies in its deeply generative sense of capaciousness, a style of thought that requires unalleviated tension between the paranoid and reparative positions which together cultivate a heightened sense of critical awareness. Sedgwick herself suggests as much in her own pioneering work on psychoanalysis and affect theory through the likes of Melanie Klein and Silvan Tomkins. Neither the reparative nor the paranoid represent a permanent, static achievement but instead function as markers “of a fluid, back-and-forth process between the two positions” that thrives upon the “authentically difficult understanding that good and bad tend to be inseparable at every level.”⁹⁰ This scrupulous attention to the minutia

⁸⁹ See, for instance, Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), especially chapter 2; Heather Love, “Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading,” *Criticism* 52, no. 2 (2010): 235–241; and Judith Butler’s contribution to Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

⁹⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Teaching/Depression,” *The Scholar and the Feminist Online* 4, no. 2 (2006), 3-4. In her essay on paranoid reading Sedgwick has the following to say regarding the relationship between

of affective attachments—both generative and indicative of comprised conditions of existence, what Lauren Berlant terms “cruel optimism”—⁹¹constitutes, according to Sedgwick, “a uniquely spacious rubric...in which challenges to a normalizing universality can develop.”⁹² Such a rubric also creates, as Edelman and Sara Ahmed remind us in their own registers, the preconditions necessary to interrogate the disciplinary function and cultural imperative of making certain feelings, like nostalgia, ‘good’ or ‘happy’ by assigning them some ameliorative value.

Nostalgia is a particularly fruitful site for exploring Sedgwick’s “spacious rubric” because it resists, while at the same time summoning, the normalizing universality of teleological trajectories and the linear conceptions of time they encourage. Those elements and the affective experiences they condition are also “inseparable at every level” even if they do not always serve or support those experiences. Nostalgic experience makes this incongruity especially clear by pining for and reworking the past while remaining fully aware that the form of return it so deeply desires remains impossible precisely due to the temporal conditions that generated it. The themes developed over the course of this project show that there is something to be gained in refusing the redemptive values so commonly associated with those structuring temporal

paranoia and reparativity: “I am interested in doing justice to the powerful reparative practices that, I am convinced, infuse self-avowedly paranoid critical projects, as well as the paranoid exigencies that are often necessary for non paranoid knowing and utterance.” And later in the same piece: “It is sometimes the most paranoid-tending people who are able to, and need to, develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices.” Cf. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 128-129; 150.

⁹¹ Cf. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011) and Lauren Berlant, “Cruel Optimism,” *Differences* 17, no. 3 (January 1, 2006), 21.

⁹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Melanie Klein and the Difference Affect Makes,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106, no. 3 (2007), 637.

conditions. The sheer persistence of nostalgic desire complicates those conditions as well as the values that bolster them. To that end, the analyses below work to position nostalgia as an especially illuminating means of interrogating what we expect the experience of time and the work of memory to yield.

What I am suggesting, then, and hope to show throughout, is that nostalgia need not be routinely dismissed as overly sentimental and retrograde, nor is it in need of recuperative measures that might transform it into facile, positive feeling. If anything, it stands in need of sustained reckoning that takes seriously the productive ambiguities that contribute to the role it plays in affective life, a role that does not easily confirm to readily available taxonomies. Nostalgia's irreducible bittersweetness—a collision of opposites like Hofer's combination of *nostos* and *algos*—is one such productive ambiguity and it shows how nostalgia resists the cold, Manichean logic that categorizes experiences of feeling as 'good' or 'bad,' 'positive' or 'negative.' A depathologization of nostalgia thus does not look to save nostalgia or make it more palatable as it is, by definition, an affect characterized by lack, unease, and restlessness. Reading nostalgia reparatively is, rather, a means of better attending to its form and effects, of closely interpreting it in a manner that is neither dismissive nor saccharine, but patient and attentive. For Sedgwick, this approach is "founded on and coextensive with the subject's movement toward...the often very fragile concern to provide the self with pleasure and nourishment in an environment that is perceived as not particularly offering them."⁹³ That pleasure is specific and may not always (or ever) be completely pure or uncomplicated by

⁹³ Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 137.

the archives of experience that sustain us, refracted as they are through the prisms or flashpoints that (in)form the present. Bittersweetness is another name for nostalgia, after all. But the form of movement Sedgwick identifies can contribute to a generative type of expression, what Michel Foucault calls the care of the self and Marielle Macé the stylistics of existence.⁹⁴ This project gains traction from these approaches to the extent that they can help us identify what experiences like nostalgia “set alight” in the consciousness of those who feel it—the forms of movement it impels, the shifts in perception it prompts, the adjacent affects it elicits, and the modes of attachment it convenes.⁹⁵ What, exactly, nostalgia sets alight cannot necessarily be known in advance. It is possible the affective stirrings it elicits may squelch rather than increase movement, just as it is possible that nostalgia itself may be exploited by insidious mechanisms that

⁹⁴ I take these designations to be loose synonyms for Sedgwick’s notion of the “middle range.” For Macé, to “give style” to existence involves sketching, tracing out, or contesting possibilities within the self. She draws insights from Foucault’s own evocative turning of phrase “stylistics of existence,” which she takes to be a means of “modulating our living configurations, our forms of perception and attention, or our entire vision of the world.” This strategy is not loud, earth-shattering, or world-moving but emerges in the “opportunity of giving a certain aspect to our presence, accepting universal human positions on our own terms, fashioning our movements, external acts, or secret thoughts, complying with models or forming new ones....in the nuance of an ordinary but always reinvented gesture.” See her wonderful essay Marielle Macé and Marlon Jones, “Ways of Reading, Modes of Being,” *New Literary History* 44, no. 2 (August 8, 2013): 213–29, especially 217–18. Foucault refers to this as a way of “giving form and style to life.” See Michel Foucault and Arnold I. Davidson, *The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II; Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983--1984*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2012), 161–165. In the final volume of his *The History of Sexuality Project* published right before his death, he writes that “the development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others.” See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, N.Y.: Vintage, 1988), 238–239. Positioning the care, art, or style of the self as a question opens up the range of possibilities in which that question might be expressed, framed, or left open. What I am suggesting throughout this study is that the experience of nostalgia is but one means of attending to that question, a particularly idiomatic way of approaching the modes of existence Sedgwick, Macé, and Foucault take to be constitutive of experience but only ever incrementally achieved, negotiated, or reworked.

⁹⁵ Cf. Felski, *The Limits of Critique*, 179.

squelch its more propulsive, animating features. That risk remains as persistent as nostalgic experience itself.

Moved, But Not “Broken Up”

“Nostalgia evokes the past only in order to bury it alive,” Lasch tell us. His turn of phrase not only re-animates the remains of Hofer’s afflicted youths and Praxin’s entombed victims, it also raises—*quietly* raises—aspects of nostalgic experience that subsist despite their vivisepture. Those aspects do not show up in Lasch’s thinking because it is based on an understanding of authentic memory that cannot abide the forms of desire, movement, and affective attachment nostalgia encourages. The exercise of true memory provides genuine connection with the past based on recognition and appreciation while nostalgia, by contrast, only offers fantasy images that glorify the past as timeless and unobtainable, forever shrouded in reactionary sentimentality and maudlin kitsch. This binary between authentic remembrance and facile, inauthentic phantasm correlates historical memory with a sense of gratitude that “serves to link the present to the past and...provide a sense of continuity” by acknowledging the past’s “formative influence.”⁹⁶ Nostalgia can never perform this operation in any sort of legitimate way, Lasch argues, because it remains correlated with *pathos* and mere feeling. This evaluation re-inscribes a familiar and longstanding gesture that takes feeling, emotionality, and the modes of aesthetic representation in which they often find expression to be deficient and inferior ways of knowing—errant desires and spurious forms of movement as Hofer intimated. In

⁹⁶ Lasch, “Memory and Nostalgia, Gratitude and Pathos,” 18–19.

this context nostalgia provides limited, inferior access to the past because it relies on equally inferior faculties. It simply does not cut the epistemological mustard, so to speak. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than when Lasch announces that “nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all” due to an “emotional appeal”⁹⁷ where happy memories generate feelings of loss, discontinuity, and disillusionment. These feelings can only serve as memory’s other within this frame—that against which authentic acts of remembrance gain their value, essence, and identity.

Hofer laid the conceptual groundwork for this type of posture, but his text already contains curious moments of hesitation and incongruity, faint traces, perhaps, of nostalgic potentiality that continue to speak, and haunt, beyond their living tombs. The remaining chapters of this study work to make those traces more legible by leveraging insights from philosophical and cinematic sources. Those sources serve to clarify nostalgia’s standing as an animating and propulsive response to loss and discontinuity, a strategy for mourning and remembrance that intervenes in temporal awareness to nourish generative relations with formative pasts.

Hofer wasn’t interested in these aspects, but his text documents them nonetheless. He believed nostalgia was an eminently curable physical disease that “admits no remedy other than a return to the homeland.”⁹⁸ He suggests a treatment plan that involves a recalibration of movement, one that indulges *and* satisfies the desire to return. He felt there was no other option. But the evidence he supplies does not always corroborate that

⁹⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁸ Anspach and Hofer, “Medical Dissertation,” ¶4, 382.

claim and lends itself to insights explored throughout this project: that the most propulsive, animating, and compelling forms of nostalgia indulge the desire to return *without* satisfying it, and often do so to generative effect.

The Swiss doctor uses only two detailed case studies to support his argument. In the first case, a young girl remains utterly despondent in the hospital after suffering a fall. Refusing both food and medicine, Hofer reports that she would often wail aloud, responding to questioning only by repeatedly uttering the words “*Ich will heim, Ich will heim* [‘I want to go home, I want to go home’].” Once the request to return home was finally granted, Hofer states that “within a few days she got wholly well, entirely without the aid of medicine.”⁹⁹ He goes on to claim that his remedy of return “has been proved by many examples,” but the example provided in his final paragraph calls that assertion into question. This case study offers a clue to features of nostalgic experience that all too often remain illegible and buried alive. It not only weakens his proposed treatment plan, it also calls into question the general diagnostic assumption that has persisted since Hofer, one that saw new use under General Praxin, and continues to enjoy popular currency via Lasch and other cultural commentators: that nostalgia buries the past alive. After mentioning cases of nostalgia that resulted either in death or acute mania, Hofer describes the following scenario:

It was told me by a Parisian that he himself had a Helvetian bound servant who was sad and melancholy at all times so that he began to work with lessened desire; finally, he came to him and sought dismissal with insistent entreaties, of which he could have no hope beyond him. When the merchant granted this immediately, the servant changed from sudden joy, excused from his mind these phantasma for several days, and after while remained in Paris, broken up no longer by this disease.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ibid., ¶4, 383.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Both of Hofer's unnamed nostalgics convalesce not through the catharsis of full return but through the movement toward return, a means of indulging the desire without fully satisfying it. The young girl gets better *en route*, not by the return itself. Arrival at the destination is withheld, suggesting that the possibility of new movement is enough to sustain her. The Helvetian servant recovers without any form of return at all; the possibility of return at some point in the future not only sustains him, it keeps him in place (grounded, we might say). Once she is well does the unnamed girl find that Kant was ultimately correct about her ailment, that home itself remains touched by time and is no longer what it once was? Does the yearning for return then resurface with new inflection points, rousing animating movement despite its fundamental futility? We are not told. And what of the servant? The last sentence of Hofer's dissertation offers a crucial, almost missable qualification, one that provides us with a clue for thinking nostalgia otherwise. He tells us that once the Helvetian's desire is articulated and given space for expression he is no longer "broken up" by nostalgia, not that the desire itself is fully sated or even completely gone. The Latin verb Hofer uses here is *corripio* which can mean to seize, snatch up, collect, or take a hold of. The implication is that nostalgia has snatched up or taken a hold of the Helvetian servant, overwhelming his faculties and seizing his abilities to move about in the world. By expressing and indulging his desire he is released from this seizure and free to resume activity. Questions of satisfaction and fulfillment are curiously suspended. Instead, the desire for movement is simply given voice and thereby granted the affecting, emotive, and *moving* status we often attribute to

experiences of feeling. Expressing his longing to another allows the Helvetian servant *to be moved* by his experience. Hofer tells us that it is through this exchange, through this capacity *to be moved*, that the servant is able to remain, no longer “broken up” by nostalgic desire. That desire may persist still, but it is no longer debilitating or immobilizing. Instead, it contributes to propulsive, animating movement. To the extent that this is the case, the remaining chapters explore what it might mean to be moved by nostalgia without being “broken up” by it.

In each case—the young country girl and the Helvetian servant—nostalgia acts as a motivating force absent full closure or finality. These potentialities run counter to the diagnostic frame Hofer sets up and the gestures of vivisepture exemplified by Praxin and Lasch. They are themselves buried in Hofer’s own text, a work that is, in this respect, as at odds with itself as the experience it names. Like Odysseus before them, both of Hofer’s nostalgics endure the experience and emerge from it neither enfeebled nor completely incapacitated. The desires they feel are truly bittersweet, eliciting pleasure and grief in equal measure—grief in response to the loss, pleasure for what came before it. More than that, their feelings and desires are *motivating*, compelling them to move and act. For Odysseus, the thought of home, while painful, impels his journey back to Ithaca.¹⁰¹ When homecoming and full return are found lacking, he discovers that the journey and the desires that motivated it were perhaps enough. They provide him with a source for survival in the face of his adversaries and a means of persistence through his

¹⁰¹ Cf. Felipe De Brigard, “Nostalgia Doesn’t Need Real Memories – an Imagined Past Works as Well,” *Aeon*, July 20, 2020, <https://aeon.co/essays/nostalgia-doesnt-need-real-memories-an-imagined-past-works-as-well>.

obstacles.¹⁰² The possibility and contemplation of return provide a means for animating, propulsive movement. In his discussion of nostalgia treatment, Hofer advises that “hope of returning...must be given as soon as the strength seems somewhat equal to bearing the annoyances.”¹⁰³ A strategy for contemplating possibilities, hope can be dashed or fulfilled, exploited or actualized; it, too, can act as an annoyance. It is difficult to know if the hopes of Odysseus, the young country girl, and the Helvetian servant were ever fully or finally achieved. Hofer seems uninterested in addressing that question despite his instructions. But he does tell us that many patients recovered *in media res*, that is, by virtue of experiencing and expressing the desire regardless of its prospects for future fulfillment. Can this more propulsive dimension of nostalgic experience attain (re)animating significance beyond its living tombs?

¹⁰² For more on this see Anna Bonifazi, “Inquiring into Nostos and Its Cognates,” *American Journal of Philology* 130, no. 4 (December 11, 2009): 481–510. The argument she advances maintains that *nostos* (nostalgia’s primary etymological root) carries connotations of “surviving lethal dangers,” connotations that have been obscured in favor of the more pathological associations I have outlined.

¹⁰³ Anspach and Hofer, “Medical Dissertation,” ¶12, 389. Italics mine.

Chapter 2: *Nostos*: Heidegger and Philosophy's Uncanny Nostalgia for Presence

Our being in the world, the world that is our only home, is marked by the uncanny discovery that we are not at home.¹⁰⁴
- David Farrell Krell

A mood assails or invades us. It comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside,' but arises out of Being-in-the-world.¹⁰⁵
- Martin Heidegger

I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul...¹⁰⁶
- St. Augustine

Philosophy's Feelings About Feeling

Composed of two distinct words—*nostos* and *algos*—nostalgia remains internally divided, unable, at times, to differentiate or hold in tension the dual elements that lie at its roots. It indicates a longing for the rest roots can provide (*nostos*: homecoming, return to a point of origin) and signals an ache that emerges from the inability to complete the return it so desperately desires (*algos*: pain, turmoil, melancholic grief). This chapter initiates an investigation into how philosophy tends to handle each of these elements. Like nostalgia, philosophical speculation depends on the motivating experience of *algos*, of dissatisfaction, disappointment, or disillusionment, and proceeds without clear-sighted access to the *nostos* it so strongly desires.¹⁰⁷ In doing so, it often privileges reason and

¹⁰⁴ David Farrell Krell, *Architecture: Ecstasies of Space, Time, and the Human Body* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1997), 93.

¹⁰⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), 136/176.

¹⁰⁶ St. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), XI.28.38.

¹⁰⁷ I am not alone in positioning philosophy as a type of response to the conditions of dissatisfaction. Simon Critchley, for example, argues that all philosophy begins in or with disappointment and thus constitutes a sustained effort in responding to various persistent forms of nihilism. See his *Very*

transparent intelligibility over the opacities of affective experience. This is why, near the end of the last chapter, I suggested that philosophy maintains a long-standing enmity toward feeling and emotion. That assertion deserves more elaboration. The attitude it implies bears some similarity to the diagnostic frame of reference that gave rise to nostalgia and contributes to its construal as a problem in need of a cure or solution, what I called gestures of vivisepture in the last chapter. Johannes Hofer laid the groundwork for that frame and it establishes discursive habits of mind—like those often exhibited by philosophy—that fail to recognize the propulsive, animating features of nostalgic experience, instead positioning it as regressive or simply pathological.

In common use, ‘the pathological’ refers to those feelings and behaviors that indicate some sort of mental disease or cognitive malaise. This, in any case, is what most dictionaries tell us.¹⁰⁸ But that usage all too easily neglects the Greek roots of the word and its association with another term, one that both speaks to nostalgia’s enduring exigence and philosophy’s equally enduring anxiety: *pathos*. Like nostalgia, *pathos* carries multiple, sometimes conflicting connotations. On the one hand, it can refer to pain, suffering, and death, particularly those instances that emerge from misfortune, calamity, or disaster. But, on the other hand, an additional set of meanings deal with experiences of passion, emotion, and especially strong feelings. Experiences of the heart, in other words, and not necessarily those of reasoned rationality. These experiences of feeling *move* us; they galvanize our affective state of mind and impel movement. *Pathos*

Little ... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2004), 1-30; and Jill Stauffer, “An Interview with Simon Critchley,” *Believer Magazine*, August 1, 2003, <https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-simon-critchley/>.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “pathological,” accessed June 2020.

activates feelings that lead us to move this way or that. To construe a feeling or emotion like nostalgia as *patho-logical* is to imply that it deviates from the normal, customary course of movement—the spurious forms of movement and errant desires buried and expunged by the Hofer-Praxin-Lasch apparatus. Philosophy’s deep, abiding suspicion of feeling and emotion stems from the same basic assumption: that *pathos* slides all too easily into the terrain of the *patho-logical*. It misleads by directing movement away from approved means of rationality.

Yet, at the same time, we are told that philosophy begins with the most reasonable of feelings: awe and wonder. Martin Heidegger, one of the most influential and contentious thinkers of the last century, observes that feelings of wonder lie at the genesis of the most primordial type of thinking.¹⁰⁹ In doing so he calls to mind famous lines from Plato and Aristotle who both suggest that feelings of wonder and curiosity impel philosophical inquiry. In his *Theaetetus*, Plato situates the wise Socrates as the midwife of wisdom, guiding the young Theaetetus, a burgeoning epistemologist, along the way to better understanding the nature of knowledge [*episteme*] and what it means to know or cognize.¹¹⁰ When Theaetetus pauses to complain that he is bewildered and confused by the essential differences between knowledge and perception, Socrates responds by claiming that that very “sense of wonder [*thaumazein*] is the mark of the philosopher” and that philosophy itself “has no other origin [*arche*].”¹¹¹ Aristotle has something similar

¹⁰⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), §35-36.

¹¹⁰ Plato, *Theaetetus* in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, I.N.: Hackett Publishing, 1997), 145e.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155d.

in mind when, in Book I of his *Metaphysics*, he pauses his argument in favor of philosophy as “the most exact of the sciences [*episteme*]” to reflect upon its initial origins, its *archen*.¹¹² “For it is owing to their wonder [*thaumazein*],” he writes, “that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize.”¹¹³ Even more pointedly, in his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle goes on to claim that “philosophy consists in the knowledge [*episteme*] of many things that *excite wonder* [*thaumazein*].”¹¹⁴

What this suggests is that the story philosophy tells about itself is, paradoxically, one that begins with both an excitation of feeling and anxiety about where that feeling might lead. Feeling gives rise to thought and thought ultimately supersedes feeling, offering explanations and arguments that press it into more noble and dignified ends. Like Plato, Aristotle ties philosophy to the *arche* of wonder through the theme of knowledge and beginnings. To philosophize is to be on the way to gaining or acquiring adequate knowledge, not only of philosophy’s own beginnings, but the beginning of beginnings, what the Presocratics called the unlimited and boundless *apeiron*, the origin (*arche*) of all things. Knowledge, in this itinerary, is the orienting motif, the governing philosopheme. It cannot be accessed through feeling even if feeling sets its search in motion. “All men by nature desire to know,” Aristotle writes, opening his *Metaphysics*.¹¹⁵ This desire to know or apprehend may begin in wonder, but whereas feeling in itself impels an altogether spurious form of movement, proper philosophizing garners strength

¹¹² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, N.Y.: Random House Publishing Group, 2009), 982a25.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 982b10.

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, N.Y.: Random House Publishing Group, 2009), 1371b25.

¹¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a.

and momentum by engaging in more valid and authentic forms of movement toward first principles, original causes, and grounding essences. This form of movement reaches its apex, for Aristotle, by arriving at knowledge commensurate to its object(s), an early version of Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason in which the *telos* of philosophy—"grasping" a thing's "why," as Aristotle puts it—is guided by a desire to access the original beginnings and initial causes that constitute that 'why.'¹¹⁶ This desire, we are told, begins in wonder, but ultimately outgrows it, moving beyond. Nevertheless, this wonder animates thinking, initiating its drive to movement. In the beginning was wonder, and wonder was with philosophy; wonder was philosophy in the beginning.

For Heidegger, this movement toward thought finds initial expression in wonder but is ultimately propelled by a deeper and more profound drive, one that closely orbits the contours of nostalgia—that of return and homecoming. Citing the same passages from Plato and Aristotle mentioned above, Heidegger claims that philosophy does indeed begin in feeling that its most basic form of feeling—wonder, *thaumazein*—acts as the discipline's form of fundamental attunement, what he calls a *Grundstimmung*, or basic mood. He argues that by beginning in feeling, in wonder, philosophy can access a type of "primordial thinking" [*anfänglichen denkens*] that further impels it along the way to true knowledge.¹¹⁷ This involves returning to and reviving ancient forms of thought that, for Heidegger at least, contain the resources necessary to uncover Being its most genuine and authentic essence. As we will see momentarily, Heidegger isolates that essence as a type

¹¹⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, 194b17-20 and his *Posterior Analytics*, 71b9-11, 94a20.

¹¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic"* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), §35-36.

of concealed presence, but the broader point is that for him, as for Plato and Aristotle, philosophy is about uncovering or re-accessing something that was lost, an exceedingly nostalgic operation in other words. In philosophy, wondering about something—anything really, but roots, essences, and origins especially—sets thinking in motion and mediates its returns. It inspires movement and gives rise to all manner of speculation and reflection. Reasoned meditation may be the aim but feeling still comes first and therefore presents a problem. It is there at the beginning and remains an open question. It impels movement and in philosophy that movement must be placed along the proper path to adequate knowledge.

Plato's Socrates is a paradigmatic figure of this proper path, a custodian of wonder and the desire to truly know. Through him, we begin to see how this initial feeling of wonder conceals a more rudimentary feeling. This desire to know begins in wonder, but it is tinged with nostalgia for insight into its estranged beginning. Socrates acts as a midwife to Theaetetus's birth of knowledge, but he also maintains that it is ultimately forgotten knowledge, knowledge that was there in the beginning but has since been obscured. Like virtue in *Meno* or piety in *Euthyphro*, knowledge in *Theaetetus* is that which subsists within the individual soul (*psyche*) and can be accessed through proper procedures of *movement and return*. These procedures involve recollection or reminiscence (*anamnesis*) and provide a means of transcending the sensible realm and returning home—to the intelligible, the proper origin of the soul—in order to access virtue, piety, and knowledge, all of which emanate from the supreme Form of the Good. Memory and remembrance, then, in addition to knowledge and origins, tie philosophy not

only to wonder, but nostalgia. The entire journey of the individual immortal soul (*psyche*) expounded in *Phaedo*, for example, outlines a dynamic of proper movement. This nostalgically propelled return to origins becomes an orienting motif for the itinerary of philosophy, a discursive homecoming impelled by the desire to excavate and disclose first principles, primordial causes, and irreducible essences. Philosophy thus proceeds under the conditions of exile or homesickness, evincing a deep-seated desire to triumph over estrangement and close the gap between ignorance and knowledge. It does so by searching for some means of access to the real, the true, the good, the objective and apodictic, or any number of the manifold metaphors philosophy deploys to justify itself: the *Cogito* in Descartes, the transcendental unity of apperception in Kant, the cunning of reason in Hegel, and so on.¹¹⁸ Philosophy wonders about its wonder, a movement to and of thinking rooted in nostalgia. As Sylviane Agacinski puts it in her study on temporality and nostalgia, “ever since Plato and the metaphysical condemnation of the ephemeral, philosophy has been stricken with nostalgia—that is, a painful feeling of exile...the feeling that wherever one is, one is not at *home*.”¹¹⁹ In the beginning was nostalgia, and nostalgia was with philosophy; nostalgia was philosophy in the beginning.

This chapter commences a two-part effort to not only examine the relationship between philosophy and nostalgia Agacinski identifies, but also and especially to leverage certain moments in 20th century continental thought that help clarify the

¹¹⁸ For more on the clandestine use of metaphor and rhetoric in philosophy see Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Reprint edition (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 207-273.

¹¹⁹ Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, trans. Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 16-17. Italics mine.

animating, propulsive features of nostalgic experience that form the basis of this project. Those moments put us on the path to considering nostalgia as a motivating response to loss and discontinuity that intervenes in temporal awareness to rework memory in especially generative ways. I pursue the first part of this effort below by looking at Heidegger's work with a particular interest in his understanding of the relationship between moods and temporality. That relationship, I maintain, helps us approach the temporality specific to nostalgia but also reveals the extent to which Heidegger remains a thinker of *nostos* alone, inhibited by his own nostalgia for presence and the Ancient Greek determinations of being.¹²⁰ I begin by tracing the contours of Heidegger's main project and establishing the context and motivation for key concepts like *grundstimmung* (fundamental mood or disposition), *geworfenheit* (thrownness), and *befindlichkeit* (Heidegger's word for affectivity; literally the state in which one finds oneself). After delineating how these ideas interact with Heidegger's understanding of time and discussing why he positions homesickness as a fundamental mood, I move to examine one of his key examples, that of the uncanny (*unheimlichkeit*) best typified by the figure of Antigone. Heidegger's reading of Antigone as 'the most uncanny' links his work to nostalgia as a form of existential homesickness. It also reveals how the animating, propulsive features of nostalgic experience escape him due to his philosophical commitments to presence and disclosure.¹²¹ To the extent that it serves to clarify and

¹²⁰ The next chapter seeks to push that thinking further with the help of Jacques Derrida, a thinker of *algos*, who radicalizes Heidegger's thought in this regard.

¹²¹ The last chapter considered *vivisepture* as an especially rich image with which to trace nostalgia's history and a particularly illuminating device for re-thinking its emergence as a diagnostic construct, one characterized by errant desire and spurious movement. I continue that approach here by

extend Heidegger's own thinking on temporality and moods, I turn to insights from affect theory at key moments throughout. That body of literature has recently begun to engage Heidegger in useful ways that draw attention to both the constituted nature of subjectivity and its enduring openness to both affecting and being-affected, demonstrating how feelings and emotions like nostalgia serve to galvanize movement. My analysis of Heidegger below is informed by these engagements and works to marshal their insights in anticipation of the deconstructive analyses undertaken in the next chapter. Those analyses depend on Heidegger but ultimately go a step (or two) beyond.

Heidegger is both a thinker of nostalgia and a nostalgic thinker, or so I want to maintain. He begins in the same space as Plato and Aristotle, with the same speculative posture and the same philosophical attitude, interested in excavating initial beginnings and primordial origins. His thought, like theirs, is impelled by feelings of wonder. In the opening pages of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger famously blames Plato for inaugurating a pernicious oblivion of Being, suggesting that he elides crucial ontological distinctions first identified by Presocratic thinkers like Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides.¹²²

looking at how Heidegger both exudes nostalgia and approaches it obliquely in his work through the notions of homesickness and the uncanny. As we have seen, viviseulture is meant to send its living victims to a slow, eventual death but in doing so it introduces some uncertainty as to when and if death definitively occurs and where or how life meets final closure. Despite his preoccupation with being-toward-death and his continual insistence on the primacy of death as an ultimate, anxiety-inducing horizon, Heidegger rarely takes up this uncertainty and never explicitly references live burial. He does, however, approach viviseulture and the set of questions it raises through his reading of Antigone, western literature's most famous victim of live burial. The notion of the uncanny Heidegger develops in this context maintains close proximity to his understanding of homesickness as philosophy's primary *grundstimmung*. It also demonstrates the limitations of Heidegger's thinking, revealing his own nostalgia for beginnings, authenticity, and primordality.

¹²² This distinction refers to the ontological difference Heidegger identifies in *Sein und Zeit*. Plato, he thinks, obscures or conflates the difference between individual ontic entities (*das Seiende*) and Being as such (*das Sein*). By equating truth (*aletheia*) with visibility and appearance in the allegory of the

A decade later he goes on to cite the passages from Plato and Aristotle referenced above with some approval, observing that philosophy's unlikely beginning takes shape in feeling and that wonder [*thaumazein*] acts as a fundamental attunement or basic mood [*Grundstimmung*] of philosophy.¹²³ This beginning in wonder, he argues, suggests the need for a type of "primordial thinking" [*des anfänglichen denkens*] that would further impel philosophical speculation to consider its "other beginning," one that predates both Plato and Aristotle and is rooted, for the later Heidegger at least, in the continual emergence and unconcealment of Being as such—a type of ancient presencing in which humankind primordially dwells.

The notion of *Grundstimmung* is key to this type of thinking and although it does not feature prominently in Heidegger's early work—he only mentions the term once in *Sein und Zeit*—it becomes an increasingly important touchstone in published texts after

cave, Plato effectively transforms the thinking of being. On Heidegger's reading, this marks the fateful moment when "*aletheia* comes under the yoke of the *eidos*," when being comes to be understood as the proper or correct correlation that obtains between idea or form (*eidos*) and appearance, image, or representation (*phenomena*). Cf. Martin Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 176. This slow decline of the meaning of the question of being reaches its full apex when the Greek *aletheia* encounters Latin in the Middle Ages—under the aegis of the Thomistic axiom *veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*—and reaches full closure with Cartesian rationalism and Hegel's understanding of absolute knowledge (*das absolute Wissen*). For Heidegger, Plato pries open a gap and paves the way for a full-fledged correspondence theory of truth in which *aletheia* is taken to mean correct or adequate perception or representation of *eidos*—the way in which individual entities or beings appear—rather than the continual emergence or unconcealment of being itself found in the Presocratic relationship between *aletheia* and *physis* (nature). While Heidegger identifies the famous cave allegory in *Republic VII* as the nucleus of Plato's reorientation of *aletheia* (and thus being in general), the Eleatic Stranger's claim that true statements "state...things that are (or facts) as they are" in *Sophist* 263b fully encapsulates the operation Plato performs in his doctrine of truth. See also *Cratylus*, 385b. It is also worth noting that while Heidegger is generally more approving of Aristotle's thought he does believe that Aristotle failed to fully step outside his master's shadow vis-a-vis *aletheia* and indeed the so-called correspondence theory of truth is often attributed to Aristotle as well. See, for example, his *Metaphysics*, 1011b25; *Categories*, 12b11, 14b14; *De Interpretatione*, 16a3. See also Heidegger, "Plato's Doctrine of Truth," *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 178.

¹²³ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, §35-36.

1929.¹²⁴ For Heidegger, feelings like wonder attain the status of *Grundstimmung* not because they are fundamental in the sense of being more primary or felt with more frequency than other *Stimmungen* (moods), though they certainly might. Instead, they constitute the conditions through which thinking, other entities and feelings, the world, and Being-itself are refracted in an especially illuminating manner. Their grounding status lies in the unique way they distill and lay bare the ungrounded nature of human experience, the way it remains accretive, ongoing, and fundamentally unsettled. Heidegger often refers to this laying bare in terms of displacement and disposition. A *Grundstimmung* both displaces within being (disorientation) and disposes to being (attunement). In Heidegger's thinking wonder acts as a *grundstimmung*, a basic disposition, because it "disposes man into the beginning of thinking [by] displac[ing] man into that essence whereby he then finds himself in the midst of beings as such and as a whole."¹²⁵ The implied question of wholeness looms large here as does the assumed value of unity; both are always close at hand in Heidegger's work. But this requires necessary context. In order to fully understand what is going on here we first need to clarify the stakes of Heidegger's larger project, how it relates to *Grundstimmung*, how both accounts link up with his understanding of temporality and affectivity more generally.

¹²⁴ Daniel Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary* (New York, N.Y.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 134.

¹²⁵ Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, §38.

Heidegger's Project: *Dasein* and Homesickness as Philosophy's *Grundstimmung*

There are no doubt a great many ways to characterize Heidegger's work. The most germane to a thinking of nostalgia, however, include his critique of the modern, post-Kantian subject, his understanding of temporality, and his account of moods. Unlike Kant and Descartes before him, Heidegger does not consider the self, the subjective "I," in terms of its cognitive relation with itself by virtue of its substance (*res cogitans*), nor does he hold that objects of experience are first cognized as concepts in the mental faculty of the understanding (the transcendental subject that consolidates experience across time through apperceptive unity). He instead considers the entire problematic of subjectivity from an existential point of view. The "I" identifies itself and finds itself—*Befindlichkeit*—as always already there, always already existing in time (the *Da* of *Dasein*: being-there, being-here), faced with the possibility of authentic or inauthentic existence through various means comportment. In *Sein und Zeit*, the early Heidegger explores this dynamic by engaging in a project of what he calls fundamental ontology. Through this approach he rereads the history of Western thought in light of the all-important but hitherto obscured ontological difference: the distinction between individual ontic beings or entities (*das Seiende*) and Being as such (*das Sein*).¹²⁶ Characteristically obsessed with the 'early' and the 'originary,' Heidegger believes that this approach is a

¹²⁶ "In the question which we are to work out, what is asked about is Being—that which determines entities as entities, that on the basis of which entities are already understood, however we may discuss them in detail. The Being of entities 'is' not itself an entity. If we are to understand the problem of Being our first philosophical step consists...not in defining entities as entities by taking them back in their origin to some other entities, as if Being had the character of some possible entities. Hence, Being, as that which is asked about, must be exhibited in a way of its own, essentially different from the way in which entities are discovered." Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 6/25-26.

“more primordial” (*ursprünglich*) mode of inquiry than the standard line of investigation hegemonic since Plato and Aristotle.¹²⁷ He pursues this project, as is well known, by first “destroying the history of ontology” (*Destruktion*)¹²⁸ to the extent that it has forgotten this ontological difference (and thus the meaning of the question of Being) and, second, by sketching an existential analytic of *Dasein* (“being-there”/“being-here”). This reaching back to another, more primordial or originary beginning is already suggestive of nostalgia: philosophy has ‘lost’ or ‘forgotten’ something it once had—access to the unity and totality of Being as such—and must, through processes of *Destruktion*, reclaim its true vocation by returning to its *arche*.

Dasein takes up this itinerary and, in the face of forgetfulness, is propelled by a similar desire for genuine, authentic existence. This approach mirrors, at the lower ontic level, the broader, more transcendental move Heidegger ventures in positing his essential ontological difference. That difference precedes and, in some sense, constitutes *Dasein*, but *Dasein* itself enjoys a unique position that can offer some access to its determinations, or so the early Heidegger wants to argue. *Dasein* is that entity whose being is always already an issue for it and is, in each case, its own (*Jemeinigkeit*: “mineness”).¹²⁹ *Dasein* is granted special status and pride of place in Heidegger’s thought, especially in the early works. It is taken to be a privileged entity through which some light can be shed on the meaning of the question of being in general that propels his project. By engaging in an analysis of *Dasein*’s being, Heidegger uncovers various modes

¹²⁷ Ibid., §3.

¹²⁸ Ibid., §6.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 42/67-43/68.

of intersubjective comportment and worldly engagement that are both specific to *Dasein* and revelatory of original, primordial Being as such (*das Sein*). Together, these modes of comportment constitute *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*), the ways in which it is, in any given situation, thrown (*geworfen*) into the milieu of its own facticity (*faktizität*), into the intractable conditions and often recalcitrant determinations that comprise the world, other entities, and its own makeup.

Heidegger's main concern, at least in *Sein und Zeit*, is to determine the precise nature of *Dasein*'s existence as either authentic or inauthentic. *Dasein* lives inauthentically by avoiding its own-most possibilities for existence and, especially, by succumbing to the determinations of average everydayness and 'the They,' what Heidegger terms *das Man*. In this mode of existence, *Dasein* forgets its own primordial relation to Being and, by becoming lost or absorbed in the fabric of social life, fails to choose the path of individual determination. Conversely, Heidegger argues that authentic existence involves those instances in which *Dasein* remembers the ontological difference, comports itself to its own potentiality by accepting its thrownness, and, risking the possibility of anxiety, faces the truth of Being and finitude through what he calls anticipatory resoluteness (*vorlaufende entschlossenheit*).¹³⁰ Existentially, this means facing up to the possibility of one's own death, that is, the possibility of *Dasein*'s own impossibility, a possibility that can only ever be its own, its being-toward-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*).¹³¹ Accepting the thrown facticity of this ultimate horizon furnishes *Dasein*

¹³⁰ Ibid., §62.

¹³¹ Ibid., §51-53.

with a proper path to beings in general and, eventually, Being as such in its most essential and primordial form. Like Plato's Socrates who first initiates philosophy's movement of nostalgic return and proper remembrance, Heidegger's *Dasein* purportedly provides some access to what has been lost or obscured.

The various modes of comportment and engagement that shape *Dasein's* being-in-the-world are characterized by their disclosedness (*erschlossenheit*), according to Heidegger. This disclosedness determines the myriad ways *Dasein* is open to itself, other entities, and the world as well as the ways in which these modes are themselves disclosive of the forgotten object—Being as such—and the possibility of authentic existence. Taken together, these modes constitute the basic ontological structure of *Dasein*, a structure that Heidegger characterizes as Care (*sorge*). This care-structure is Heidegger's version of Husserlian intentionality, that is, the directed-ness or about-ness of individual consciousness, the manifold ways in which the subject is able to forge a correlation between subject and object through its powers of representation.¹³² *Dasein's* care-structure—the ways in which it is determined as open and directed both toward and outside itself—is comprised of four basic disclosive coordinates. One of these

¹³² Heidegger's argument for care as replacement for intentionality can be found in Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), §31ff. As a phenomenological concept, intentionality has its roots in Scholastic thought, specifically St. Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God, as a means of differentiating between objects that exist in the mental faculty of the understanding and objects that exist in reality. Intentionality fell into obscurity shortly thereafter, but was repurposed by Husserl and his teacher, Franz Brentano as a means of enumerating the powers of the mind and elaborating the nature of individual acts of consciousness. It was then problematized by psychoanalysis and one of Brentano's most famous students, Sigmund Freud. Recently, thinkers associated with the speculative realist movement have deployed the concept in order to proffer a critique of post-Kantian forms of "correlationism," that is, modes of thought that suppose thinking and being to be necessarily correlated. See, for example, Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009).

coordinates is affectivity or *Befindlichkeit*. *Befindlichkeit*, along with *Stimmung*, is one of the two terms Heidegger variously uses to refer to affectivity, moods, and emotions in the existential analytic of *Dasein*.¹³³

For Heidegger, *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world is always contingent upon its affective capacities and its ability to be imbued with this or that mood.¹³⁴ This observation, along with his initial analyses of time, stand among Heidegger's most enduring insights and offers a means of thematizing feeling by bringing it into direct relation with the conditions of existence that shape it. Being-in-the-world is moody, it seems, if by moody we mean one's capacity to be moved, here or there, by a type of affective attunement that discloses not only matters of fact, but those facts that matter to us most intimately.¹³⁵ This moodiness often cannot be predicted and lies outside the complete and immediate control of the knowing, speaking subject it often ventriloquizes.

¹³³ Both terms are notoriously difficult to render in English translation and must be understood, at least within the context of *Sein und Zeit*, against the backdrop of Heidegger's ontological difference, where *Befindlichkeit* refers to affectivity more generally—*Dasein*'s capacity to affect and be affected—and has ontological connotations related to various states of Being, while *Stimmung* carries with it a sense particular ontic feelings or sensibilities, i.e., particular moods or emotions such as fear, hope, joy, or sadness. Both terms are intimately related such that *Befindlichkeit*, as the overall affective state in which one finds oneself, provides the necessary conditions for one's being-attuned, for having the capacity to be affected by a specific *Stimmung* or feeling. However, in 1929, shortly after the publication of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger abandons *Befindlichkeit* as it is deployed in that text and opts instead for the more all-encompassing term *Stimmung* while retaining much of the original significance of both terms. This can be seen in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger's 1929 inaugural address at Freiburg University, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, and his *Kantbuch (Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics)*, which unofficially supplies the missing third division of *Sein und Zeit* promised in that text's initial outline (Cf. *Sein und Zeit*, §8). Later, in 1941, he admits that his conception of *Befindlichkeit* in *Sein und Zeit* coheres with and contains his later account and usage of *Stimmung*. Cf. Heidegger, *Über den Anfang* (GA70), 131. See also Dahlstrom, *The Heidegger Dictionary*, 63. Given this knotty situation, I will refer to affectivity as a more general and all-encompassing term below except in those instances where either *Befindlichkeit* or *Stimmung* achieve more immediate contextual and conceptual clarity.

¹³⁴ "*Stimmung* has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something. [...] *Dasein*'s openness to the world is constituted existentially by the attunement of *Befindlichkeit*." Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 137/176.

¹³⁵ "Existentially, *Befindlichkeit* implies a disclosive submission to the world, out of which we can encounter something that matters to us." Ibid., 137/177.

It simply happens, comes to be, or emerges. “A mood [*Stimmung*] assails or invades us,” Heidegger writes, “it comes neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside,’ but arises out of Being-in-the-world.”¹³⁶ Not only is being-in-the-world constituted by affectivity—one is never not affected, never not affecting—for Heidegger, the experience of being imbued by a particular mood marginalizes intentional consciousness. To be affected is to be moved or impelled to move by a particular feeling or affective experience that discloses but cannot always be predicted or consciously conjured. This sort of experience unfolds within the vicissitudes of everyday existence in the world, in solitude and isolation, in interaction and sociality, in all manner of engagement and comportment.

This leads us back to Heidegger’s notion of *Grundstimmung*, those moods or dispositions that orient and attune *Dasein*’s manner of comportment more fundamentally than others. If individual moods [*Stimmungen*] arise out of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world and affect both its openness to experience and its receptivity to the modes of disclosure experience generates, then the notion of *Grundstimmung* raises things to the next power by disclosing how disclosure discloses, by showing how disclosure is always already colored by affective disposition, in other words. *Grundstimmungen* function as paradigmatic feelings or emotions that relate *Dasein* to itself, other beings, and the world in especially illuminating or disclosive ways that once again provide access to Being as such, Being as primordial, unconcealed presencing. The German root word here—*Stimmung*—carries at least two connotations that are difficult to express in English.¹³⁷ It

¹³⁶ Ibid., 136/176.

¹³⁷ For more on this see the entry for “Stimmung” in Barbara Cassin et al., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 1061ff.

can mean, on the one hand, vocal articulation in the sense of a particular mood, feeling, or emotion attaining some mode of expression. Johannes Hofer seems to have orbited this sense when, in his dissertation on nostalgia, he suggests that it is possible, on the basis of the word's "force" and "sound," to more clearly define the moodiness that emerges from the desire to return.¹³⁸ The other meaning derives its sense from music: to be 'in tune,' 'on pitch,' or to maintain proper tension. Perhaps this is what Heraclitus has in mind when he suggests that there is some hidden or invisible harmony in a strung bow that keeps its shape and sound by maintaining constant, tensive pressure.¹³⁹ Heidegger brings these two meanings together in his notion of *Grundstimmung*—a grounding attunement or fundamental mood—that simultaneously displaces *Dasein* among (ontic) beings present-at-hand and disposes it to forgotten (ontological) Being, revealing its unity and totality, the manner in which it grounds all that issues from its continual, emergent presencing.

This helps clarify why Heidegger posits wonder as one of philosophy's motivating *Grundstimmungen*. Wonder compels thinking and colors philosophy's movement toward the primordial, what Heidegger calls the 'first' or 'other' beginning. It acts as a lens or filter through which other feelings, emotions, and experience in general become intelligible. I say *one of* philosophy's motivating *Grundstimmungen* here because several years later Heidegger identifies an additional *Grundstimmung* that adheres to philosophy and brings us even closer to nostalgia: homesickness. To borrow from

¹³⁸ Johannes Hofer, "Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia," trans. Carolyn Kiser Anspach, *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 2 (January 1, 1934), ¶2, 381.

¹³⁹ One version of his famous Fragment #51 reads: "They do not apprehend how being at variance it agrees with itself, how being brought apart it is brought together with itself. There is a back-stretched connection, as in the bow and the lyre. See G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, eds., *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 193.

Agacinski once again, philosophy is stricken with nostalgia, with the growing and enduring realization that wherever it casts its gaze, it remains in exile, not-at-home.

Unlike Hofer, Heidegger does not view this form of homesickness as a disease and has no interest in cataloging symptoms or developing a cure. His homesickness constitutes an existential condition, to be sure, but, at the same time, the form of desire he discusses still facilitates movement and propulsion, much like Hofer's. The impetus here is a famous fragment from Novalis, the German poet and mystic: "Philosophy is really homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere."¹⁴⁰ Novalis pens these words in the late eighteenth century, right around the same time that homesickness began to see more frequent currency as a romantic metaphor of the type that Kant mentions—a response to the conditions of temporal experience—rather than a provincial physical condition.

Heidegger spends the majority of his 1929-30 seminar on the fundamental concepts of metaphysics offering extending commentary on this line from Novalis. As in Plato, Aristotle, and his own text on wonder published just three years prior, Heidegger observes that philosophy does indeed long to be at home. It yearns to relocate or regain access to its forgotten provenance, its primordial origins and initial first roots. But, even more importantly, he postulates that the urge or drive to be at home everywhere identified by Novalis can only be constitutive of philosophical reflection if those who philosophize *are not already at home*, experiencing the pangs of what Georg Lukács would later call

¹⁴⁰ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, ed. David W. Wood (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2012), 155.

“transcendental homelessness.”¹⁴¹ It is because this homesickness remains, incessantly, both compelling and unsatisfied that it attains the status of *Grundstimmung* in Heidegger’s view, conditioning philosophy’s speculative impulse and animating its movement toward thought. Both unlocalized and unlocalizable, this homesickness establishes the coordinates for the sort of questions philosophy wants to ask and installs a frame of reference through which answers to those questions become intelligible. For Heidegger, these questions and their frame pertain to unity, wholeness, and finitude. To be at home everywhere, he suggests, is to be where or when the philosopher is *not*, that is, “to be once and at all times within the whole [*im Ganzen*],” within the aleatory manifold that is the world as we know and perceive it.¹⁴² For Heidegger, the philosopher remains estranged from home. The ‘where’ and the ‘when’ of this drive to be at home everywhere, this desire to become homely in every place and in every instance, is directed, Heidegger tells us, not only toward the whole, but toward “Being as a whole [*Sein im Ganzen*].”¹⁴³ Heidegger describes this urge to become homely and this drive toward the whole in terms of restlessness (*getriebenheit*). *Dasein* remains restless and this restlessness impels its movement, its drive toward solace in Being as a whole, a whole that both contains and exceeds the totality of beings and entities in the world. This identification of philosophy with a type of unlocalizeable homesickness, a form of temporally-oriented nostalgia, marks a salient point of departure for Heidegger, the most

¹⁴¹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 5. Cf. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971).

¹⁴² Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts*, 5.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

influential and surreptitious thinker of philosophy's nostalgia. Within this frame of reference, nostalgic desire, rather than being directed toward a specific place or space (home, classically understood), suffuses the entirety of existence, and is expressive of a type of yearning for Being-itself as it gradually emerges *in time*. This, for Heidegger, is the character of philosophy's most basic disposition, its most rudimentary form of feeling and attunement.

Resonances with Affect Theory

Heidegger's vested interest in moods and feeling bear some interesting and productive resemblance to more recent theories of affectivity. Since the 1990s, high theory—perhaps motivated, at least in part, by what others have called its nostalgia for the real¹⁴⁴—has been marked by what Patricia Clough calls “the affective turn” or “the turn to affect.”¹⁴⁵ This turn offers a generative means of studying human experience by drawing attention to the ways that affectivity in general (the capacity to affect and be affected) and certain affects in particular (e.g., nostalgia, anxiety, hope, etc.) function as a chief means of motivation in human thought and experience. As we have already seen,

¹⁴⁴ As Josue V. Harari put it recently: “At the same time that theory claims to stand for the real, the discourse of theory inscribes within itself the very repression of the reality it promotes. [...] From Proust to Beckett, from Blanchot to Derrida, from Freud to Lacan, from Lévi-Strauss to Girard, our entire literary theoretical modernity has been predicated upon a *nostalgia for the real*. Reality is accused of never showing its true face...or else...of always falling short of itself. See his *Scenarios of the Imaginary: Theorizing the French Enlightenment* (Cornell University Press, 2019), 19. Italics mine. Thomas M. Kavanaugh agrees. “Expelling the real,” he writes, “theory nonetheless expresses an abiding nostalgia for what has been lost in its choice of totality and closure.” See his *The Limits of Theory* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1989), 20.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 2007). The genesis of what is now called contemporary affect theory is often attributed to a pair of essays first published in 1995: Brian Massumi's “The Autonomy of Affect,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 31 (1995): 83-109; and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins,” *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (1995): 496-522.

feelings and emotions impel movement. They move us here or there, this way and that, oftentimes in ways that we cannot clearly predict, control, isolate, or even articulate. As Lisa Blackman and Couze Venn put it, they serve to “gesture toward something that escapes or remains in excess of the practices of the ‘speaking subject.’”¹⁴⁶ As indicators of motivation and provocation, affects subsist before, beside, and beyond more familiar faculties like reason and judgment and are thus constitutive of elemental components of human behavior. They modulate, amplify, and intensify one’s capacities to act and be acted upon. While certainly felt in their fullness, they tend to exceed their naming, outstripping efforts to render them completely transparent, immediate, or accessible. They often do so by circulating just beneath the surface, intervening between sensation and thought, perception and activity. In light of this, one way to view affect theory is as a necessary corrective to the longstanding anxiety regarding feelings and emotion discussed above.

Heidegger was on his way to similar conclusions even if he never fully thematizes them. In his language, *Dasein* is transposed [*versetzt*] into this or that mood such that moods themselves constitute “powerful forces that permeate and envelop us...com[ing] over us...with one fell swoop.”¹⁴⁷ Affects and affectivity thus contribute to and determine the incessant outworking of *Dasein*’s ‘Da’—its there-ness or here-ness—which shapes the responses, reactions, and reverberations that often exceed knowing, intentional consciousness. *Dasein* is thus on the way to finding itself affected before the mental

¹⁴⁶ Lisa Blackman and Couze Venn, “Affect,” *Body & Society* 16, no. 1 (March 1, 2010), 8. Italics mine.

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine,”* trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014), 89-90/81. Translation modified.

bifurcation into subject and object, “prior to all cognition and volition,” as Heidegger puts it.¹⁴⁸ Perhaps this is why he chose to introduce his concept of “thrownness” (*Geworfenheit*)—a linchpin in his early project—in the middle of his discussion of moods and affectivity. Thrownness is a phenomenological correlate to *Dasein*’s ontological facticity and a basic attribute of its overall care-structure.¹⁴⁹ For our purposes, it functions as a loose synonym for what Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth call the immanent between-ness and accumulative beside-ness of affect, the force and forces of encounter, “the subtlest of shuttling intensities.”¹⁵⁰ In a Heideggerian register we might say that *Dasein* is always already thrown into the facticity of its existence, always on the way or in the midst of finding itself (*Befindlichkeit*) in the unsettled position of the ‘Da,’ the precarious foothold with which it identifies itself.

“Thrownness is neither a ‘fact that is finished’ nor a fact that is settled,” according to Heidegger.¹⁵¹ It instead refers to the constant pressure of *Dasein*’s existence, refracted through the disclosedness of affectivity and continually subject to the draw of inauthentic existence through the inertia of *das Man*. Thrownness discloses *Dasein* as ‘there,’ but, crucially, this occurs in a manner that is not graspable or present-at-hand, in Heidegger’s terms. Rather, this facticity is an essential attribute of the totality of *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world. It permeates the entirety of things and, as such, it cannot be seen, viewed, beheld, or isolated as one element among others. The facticity thrownness indicates is the

¹⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 136/175.

¹⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 383/435, 406/458, 412/465.

¹⁵⁰ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press Books, 2010), 2.

¹⁵¹ Heidegger., *Being and Time*, 179/223.

‘that-it-is-ness’ of *Dasein*’s constantly moving and morphing presence. This disclosure occurs, through affectivity in such a manner that *Dasein* is always on its way to finding itself in this or that position of affective attunement (*Befindlichkeit*), with this or that sense of feeling (*Stimmung*). It is thus that *Dasein*, in being affected, “is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the [*Stimmung*] that it has.”¹⁵² We first find ourselves as being affected, as feeling, as felt—and if, as Descartes would have it, our thinking ‘grounds’ our ‘existence,’ this is only because our thinking is already affected by the time we engage it. The feeling comes first, it seems. And for Heidegger this means that *Dasein* is faced with the reality it must have always found itself (as affected), will continue to find itself (affected), and will find—or *will have found*—itself (affected) again and again.

Heidegger may not be interested in developing a full-fledged theory of affectivity, but his account of moods and thrownness offer some illuminating clarifications that can help us better understand nostalgic experience. Contemporary iterations of affect theory have often had occasion to refer to “the particular temporal logic of affect”¹⁵³ as “neither linear nor homogenous;”¹⁵⁴ the manner in which affectivity itself is “constitutive of lived time;”¹⁵⁵ affects’ potential “resistance to teleological presumptions;”¹⁵⁶ and, especially, the

¹⁵² Ibid., 135/174.

¹⁵³ Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 73.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 60.

¹⁵⁵ Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 61.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Sedgwick and Frank, “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold,” 503; Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015), 61.

burgeoning notion that all theories of affect are essentially “theories of timing,” that is, “theories of the self running ahead of itself...[and] catching up with itself.”¹⁵⁷ Time is of the essence, as they say, and in this case that essence enables movement and increases capaciousness, what Purnima Mankekar calls “the affective potency of temporality” which reveals that “time is generative of agency.”¹⁵⁸ Heidegger had some nascent understanding of this too, even if he presses his insights into different register concerned more with universal ontological structures than specific feelings or experiences like nostalgia. Like his teacher Edmund Husserl, Heidegger explicitly frames all his analyses, including those related to moods and affectivity, against the backdrop of time as the fundamental horizon for phenomenological interpretation, the horizon against which *Dasein* is thrown and seeks to find itself (affected).

According to Heidegger, affectivity “temporalizes itself primarily in having been [*in der Gewesenheit*]” such that its “basic character...lies in *bringing one back to something* [*Zurückbringen auf...*].”¹⁵⁹ This “bringing-back” does not “produce” the essence or presence of the ‘having-been,’ but it does disclose or reveal the ‘having-been’ as a mode of being or sensibility available for analysis and interpretation. This is no doubt what St. Augustine had in mind when he offhandedly refers to memory as the stomach of the mind. “I can be far from glad,” he writes, “in remembering myself to have

¹⁵⁷ Marta Figlerowicz, “Affect Theory Dossier: An Introduction,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 20, no. 2 (2012), 3-4. See also Marie-Luise Angerer, Bernd Bösel, and Michaela Ott, eds., *Timing of Affect: Epistemologies of Affection* (Diaphanes, 2014) and Purnima Mankekar, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

¹⁵⁸ Purnima Mankekar, *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 18; 21.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 340/390

been glad, and far from sad when I recall my past sadness...I remember with joy a sadness that has passed and with sadness a lost joy.”¹⁶⁰ Sadness and gladness are as bitter and sweet food. “When they are entrusted to the memory they are as if transferred to the stomach and can there be stored, but they cannot be tasted.”¹⁶¹ If they could, of course, the sensation would be revolting and bilious. Instead, they sustain us in the ‘stomach’ of the mind, the region that both nourishes us and produces all manner of *viscera* and affective feedback, generating a unique experience *with*—but not *of*—the past, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin.¹⁶²

What Heidegger seems to be suggesting, without explicitly saying so, is one of the central tenets of affect theory: that time is, above all, *felt*. It *affects* us and issues a relentless and unceasing array of cumulative *archival effects* (memories, feelings, memories of previous feelings, memories of memories, etc.). These effects are always already at/in play and at times they reduce our capacities for abstract thought and clear articulation to a faint whisper. We are inscribed by affects and we often feel them in the form of a muted cry, a sensate twinge welling up in search of expression. At times they overwhelm us, but not always. Yet, we do find ourselves cast into their atmosphere, carried over into the contagious vibes they emit. Affect theory suggests, among other things, an ongoing shift in attention and a newfound interest in these vibes and atmospheres. It demands a reengagement with the non-conscious dimensions of subjectivity that often intervene to mediate thought and experience.

¹⁶⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.14.21.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. Italics mine.

¹⁶² Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 262.

This mediating liminality highlights affects' distinctly temporal dimensions, the way they both disrupt and facilitate our temporal orientation. Affects and affectivity shape our experience of time, functioning as something of a shimmering, circuitous index of temporization, of the belated lag that persists between being affected by someone or something and rationally cognizing or apprehending that experience, between feeling and thought, sense and understanding, experience and consciousness. I feel something and this feeling overtakes me. It moves me, transports me, and seizes the ostensibly seamless flow of time as I perceive it, slowing it down, speeding it up—bending it and twisting it. My feelings grip and convulse my time just as my time tabulates the accruing, nearly undetectable expression of my feelings, the dim and shadowy archive of my unceasing experience. Time, in this matrix, becomes less of an immovable repository containing discrete, successive moments and more of vivacious, labile shoreline, revealing and concealing. Wave upon wave, the vagrancies of temporality's tide indicate the opacities of an aggregate self that *is* because it *feels*, a buoyant and adrenalized “upsurge” of time and affective accretion, to paraphrase Maurice Merleau-Ponty.¹⁶³ As such—and this will become clearer over the course of the next chapter or so—affects like nostalgia signal the possibility that consciousness never completely and fully coincides with itself. We are always running ahead of ourselves, and can be, at any given moment, thrust into the dense haze of our accumulative histories, overtaken by the build-up of affective associations that drag us into the future.

¹⁶³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 497. “We are not in some incomprehensible way an activity joined to a passivity, an automatism surmounted by a will, a perception surmounted by a judgement, but wholly active and wholly passive, because we are the upsurge of time.”

When Heidegger says that the temporality of moods involves a certain ‘bringing-back,’ he is referring to something that does not occur in a neat, linear, or successive manner. The time of affectivity appears, *at times*, to run backwards, or, better, sideways, cutting across past and future in the present, intimating what Michael Warner calls a “dilated temporality.”¹⁶⁴ Bringing-back always happens after the fact and does not adhere to the standard logics of cause and effect; the return occurs in the absence of any sort of object or ground cast in proverbial amber. Feelings are fleeting; they are but echoes, shimmers, reveries—duplicative feedback. They bring us back to our having-been, but reveal that the having-been is not *now* what is once *was*, as Kant first observed in his comments on Swiss homesickness. Instead, they emerge in an upsurge and then recede, gathering themselves within the oceanic expanse of the self to generate yet another series of teeming, crashing waves.

Being on the way to finding oneself with this or that feeling already suggests a sort of belatedness or nonlinearity, an essential feature of emotional life highlighted by nostalgic experience. I will have much more to say about this in the next chapter, but for now it will suffice to note that the protracted timing invoked here is characterized by deferral and accretion. Affect theory itself has yet to fully thematize this element, but Heidegger’s discussion of temporality and *Befindlichkeit* in Division II of *Sein und Zeit* offers some useful clarifications that begin to broach the sort of temporality involved in nostalgic experience. It is worth remembering that the entire existential analytic of

¹⁶⁴ Michael Warner, “Uncritical Reading,” in *Polemic: Critical or Uncritical*, ed. Jane Gallop (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 19.

Dasein outlined in the first half of *Sein und Zeit* is only ever given the status of a “preparatory analysis”¹⁶⁵ meant to lay groundwork for the explication of “primordial temporality” Heidegger offers near the end of the text. As such, and in order to “repeat the existential analysis in a more primordial manner,”¹⁶⁶ he returns, in Division II, to key moments in the analytic under the general rubric of time. These include affectivity (considered as *Stimmung* and the basic *existentiale* of *Befindlichkeit*) the temporality specific to *Dasein*’s elemental disclosedness.

The meaning of *Dasein*’s being is found in care or concern, Heidegger tell us,¹⁶⁷ and the ontological meaning of care is located in temporality.¹⁶⁸ That care-structure exhibits both the unity and totality of selfhood, an aggregate of *Dasein*’s being-ahead-of-itself (existentiality), its being-already-in-the-world (facticity, thrownness), and its being-alongside other entities in the world (fallenness). Rather than characterizing selfhood as either substance or subject—this is his dispute with Descartes and Kant referenced above—Heidegger contends that the phenomenon of the self is exemplified, or disclosed, through this care-structure, as a type of radical, ecstatic openness to the world. This ecstatic openness is part and parcel of Heidegger’s temporality of affectivity, which consists primarily in pastness, in one’s thrownness, the disclosure of how one is, how one feels, or how one finds oneself in any particular moment. This pastness or been-ness is one of temporality’s own *ecstases*, one of the modes in which time temporalizes itself as having-been (past), being-alongside (present), and being-ahead (future). Each mode

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 334/383.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 331/380.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 191/235ff.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 323/370ff.

stands outside itself in standing alongside the others. In finding itself in this or that affective state, *Dasein* faces the facticity of its thrownness. In asking how it is, how it feels, or what causes it to be moved, *Dasein* finds itself confronted with this accretive facticity, the character of its 'having-been.' Both *Dasein*'s 'having-been' and its factual thrownness stand outside themselves as *ek-stases* in this confrontation and together contribute to its mood or state of mind in the present.

Affects reveal the experience of how time feels, an experience that often feels like constitutive stretchedness, of the self strung *between* having-been, being-alongside, and being-ahead. It is for this reason that Heidegger claims that affects would have no basis for signification whatsoever "except on the basis of temporality."¹⁶⁹ To feel this or that affect lays bare the manner in which the self is always in the process of catching up with itself by both reaching back and projecting ahead, reaching back as a means of projecting ahead and coming to terms with one's experience and all the lag, attentiveness, and anticipation it entails. The temporality involved here entails linearity, to be sure, but it is not predicated upon it. It 'brings one back' to instances of 'having-been' but, instead of simply reproducing those instances, it discloses or makes manifest the way *Dasein* always carries its factual thrownness within itself, often in excess of its cognitive facilities. As we saw in the last chapter, feelings often emerge in the belated aftermath of that which prompts them and as such they rarely fully coincide with their initial impetus. Affective experience, then, is the experience of delay and deferral, of hesitation and protraction. One experiences something and later—who knows when—that experience

¹⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 341/391.

elicits a certain feeling, a particular emotion or affect, the trembling travails of the aftereffect, or better, the *after-affect*: that which is felt (later) (on), which is to simply say that which is felt (right) (now).¹⁷⁰

The Uncanny and Counter-Turning

Heidegger's favorite and most famous example of affectivity brings these temporal insights together and provides yet another link to homesickness and nostalgia by way of an additional concept, that of the uncanny (*unheimlich*). Uncanniness refers to the experience of the strange and the familiar, the unhomely in the homely, a cousin to nostalgia both in terms of etymological history (the notion of home) and affective experience (the feeling of estrangement, exile, or displacement). Heidegger is rarely known for his thinking on the uncanny but as Derrida observes, "the frequent, decisive, and organizing recourse he has to the value of *Unheimlichkeit*, in *Being and Time*, and elsewhere, remains generally unnoticed or neglected."¹⁷¹ This, of course, places Heidegger alongside someone like Freud whose 1919 essay "Das Unheimliche" stands as something of an ur-text on the subject. Heidegger initially analyzes the uncanny under the

¹⁷⁰ I return to this thematic more fully in the next chapter below.

¹⁷¹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2006), 218. He makes similar comments in Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2006), 57-58 where *unheimlich* is thought as that which "defies all oppositions." Perhaps following Derrida's lead, recent scholarship has begun to probe these connections with increasingly useful dividends. See, for instance, Katherine Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2015) and Anneleen Masschelein, *The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late-Twentieth-Century Theory* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2012) as well as Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York, N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 2003).

rubric of anxiety, perhaps one reason why he is not as easily associated with uncanniness as someone like Freud.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger characterizes *Angst* as an essential constituent of *Dasein*'s character as thrown being-in-the-world. Anxiety is the earliest example of *Grundstimmung* in his work. It anticipates his thinking on philosophy's beginnings in wonder and retreads the same terrain as his Novalis-inspired discussion of philosophy's essential homesickness, its constant drive to be at home everywhere despite its constitutive displacement. As an elemental *Grundstimmung*, anxiety colors the entirety of *Dasein*'s comportment and governs its capacities for affectedness. Heidegger thinks *Angst* reveals or discloses our state-of-mind and affective attunement, the way in which we already find ourselves (*Befindlichkeit*) feeling this way or that by virtue of our thrownness. He suggests that in *Angst* this grounding attunement is characterized by uncanniness. "In anxiety one feels uncanny [*Unheimlichkeit*."¹⁷² This uncanniness not only suggests unfamiliarity or strangeness, but also and especially a type of "not-being-at home" [*das nicht-zuhause-sein*]. This displacement stems from *Dasein*'s fraught relationship with *das Man*, its constant battle against alienation, estrangement, and average everydayness. In anxiety one feels uncanny and in uncanniness, like nostalgia, one feels unmoored and adrift, not at home yet longing to be at home, longing to find or seek out home despite its absence. This condition is never alleviated or assuaged. "Uncanniness pursues *Dasein* constantly," Heidegger says later on, and poses "a threat to

¹⁷² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188/233.

the lostness in which it has forgotten itself.”¹⁷³ Here, again, forgetfulness acts as a precondition for philosophy’s movement toward thought, its nostalgic desire to remember its initial, primordial vocation—the ontological difference—and reinstall authentic thought by pursuing a return home perpetually beyond its reach.

Later, in his 1935 course *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger returns to the uncanny again, this time with reference to Sophocles and the figure of Antigone (who, like Praxin’s nostalgics discussed in the previous chapter, is sentenced to viviseulture for disobedience and errancy). This is the first instance of his now famous rendering of the Greek “*deinon*”—a word more readily associated with the fearful, the marvelous, or the strange—as *Un-heimlich*, the uncanny. The chorus in Sophocles’ *Antigone* announces that the human being is *deinon* in the most supreme sense. In Heidegger’s hands, this means that *Dasein* acts as the uncanniest of the uncanny, an expression he takes to be “the authentic Greek definition of humanity.”¹⁷⁴ He defends his translation choice here by drawing attention to the violent connotations built into *deinon* as well as its sense of negation, displacement, and thrownness. The uncanny “throws one out of the ‘canny,’ that is, the homely, the accustomed...the unhomely that does not allow us to be at home.”¹⁷⁵ This idea receives further elaboration nearly a decade later in Heidegger’s commentary on Hölderlin’s “The Ister,” the middle third of which is devoted entirely to Sophocles’ tragedy. Heidegger is so interested in Hölderlin, at least in this case, because

¹⁷³ Ibid., 189/243; 277/322. A few pages later: “In uncanniness *Dasein* stands together with itself primordially. Uncanniness brings this entity face to face with its undisguised nullity, which belong to the possibility of its own most potentiality-for-Being. Ibid., 287/333.

¹⁷⁴ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics: Second Edition*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, Second Edition (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2014), 168-169.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 168.

he “poetizes the becoming homely yet simultaneous being unhomely of human beings.” This “poetic necessity,” as he puts it, finds “pure fulfillment” in the figure of Antigone who takes the uncanny within herself and becomes a poem of becoming unhomely in the most supreme sense.¹⁷⁶ Building on the 1935 course, Heidegger goes on to offer further justification of his translation which he admits is ‘alien’ and ‘violent’ but still provides a great deal of conceptual clarity. *Deinon* as *Un-heimlich* may “go beyond what is expressed in the Greek” but provides some grounding for the word’s own manifold meaning: the fearful, the powerful, and, especially, the inhabital or unfamiliar. Heidegger thinks the essence of *deinon* “conceals itself in the originary unity”¹⁷⁷ of these connotations, the same sort of structuring, primordial unity that grounds Being as such and the same unity toward which *Dasein* is directed in its homesickness. For Heidegger, the phrasing *deinon* as *unheimlich*—humanity as the most uncanny among the uncanny—grasps this concealed unity in an especially illuminating manner

How does he arrive at this conclusion? Everything hinges on the choral ode, that moment of pause, of collective interruption, to thematize, respond, and portend.

Heidegger is especially interested in the long choral ode that occurs right before Creon learns that Antigone has disobeyed his order not to bury her brother, Polynices, and summarily sentences her to death via live burial. Antigone, who in the wake of the loss of her brother longs to give him a proper burial, is herself subject to improper burial by means of viviseulture, the same punishment wrought upon early nostalgics as we have

¹⁷⁶ Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister,”* trans. William McNeil and Julia Davis (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1996), 64-65.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

seen. Heidegger is interested in the opening lines here, claiming that they form “the essential ground of this tragedy, and even of Sophocles’ poetic work as a whole.”¹⁷⁸

Following Hölderlin, he translates them as follows:

Manifold is the uncanny [*deinon, unheimlich*], yet nothing more uncanny looms or stirs beyond the human being.¹⁷⁹

The uncanny ‘looms’ and ‘stirs’ both within the manifold that is the world and, especially, within the human being, its most paradigmatic exemplar. It is both specific and diffuse, present in multiplicity and particularity, yet outstripping both by virtue of its own specificity, a specificity unique to *Dasein*, according to Heidegger. In this frame, the uncanny itself is manifold, “strewn among many kinds.” But the various folds that form this manifold never really un-fold in a way that might reveal the “simplicity of its full and pure essence.”¹⁸⁰ Even the manifold itself, as uncanny as it is, fails to disclose the supreme level of uncanniness: the manner in which the human being, by virtue of its being, stands as the uncanniest of all. Heidegger places this designation—*Dasein* as *deinon*, *deinon* as *un-heimlich*—alongside Hölderlin’s poetic care for “becoming homely” to lay bare the “intrinsic relation” between the two, between being unhomely in uncanniness and being on the way to becoming homely in thrownness.¹⁸¹ The one always contains the other, he thinks. Uncanniness stands in relation to canniness just as the unhomely furnishes the homely with its essential sense.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 60.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 68.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 69.

Freud thought this too. In his landmark essay “Das Unheimliche,” Freud engages in close philological analysis of the word’s different shades of meaning, observing that “what is *heimlich* comes to be *un-heimlich*” and that the homely ultimately “develops in the direction of ambivalence until it finally coincides with its opposite.”¹⁸² The unhomely is thus a sub-set of the homely, and the uncanny that which is secretly and intimately familiar, familiar unfamiliarity one might say. Nicholas Royle, in his insightfully witty study on the topic, notes that this valence of the uncanny “consists in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home.”¹⁸³ He notes that the feeling is often bound up with an “extreme nostalgia” or homesickness characterized by an all-encompassing desire to ‘go back.’ Royle goes on to connect this idea to Freud’s notion of the death drive, where extreme nostalgia reveals a deeper compulsion to return to an inorganic state.

Referring to the uncanny as “homeliness uprooted” gets at the intrinsic ambiguity identified by both Freud and Heidegger, a subterranean unity of opposites that can be traced all the way back to Presocratic thinkers like Heraclitus. The uncanny denotes dissonance and tension internal to home, the unhomely, and all the values of unity, identity, and belonging they depend upon. It is with this in mind that Heidegger finally arrives at his own definition of the uncanny, one that harkens back to and builds upon his earlier ruminations on anxiety in *Sein und Zeit*: “We mean the uncanny [*unheimlich*] in

¹⁸² Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey and Anna Freud, vol. 17 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 224; 226. Later in the essay Freud goes on to claim that “the uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind” (241).

¹⁸³ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York, N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1-2.

the sense of that which is not at home—*not homely in that which is homely*...the sense of something that has an alienating or frightening effect that gives rise to anxiety.”¹⁸⁴ The sense of feeling not-homely in that which is taken to be homely is one way of describing the early cases of nostalgia discussed in the last chapter vis-a-vis Hofer and Praxin.

Nostalgia emerges as an uncanny experience because it reveals the degree to which one feels dislocated or displaced within what is called homely or said to be home. One finds oneself nostalgic or unhomely because homeliness (feeling) and home (object) do not exactly coincide, much like *Dasein* and its ‘Da,’ its immediate self-presence.

Not homely in that which is homely: this adds a bit more character to the initial connection between *Angst* and *Unheimlich* Heidegger leaves unthematized in *Sein und Zeit*. Not only does one feel uncanny in anxiety, uncanniness itself gives rise to anxiety and is never fully given as such. It is never merely present at hand, yet still contributes to an overall or state-of-mind characterized by being-not-at-home, a *Grundstimmung* of the highest order. It both displaces and disposes, casting one out of the homely and at the same time disposing one to the search for homeliness within the unhomely. *Not homely in that which is homely*: as thrown being-in-the-world, *Dasein* experiences being-unhomely even in those situations in which it is being-homely. Its *Befindlichkeit*, the state-of-mind in which it finds itself, is characterized by an essential ambivalence without which neither the homely nor the unhomely would attain sense or intelligibility. *Not homely in that which is homely*: given this situation, Heidegger will go on to say that the uncanny does not emerge as an effect of human experience, but the inverse. Human experience issues

¹⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 71. Italics mine.

from the uncanny, it “remains within it, looms out of it and stirs within it.” It is the uncanny itself, he argues, that looms forth in the essence of the human being as that which “presences and at the same time absences.”¹⁸⁵ Like Hofer’s initial nostalgics who pine for lost presence and Praxin’s soon-to-be victims of live burial who appear mentally absent, Heidegger describes *Dasein*’s uncanniness in terms of the interplay between presence and absence, between the homely and its other. He began to broach this in his commentary on Novalis, suggesting that philosophy can only be homesickness if the philosopher is not already at home, perpetually suffused by the unhomely that impels her to seek out the homeliness of primordial Being. Here that very same dynamic between displacement and disposition receives further determination by way of Antigone, the most famous and formidable of all live burial victims, a heroine who takes takes the uncanny within herself and finds the homely among the unhomely. *Not homely in that which is homely*. Anticipating Derrida, we could also say *not present in that which is present*, a means of expressing the sort of experience particular nostalgia, one that takes the present itself to be *not homely*, or at the very least a little strange, discontinuous, or spasmodic.

Not homely in that which is homely. Heidegger eventually goes on to juxtapose these opening words with those of the ode’s conclusion, a perplexing moment from his point of view where the chorus appears to banish the uncanny from the hearth, that is, from the homely, the house of Being. But before that juxtaposition he continues to tarry with his own definition: *not homely in that which is the homely*. The uncanny involves

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 72.

the experience of being not-at-home even while being-at-home, of being un-homely in whatever is taken to be homely, an experience of discontinuity, of feeling the unfamiliar at the core of the familiar. Given his new translation of *deinon* as *unheimlich* (the uncanny), it is unsurprising that Heidegger does not believe that the uncanniness of the unhomely constitutes some perversion or deviance from the homely. It is not as if the unhomely is completely unfamiliar with the homely and the sense of familiarity it depends upon. No, for Heidegger, uncanniness still impels movement—this is the restlessness he references vis-a-vis Novalis—and it involves a constant searching out of the homely, a constant desire for some repose in the midst of thrownness, even and especially when that searching out does not recognize itself as such. “This seeking shies at no danger and no risk,” he tells us. “Everywhere it ventures and is underway in all directions.”¹⁸⁶ Uncanniness and unhomeliness do not connote pure lack or simple negation even if they appear to subsist on the basis of negation alone. For Heidegger, the ‘un-’ constitutive of each term may hint at some deprivation but, calling to mind the ontological difference once again, this deprivation or displacement occurs on the ontic level and indicates deeper, more profound and ontological sense in which the homely and the unhomely remain conjoined, an imbrication that disposes and fundamentally attunes *Dasein* toward Being as such—this, again, is why both the uncanny and homesickness remain primary *Grundstimmungen*. In other words, the homely and the un-homely, like the canny and the un-canny, do not persist in simple opposition as Freud first noticed, but remain correlated. This correlation is forged, for Heidegger, through a type of disclosive

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 74.

counter-turning that unites the dual movements of displacing and disposing, of turning away from ontic homeliness in order to turn toward ontological unhomeliness and fully apprehend their essential relation.¹⁸⁷

What is this counter-turning? In English, the word ‘turn’ contains an essential equivocation that relates to its transitivity in verbal form. One can both turn, or be turned (e.g., “I turn,” where ‘turn’ functions as an intransitive verb), and one can perform an act of ‘turning’ upon oneself or another object (e.g., “I turn my head,” with ‘turn’ as a transitive verb). One can turn and be turned, that is to say, one can *affect* a turn and one can *be affected* by a turn. The turning that takes place here involves a general arrangement of senses or meanings that include, but are not limited to: to rotate or revolve; to form or shape by rotation or revolution; to change or reverse position, course, or direction; and to change, alter, transmute, or simply render different.¹⁸⁸ The etymological roots of the term are found in the Latin and Greek words *tornāre* and *tórnos*, respectively, both of which refer to the sort of action performed by a lathe, a tool used to shape, hone, form, and refine its object by turning on an axis. Other associations and connotations: to move about or around (something), to reposition or reorient in relation to a pivot or point of reference. I turn toward something by turning away from something else, leaving one mode of comportment or orientation in favor of another, narrowing the focus of attention and awareness. This turning is often elicited by some

¹⁸⁷ Here I am following William Richardson who reads ‘the turning’ in Heidegger through the ontological difference. “This collaboration,” he suggests, “may be conceived on the one hand as a turning-away-from *the ontic* and on the other as turning-toward *the ontological*.” Cf. William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hauge: Springer, 2013), 352. Italics mine.

¹⁸⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “turn, v.,” OED Online. June 2018, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.bu.edu/view/Entry/207669?> (Accessed August 12, 2018).

sort of change in feeling or affective attunement. I *sense* someone behind me, and I *turn* my head over my shoulder. I *detect* someone or something approaching, and I *turn* around. I *intuit* the lingering gaze of my conversation partner and I *turn* to share the glance.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger discusses ‘turning’ in precisely these terms, i.e., through a shift in mood or affective disclosure (*Befindlichkeit*). “The way in which the *Stimmung* [mood, feeling, affect] discloses,” he writes, “is not one in which we look at thrown-ness, but one in which we *turn towards or turn away* [*An- und Abkehr*].”¹⁸⁹ This turning toward or away not only reveals *Dasein*’s *Befindlichkeit*—the state in which it finds itself—it also makes experience phenomenologically interpretative.¹⁹⁰ In turning toward or away, particular *Stimmungen* disclose *Befindlichkeit* just as in turning toward or away *Dasein* discloses the truth of being as presencing. When it comes to the later work on uncanniness, Heidegger holds that the homely and the unhomely participate in this counter-turning by turning away from themselves and toward the other. What we have, then, is a new dynamic of movement predicated upon his definition of the uncanny with Antigone as its paradigmatic exemplar: *not homely in that which is homely*—or, as I put it, *not present in that which is present*.

¹⁸⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 135/174.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 185/229. “Only to the extent that *Dasein* has been brought before itself in an ontologically essential manner through whatever disclosedness belongs to it, can it flee in the face of that in the face of which it flees. To be sure, that in the face of which it flees is not grasped in thus turning away [*Abkehr*] in falling; nor is it experienced even in turning thither [*Hinkehr*]. Rather, in turning away from it, it is disclosed ‘there.’ This existentiell-ontical turning-away, by reason of its character as disclosure, makes it phenomenally possible to grasp existential-ontological that in the face of which *Dasein* flees, and to grasp it as such. Within the ontical ‘away-from’ which such turning-away implied, that in the face of which *Dasein* flees can be understood and conceptualized by ‘turning thither’ in a way which is phenomenologically interpretative.”

When he claims that his translation of *deinon* as the uncanny discloses the originary unity of the original Greek term, this is what Heidegger has in mind: the counter-turning that subsists within the word grounds its intrinsic unity. This is why the choral ode describes *deinon*, the uncanny, as a manifold; it is a manifold because it is a counter-turning. The counter-turning signals the unity of its essence—an essence of multiplicity—but never makes that unity directly manifest. Similarly, when Heidegger supposes that the uncanny “presences and at the same time absences” he does not mean that uncanniness merely wavers between presencing and absencing. On the contrary, it initiates a counter-turning within presence itself to accomplish “a presencing that comes to pass by means of absencing,” as Katherine Withy puts it.¹⁹¹ The unhomely does not absence the homely but, by means of counter-turning, forges a new relation to the homely by constantly seeking it out, by constantly seeking refuge in its unity and wholeness. *Not homely in that which is homely, not present in that which is present*—a strange enigmatic type of presencing, but presencing nonetheless.

This turning and counter-turning directly correlate with temporality as well. In turning toward or away, the ‘having-been’ that affectivity ‘brings-back’ is revealed as ‘there’ and we are transported and delivered over to it, remembering and recognizing it as having been ‘there’ even though we, at present, are not. The ‘there’ moves, it seems, and we with it by turning toward and away—orienting and reorienting ourselves to the rudimentary elements of our innermost makeup. It is thus, Heidegger suggests, that

¹⁹¹ Katherine Withy, *Heidegger on Being Uncanny* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 121.

“within our being transported to that which has been...that something unsuspected is possible,”¹⁹² the mutual opening of the world and ourselves, both affected and affecting, to the quiet stirrings of attunement and intuition that otherwise escape us. By feeling this way or that, by finding oneself in this or that affective state (*Befindlichkeit*) one apprehends, as best one can, the ‘having-been’ character of one’s own experience. This adumbration—the remembering or ‘bringing-back’ to the feeling’s ‘origin’ or ‘referent’—does not occur in a straightforward manner. It does not involve comprehensive grasping, direct confrontation, or immediate correspondence. It is, instead, mediated by the turning, a movement hither and thither that unsettles our temporal experience.

Heidegger’s Limits

Heidegger’s thinking on moods, when read alongside insights from affect theory like those discussed above, help clarify how experiences of feeling influence temporality. He not only offers some insight into how time feels before it is thought or cognized as such, he takes great care to show how moods and emotions lay bare a structure of temporization often characterized by disjunction. Nostalgia highlights these disjunctive aspects of temporal experience and insists that they cannot be easily consolidated. But it is here, finally, that Heidegger’s work reaches its ceiling, inscribing a diminished but all too familiar form of nostalgia that only emphasizes one half of the word—*nostos* (homecoming, return, origins). The ongoing mourning, aching grief, and interminable

¹⁹² Heidegger, *Hölderlin’s Hymns “Germania” and “The Rhine,”* 169-170/155.

bittersweetness of nostalgia (its *algos*) remain curiously absent. The insights Heidegger offers regarding time and affectivity, while useful, remain inadequate and ultimately reveal both the limitations of his thinking and his own surreptitious nostalgia for primordial presence and initial origins (his “other beginning”).

Before moving to sketch out a viable deconstructive alternative—one on its way to holding *nostos* and *algos* in open tension—we first need to establish the set of coordinates under which Heidegger’s thought remains constrained. After all, he never thematizes or even references nostalgia as such; his commentary on the Novalis fragment (philosophy as homesickness) and his discussion of Antigone are as close as he comes. Nevertheless, his entire project is steeped in nostalgia; it remains one of his most animating if unmarked concerns. His nostalgia is one that is directed toward, and seeks to preserve or restore, the pristine un-concealment of Being in the Ancient Greek sense (*physis* for the pre-Socratics). That forgotten determination of Being as continual presencing is the source of several key Heideggerian concepts, including especially authenticity and the notion of primordial, originary unity to which he constantly appeals in his discussion of temporality, homesickness, and the uncanny.

This nostalgia for primordial presence remains intact even after the supposed “turn” (*die Kehre*) his thought takes in the 1940s, characterized by a move away from traditional philosophers and toward poets like Hölderlin.¹⁹³ Heidegger himself held that this turn does not amount to a radical break with his earlier project. Instead of signaling a

¹⁹³ For a good reckoning with this turn in Heidegger’s thinking and what it entails see Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2008), esp. 10-16.

main change in standpoint from the perspective of *Sein und Zeit*, this turn or shift marks a clear attempt to change tack by re-treading that standpoint with the dual movements of turning and counter-turning in full view. Given this, it would not be an overstatement, I think, to claim that Heidegger's own *Grundstimmung* remains constant from *Sein und Zeit* up through the later texts on art, technology, and poetics. This fundamental disposition is perhaps best typified by the desire, first expressed in his "Letter on Humanism," to change the direction of his earlier work by abandoning not only the language of metaphysics but the prospect of subjectivity itself in favor of "another thinking" that requires recollection and "thinking back" to the early Greeks and their values of presencing and disclosure.¹⁹⁴ Heidegger references this thinking back to an "other beginning" throughout his career and the language he uses to characterize this procedure is nothing if not wistful and nostalgic. He variously describes it as type of recollective thinking [*Andenken*] that accesses a lost or concealed original;¹⁹⁵ a type of return or recovery that conserves and preserves being as continual presencing;¹⁹⁶ a way of

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, Revised and Expanded Edition (New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 231-232. See also "What Calls for Thinking?" *idem.*, 376.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Heidegger, "On the Question of Being" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 314, 182; Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. Andre Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1998), 83, 113, 124, 163; Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Hoeller Keith (New York, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), 108; Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1977), 29-30; and Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 263, 376.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic,"* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 88; Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1991), 165, 46-48; Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1991), 217; Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 2003), 23; Martin Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Hoeller Keith (New York, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2000), 215; Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (San Francisco, C.A.: Harper San Francisco,

regaining or rescuing the other beginning by turning back to the provenance of metaphysics;¹⁹⁷ and a repetition of the initial beginning in order to attain original truth and ‘bring back’ being in its full essence.¹⁹⁸ It is not exactly fashionable to position Heidegger as some sort of crypto-Platonist,¹⁹⁹ but the rhetoric he relies upon time after time closely orbits the dynamics of movement, recursion, and forgetfulness discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Authentic *Dasein*, like Plato’s philosopher-king, lives in exile and must return to its primordial origins to uncover and recollect what it has always known but since forgotten: the determination of Being as un-concealed presence.

These concerns drive Heidegger’s characterization of homesickness and the uncanny, positioning him as an eminent thinker of philosophy’s nostalgia for origins. When discussing Novalis and homesickness as one of philosophy’s motivating *Grundstimmungen*, he suggests that, as *Dasein*, human beings remain restless, driven toward Being as a whole. As a whole, Being as such—ontological Being, not individual ontic entities—keeps an originary, constitutive unity that *Dasein* lacks at the most fundamental levels. This is the forgotten determination of Being that Heidegger wants to

1985), 36; Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 368; Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 145.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 32; Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes Three and Four: Volumes Three and Four*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins, 1991), 157; Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 357; Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 319.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 2012), 46, 92; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), 355, 388.

¹⁹⁹ This is not to say there are not those that do, however. See, for example, Catalin Partenie and Tom Rockmore, eds., *Heidegger and Plato: Toward Dialogue* (Evanston, I.L.: Northwestern University Press, 2005) and Mark A. Ralkowski, *Heidegger’s Platonism* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum, 2011).

retrieve and protect. *Dasein* remains scattered and dispersed, but the whole toward which it is driven in its homesickness achieves and retains an ameliorative aspect of gathering and unification. Later in his career Heidegger refers to this as the event of appropriation. Being appropriates *Dasein* and this movement is what enables Being to unfold as pure presencing, a primordial un-concealment in which *Dasein* can dwell in its most authentic nature. The assumption here is that Being, as unified whole, acts as an ontological ground that can support and reinstate *Dasein* despite *Dasein's* uncanny anxiety and unmoored restlessness—a type of concealed presence, to be sure, but presence nonetheless.

When Kant first remarked that the homesickness of the Swiss evinces a desire for lost time rather than return to lost space, he offered a new understanding of nostalgia that emphasizes its intrinsic bittersweetness and structural antinomies: a feeling that cannot be alleviated, one that emerges in the wake of enduring absence, longs to see it overcome, and only gains further strength and force as that absence persists. Heidegger's philosophy cannot fully account for this because it exhibits a vested interest in seeing that absence conquered and subdued even if it plays a vital, but provisional role in the larger drama of presencing and disclosure.

The commentary on Sophocles only further corroborates this despite its recuperation of the uncanny and the unhomely as necessary moments in the movement of Being. Heidegger claims that, according to the choral ode, Antigone is the uncanny in the most supreme sense. As a paradigmatic instance of *Dasein*, she remains unhomely in that which is taken to be homely and therefore becomes homely by being unhomely, like Novalis' homesick philosopher. The obvious problem with this, from a textual

standpoint, is that the choral ode banishes the uncanny from hearth and home near the end of tragedy. How does Heidegger reconcile this with his prior claim? He relies on the same notion of originary unity that governs his thought as a whole, a value that authorizes his translation of *deinon* as uncanny, characterizes the *telos* of *Dasein*'s authentic existence, and subtends his larger project of disclosure. On his reading the choral ode can only banish uncanniness from the hearth if it possesses some genuine knowledge of it, or else it would stand outside the sphere of Being he associates with the hearth. And for Heidegger nothing, absolutely nothing, can stand outside the sphere of Being. Sophocles says this without saying it, Heidegger tell us, and the play contains more than what is explicitly stated. "Being homely is no mere deviance from the unhomely," he argues.²⁰⁰ The chorus remains aware of this concealed, originary unity and the hearth exemplifies it by signaling some access to the other beginning, expressing a "relation to what was experienced at the commencement of Western thought yet at once became lost as a fundamental experience."²⁰¹ The expulsion from the hearth announced near the end of the play refers, according to Heidegger, to those instances in which the uncanny supports forgetfulness and thus a failure to "have being in view." The expulsion occurs because the uncanny does not initiate the process of 'thinking back,' of thoughtful remembrance and recollection (*Andenken*) indicative of belonging to the hearth (Being as such).²⁰² This allows Heidegger to ultimately claim that Antigone is "exempt" from the expulsion, not because she has no relation to the unhomely, but because she becomes the uncanny in the

²⁰⁰ Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister,"* 74; 108.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 109; 115.

most supreme sense by taking it within herself as a means of becoming homely within the hearth of Being and belonging.²⁰³

A clear sequence of events is implied in this exemption, one subtended by the familiar Heideggerian values of unity, harmony, and primordial origins: “In becoming homely, being unhomely is *first* accomplished.”²⁰⁴ Homesickness, the uncanny, the unhomely—each of these terms becomes instruments within a broader *telos* that lays claim to ancient, pre-Socratic presence. One gets the sense that they possess no real use or value otherwise. This becomes especially clear when Heidegger finally appeals to his ontological difference in order ground the subjugation of the unhomely and the uncanny. It sets up a clear and familiar binary “between being unhomely in the sense of being driven out about amid beings without any way out and being unhomely as becoming homely from out of a belonging to being.”²⁰⁵ It is unclear, in this context, how being amid other beings means that one has no way out or refuses belonging to being—and on this front Heidegger himself forgets Antigone’s primary motivation. She takes as her point of departure that against which nothing can avail—the inevitability of death through live burial—not because she aims to risk some abstract ‘belonging to being,’ but because she remains ‘driven about amid beings without any way out,’ namely one individual being in particular, her dead brother, Polynices, whom she mourns throughout the tragedy—an experience, like nostalgia, that emerges in response to loss and discontinuity. Heidegger tell us that the chorus’ closing words “do not reject the unhomely but rather let being

²⁰³ Ibid., 117.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 115.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 118

unhomely become worthy of question.”²⁰⁶ Perhaps, but if this worthiness of interrogation is to fully reverberate, if Antigone is to be “the purest poem herself,”²⁰⁷ as Heidegger puts it, then the particularity of her predicament, and her losses, must not be elided in favor of yet another abstract universal in search of primordial unity or authenticity.

I do not mean to imply that Heidegger conceives philosophy as some sort of elaborate time machine that might leapfrog the conditions under which ideas like the ontological difference become necessary. Nevertheless, he does believe something was obscured or forgotten prior to traditional metaphysics and in his later works especially we seem him struggling to arrive at a form of language adequate to what he sees as the pure essence of being as presencing and disclosure. It is precisely this nostalgia for lost origins and initial beginnings that others have found so problematic. Derrida will soon become my main interlocutor on this front, but he is certainly not the only one to have suggested as much.²⁰⁸ Despite this, Heidegger’s unacknowledged nostalgia becomes even more

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 115.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 119; 121.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), especially chapter eight entitled “Philosophy’s Nostalgia.” See also Gregory Fried, *Heidegger’s Polemos: From Being to Politics* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 2008). Both texts take Heidegger’s nostalgia for origins and primordiality as a major point of departure. See also Allan Megill who situates this form of desire as a type of “longing for the immediate Dionysian presence of the origin, from which all division, all separation, [and] all difference[s] [are] excluded” in *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1987), 125. Albert Borgmann writes similarly of an “inappropriate nostalgia” that “clings” to Heidegger’s thinking, one characterized by a desire for harmony, unity, and consolidation. See his *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Chicago, I.L.: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 196. More recently, Theodore Ziolkowski argues that Heidegger’s “nostalgia for a *völkisch* past...disposed him favorably toward the Nazis” and “constitutes a basic quality of his rhetoric and thought” in Theodore Ziolkowski, “Five Portraits: Modernity and the Imagination in Twentieth-Century German Writing (Review),” *Modernism/Modernity* 8, no. 2 (April 1, 2001), 360. It is this basic quality that I am working to ferret out while at the same time acknowledging the constructive insights Heidegger offers regarding moods and temporality, insights that serve to clarify how nostalgia can work against the grain of Heidegger’s own adverse proclivities.

insidious when considered against the backdrop of his truly disastrous politics. As I mentioned, for all his interest in anxiety, the uncanny, and homesickness, Heidegger never discusses or even explicitly mentions nostalgia as such. Yet his entire approach to politics—initial quietism and later support of National Socialism bolstered by appeals to the provincial German *Volk* and *Heimat*—exhibit a strong and disturbing degree of what Svetlana Boym would likely call “restorative nostalgia,” a form of nostalgia that veils its desires under the auspices of truth and tradition. The full extent of this debacle is only now beginning to be fully understood and only goes to show how Heidegger both thematizes and exhibits philosophy’s nostalgia for origins and pure presence.²⁰⁹

Despite all this, something would be lost, I think, in simply dismissing nostalgia out of hand due to the constraints inherent in Heidegger’s thought or his own shortsightedness. Such a move would only serve to reproduce the gestures discussed the previous chapter. Moreover, Heidegger’s work does offer some useful, albeit limited

²⁰⁹ It is not as if continental thinkers remain unaware of Heidegger’s politics or uninterested in the ways that Nazism continues to tarnish his legacy. It has almost become a subfield of its own. See Víctor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism* (Philadelphia, P.A.: Temple University Press, 1989); Hans D. Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1993); and Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger’s Nazism and Philosophy* (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 1997). Charles R. Bambach’s *Heidegger’s Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003) considers this problem within the specific context I have been delineating, i.e., Heidegger’s own nostalgia for ancient Greek antiquity and its influence on his political thinking. More recently, however, the publication of the *Black Notebooks* in translation serve to make much more explicit what has long been speculated about: not only Heidegger’s own anti-Semitism, but the influence of Nazism on his thought. For more on this see Richard Wolin, *Heidegger’s Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015); Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas, eds., *Reading Heidegger’s Black Notebooks 1931–1941* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2016); Andrew J. Mitchell and Peter Trawny, eds., *Heidegger’s Black Notebooks: Responses to Anti-Semitism* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2017); Donatella Di Cesare, *Heidegger and the Jews: The Black Notebooks* (Medford, M.A.: Polity Press, 2018); and Elliot R. Wolfson, *The Duplicity of Philosophy’s Shadow: Heidegger, Nazism, and the Jewish Other* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2018).

insights into the sort of consideration of nostalgia we are after. By thematizing the thrownness of existence against the backdrop of temporality and emphasizing how that temporality interacts with *Dasein's* affective state-of-mind, he offers some initial thinking into how nostalgia intervenes in temporal awareness, calling to mind things past and passing. But by tethering those insights to what he takes to be the unity and continual presencing of ancient, pre-Socratic Being, Heidegger comes down on the side of *nostos* alone, neglecting the animating, tensive function of *algos*. Perhaps an extension of these insights, not in the direction of antediluvian primordially but something more *haunting*, might serve to make the propulsive, animating features of nostalgic more legible.

Chapter 3: *Algos*: Derrida's Nostalgia Between Presence and Absence

One feeling which prevailed greatly with me, and could never find an expression odd enough for itself, was a sense of the past and the present together in one; a phenomenon which *brought something spectral into the present*...whenever it began to mix itself up with actual life, it must have appeared to everyone strange, inexplicable, perhaps gloomy.
— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe²¹⁰

We are all of us celebrating some funeral.
— Charles Baudelaire²¹¹

I love memory...how else can one love?
— Jacques Derrida²¹²

The Attunement of Bad Moods

Through and through, Heidegger is a thinker of unity and harmony. Because of this, he roundly rejects so-called “bad moods.” Bad moods threaten unity and harmony. They depart from the proper path of basic attunement and jeopardize the fundamental concordance *Dasein* seeks in its being-in-the-world. In German, *Verstimmung* refers to ill feeling or ill-will, instances of feeling disgruntled or upset. It shares the same root—*stimmen*—as Heidegger’s term for moods (*stimmung*) and, like that word, it also relies on a set of meanings associated with music. If *stimmung* refers to being in tune or attuned in the sense of being right or true, then *verstimmung*, by virtue of its negative prefix, connotes being out of tune, detuned, or simply out of sync. Heidegger only uses the word twice in *Sein und Zeit* and in both cases he uses it to refer to “bad moods” where *Dasein*

²¹⁰ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Auto-Biography of Goethe: The Concluding Books. Also Letters from Switzerland and Travels in Italy*, trans. the Rev. A. J. W. Morrison (London: H. G. Bohn, 1849), 23-24.

²¹¹ Charles Baudelaire, “The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life” in *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965), 118.

²¹² Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 70.

remains blind to itself and its environment.²¹³ Strangely, *Ver-stimmung* does not enjoy the same moment of counter-turning that Heidegger (and Freud) associate with other terms, like the un-canny or the un-homely, that often express sheer privation in ordinary use. Bad moods are simply bad moods it seems, and *Verstimmung* has nothing to offer beyond demarcating the various states of annoyance, dissonance, or disjunction against which better, more in-tune *stimmunen* supervene.

Derrida doesn't use the Heideggerian language of counter-turning, but he deploys *Verstimmung* to similar effect in his own register. In "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," an essay ostensibly on Kant and philosophy's universalizing tonality, Derrida shows interest in how *Verstimmung*, by detuning or threatening "the unity of tone," facilitates a different type of attunement.²¹⁴ *Verstimmung* attunes by calling into question the stable, concordant identity of attunement and the governing values of unity it presumes. Noting the Heidegger connection in an unmarked way, Derrida observes that "*Verstimmung* can come to spoil a *Stimmung*" resulting in a "*pathos*, or the humor that then becomes testy." He goes on to refer to the term as a "social disorder" and—calling Hofer's diagnosis of nostalgia to mind—a type of "derangement" or "delirium" that might provoke a sudden change in mood or shift in tone.²¹⁵ Derrida delivered an earlier version of this essay at a 1980 conference in Cerisy-la-Salle devoted to his seminal "The Ends of Man" published in the late 60s.²¹⁶ Like much

²¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), 134-137/172-176.

²¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, ed. Harold G. Coward and Toby Foshay (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1992), 53.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 36-37; 53.

²¹⁶ Cf. Dawne McCance, *Posts: Re Addressing the Ethical* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1996), 23.

of his earlier, more famous texts that work with, but mostly against, traditional metaphysics, “The Ends of Man” offers a critique of consciousness by taking aim at the principles of unity and self-presence operative in Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger especially. Derrida believes that these principles constitute a “subterranean necessity” that, in Heidegger at least, reveals how his “de-limitations of metaphysical humanism appear to belong to the very sphere of that which they criticize or delimit.”²¹⁷ In his famous essay on “différance” written during the same period, Derrida refers to that subterranean necessity as a type of Heideggerian nostalgia for “a lost native country of thought,” the initial or other beginning Heidegger attempts to restore as we have seen.²¹⁸

Derrida believes that origins like Heidegger’s other beginning are always linked to ends and in his reading of Kant and the tonality of philosophy, he furthers this line of critique by drawing attention to how *Verstimmung* calls into question the unity of self-identity and destination (*Bestimmung*, which can also mean determination).²¹⁹ The sudden, mercurial shifts in mood or tone *Verstimmung* intimates suggest a type of “generalized derailment” that “mutipl[ies] voices” and creates the conditions for an “experience of presence...for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination.”²²⁰ He goes on to directly associate this phenomenon with two other key ideas that receive further elaboration in his later work: ‘destinerrance’ or ‘clandestination’ and “haunted memory” (what he later calls spectrality or

²¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Ends of Man,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 119.

²¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 27.

²¹⁹ Cf. Derrida, “Of an Apocalyptic Tone,” 53.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53; 57.

‘hauntology’).²²¹ Like so many Derridean ‘non-concepts,’ both notions gesture toward the manner in which experience remains open and receptive to what it cannot foresee, the incoming of something other that forces it to wander off the charted course, erring as it approaches its destination, perhaps arriving at a destination the lies off map and out of frame. As a signifier of the capriciousness that often attends to so-called bad moods, *Verstimmung* holds together connotations of derailment, delirium, and general discordance, evincing the irritable and iterable attunement that can occur within detuning. This “delirium of destination” and the attentiveness to a “wholly other path” leads Peggy Kamuf, one of Derrida’s translators, to claim that *Verstimmung* acts as “the watchword of deconstructive vigilance.”²²²

What is this deconstructive vigilance and how might it relate to nostalgia? These ideas need a bit more unpacking to really stick, but the notion of *Verstimmung*, which can also mean malaise in the Hoferian sense, already provides an entry point. In chapter one we saw how nostalgia often functions as a bad mood in the most supreme sense, from Hofer’s initial coinage in medicine up through more contemporary assessments. In both cases—despite significant shifts and semantic drift—nostalgia gives rise to an *errant* type of desire that facilitates spurious, unsanctioned, and unauthorized forms of movement. Under the diagnostic frame of reference initiated by Hofer and further perpetuated by various gestures of viviseulture, nostalgia reads as a form of *delirium* or *derailment*,

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 62; 52. These themes become increasingly prominent later in Derrida’s career. For more on destinerrance and clandestination in particular see J. Hillis Miller, *For Derrida* (New York, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2009).

²²² Peggy Kamuf *To Follow: The Wake of Jacques Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 15.

what Hofer calls an affiliation of the imagination, the unproductive and ineffective condition of being out of sync or out-of-tune. Within this discursive milieu, nostalgia, like any other *Verstimmung*, disrupts proper attunement and the forms of movement it coordinates. That discursive milieu and the habits of thought that subtend it fail to recognize, as Derrida suspected, how *Verstimmungen* like nostalgia provide a sense of attunement even in dis-attunement. In the last chapter we saw just how pervasive and extensive these assumptions can be. A towering figure like Heidegger offers useful insights for reconsidering the temporality of nostalgia, but those insights remain severely limited by his desire for authenticity and primordially. That desire—the same desire that impels philosophy’s first movement to thought—ends up reproducing a familiar form of nostalgia that fails to recognize its more animating and propulsive features.

This chapter takes up the temporal texture of those features in a more focused way by exploring how Derrida’s work sheds light on nostalgia’s utility as a so-called ‘bad’ mood (*Verstimmung*). That usefulness has to do with how nostalgia, by virtue of its constitutive bittersweetness, attunes otherwise, intervening in temporal awareness to rework our experience of time and the demands that experience entails. I argue that deconstruction offers insights pertaining to time and memory that serve to clarify how nostalgia engenders movement, paving the way for a consideration of how that movement shows up in cinema, a task I undertake in the chapters that follow. Those insights owe quite a bit to Heidegger, but ultimately depart from him by radicalizing and extending his thought in areas he himself was not willing to go. If Heidegger remains a

figure of *nostos* in this scheme, then Derrida acts as perhaps the most compelling and representative thinker of *algos* twentieth-century continental thought has to offer.

On the surface, Derrida is admittedly an unlikely figure for this sort of intervention and in many ways stands as one of the *least* nostalgic thinkers of the last century. He essentially made a name for himself by vehemently rejecting various forms of Heideggerian nostalgia for presence he takes to be emblematic of broader problems in Western thinking (logocentrism, the immediacy of self-consciousness, etc.). I maintain that this overt distance and reticence—he never writes on nostalgia directly and often uses it as little more than a foil—open up a fecund space for considering nostalgia otherwise. Derrida’s habit, undoubtedly, is to take *certain forms* of nostalgia, like Heidegger’s, to be subsidiary to a metaphysics of presence. His textual practice, however, helps in decoupling nostalgic desire from its initial diagnostic frame of reference, offering key insights that open up its range of expression. Those insights pertain to time and temporization and are often nested within the granular minutiae of Derrida’s scrupulous and exacting method of reading. Together they form what Nicholas Royle calls, echoing Kamuf, the vigilant attempt to “keep watch over other temporalities and other histories.”²²³ In keeping watch over these temporalities and their exigences Derrida so often takes up a position that, to me, can only be characterized as a type of romance with time’s intractability. His style and approach are expressive of a type of longing which takes that intractability less as a problem resulting in paralysis and more as stimulating opportunity for increased receptivity. He both laments time’s structuring

²²³ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York, N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 2003), 120.

conditions and celebrates the fleeting impermanence that issues from those conditions—and often in the same moment. In doing so he ironizes or frustrates nostalgic desire without denying the fullness of the experience it induces, suggesting, in an indirect and serpentine manner all his own, that this feeling and its attendant desires are irreducible to the experience of time itself. In other words, while Derrida often seems to disavow nostalgia, his work deals with variegated ideas—like *verstimmung*, *destinerrance*, *différance*, spectrality, or any number of his neologisms—chiefly concerned with the same temporal ambiguities produced in nostalgic experience (he would no doubt call this their ‘play’). In this respect, deconstruction can work to unfold nostalgic experience, serving to make its propulsive, animating features more legible.

The path this chapter takes is as circuitous as that of nostalgia itself. I begin by introducing and situating Derrida’s work through a reading of one of his final seminars, a text that is representative of his thought as a whole and takes nostalgia as a minor theme. But just as nostalgia so often interrupts the seamless flow of time, my examination of this text is marked by necessary turns and detours. These deviations serve to contextualize Derrida’s work on several fronts. First, they establish the terms of his version of deconstruction as an elaborate gesture of what he calls *re-marking*, a designation that is, I think, commensurate with the experience of nostalgia to the extent that both involve retroactive acknowledgement and reworking. Second, these detours serve to outline the stakes of several key notions—*différance*, the trace, and afterwardness—that form the backdrop for Derrida’s work. I take special interest in his discussions of time and temporality, a strain of thought that develops piecemeal in conversation with interlocutors

like Heidegger and Freud. Finally, the reading I undertake here positions Derrida both within and against the terms of nostalgia outlined in the previous chapters. That positioning is often taken with regard to Heidegger (and, to a lesser extent, Husserl and Levinas). Crucially, however, Derrida's recourse to Heidegger is often strategically interrupted by psychoanalytic insights that serve to facilitate the idiosyncratic understandings of time and memory at play in his final seminars. My reading of the seminar in question is informed by these insights and marshals Derrida's phenomenology of time toward an understanding of nostalgia that carries with, rather than glosses or elides, its signifying vacillations—*nostos* and *algos*, bitter *and* sweet—one that indulges nostalgic desire but denies it full closure and satisfaction.

Deconstruction as *Re-Marking*

Derrida gave the second half of what would become his final seminar a year before his death in the winter of 2002-2003. Titled “The Beast and the Sovereign” and given at L'École des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, the seminar pursues the interlocking questions of sovereignty and animality first signaled in *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (1997), *Voyous* (2002), and Derrida's previous seminars on capital punishment and forgiveness, “La Peine de mort” (1999-2001). These seminars are often associated with a cluster of other ‘late period’ texts, beginning with the quasi-autobiographical “Circonfession” in 1991. These texts are often said to form something

of a religious or ethico-political turn in Derrida's work.²²⁴ It may be the case that Derrida's oeuvre in the mid-late 1990s and early 2000s does form a certain type of turn, a new type of inflection, but those themes do not stand in substantive contrast to his early, more technical essays on metaphysics and phenomenology. So-called "late Derrida" rigorously attends to a cluster of problematics that have occupied deconstruction since the beginning. The shift or turn simply involves a new series of vantage points or contexts. Derrida himself seems to espouse a certain degree of irritation at this assessment of his work. He claims, with heightened care and consideration, that a notable degree of continuity persists across his texts and defends his style of deconstruction—its impetus and "theoretical *élan*," as Hector Kollias puts it—against those detractors who might dismiss it on that basis of some perceived aimlessness or lack of consistency.²²⁵ "There never was in 1980s or 1990s," he writes in *Voyous*, "a political turn or ethical turn in deconstruction, at least not as I experience it. [...] That is not to say...that nothing new

²²⁴ Simon Critchley is best known for having first drawn attention to the possibility of an ethico-political turn in deconstruction, while John D. Caputo remains perhaps the most prominent proponent of Derrida's supposed turn to religion. Cf. Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 1992) and Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997). For more on the so-called ethical or political turn see Peter Baker, *Deconstruction and the Ethical Turn* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1995); Michel Rosenfeld, "Derrida's Ethical Turn and America: Looking Back from the Crossroads of Global Terrorism and the Enlightenment," *Cardozo Law Review* 27 (2005): 815-846; Richard Beardsworth, *Derrida and the Political* (NY: Routledge, 2013); and Robert Doran, *The Ethics of Theory: Philosophy, History, Literature* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016). For a more circumspect take on this perceived turn see Richard Kearney "Derrida's Ethical Re-turn," *Working Through Derrida*, ed. Gary Brent Madison (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 28-59. For more on Derrida and religion see Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001); Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, eds., *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004); Martin Hägglund, *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Dawne McCance, *Derrida on Religion: Thinker of Differance* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014); and Edward Baring, ed. *The Trace of God: Derrida and Religion* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015).

²²⁵ Hector Kollias, "Queering It Right, Getting It Wrong," *Paragraph* 35, no. 2 (2012), 150.

happens...but what happens remains without relation or resemblance” to the figure of a turn that might force one “to ‘veer’ away or change tack.”²²⁶ The overall tenacity or determination intimated here—deconstruction’s vigilance as Kamuf and Royle put it—is marked by an ardent, almost obsessive commitment to the proliferation of difference, a feverish responsibility for manifold particularity, and a deep, abiding respect for the

²²⁶ Jacques Derrida, *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 39. Derrida goes on in this paragraph to explicitly distinguish any sort of ‘turn’ in the larger trajectory of his work from the sort of shift or turn (*Kehre*) that occurs in Heidegger’s later period. Commenting on his notion of *différance*, one of deconstruction’s earliest neologisms and loose analogue or corrective to Heidegger’s ontological difference, Derrida suggests that “the thinking of the political has always been a thinking of *différance* and the thinking of *différance* has always been a thinking of the political, of the contour and limits of the political...” He no doubt has in mind here a few passages in his “La Différance” essay where he connects the difference of *différance*, a subtle misspelling that only be inscribed, never heard, to the political and the economic. This difference, he writes, “is offered by a mute mark, by a tacit monument, I would even say by a pyramid, thinking not only of the form of the letter [the ‘a’ of *différance*] when it is printed as a capital, but also the text in Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* in which the body of the sign is compared to the Egyptian pyramid. The *a* of *différance*, thus is not heard; it remains silent, secret and discreet as a tomb: *oikos*. And thereby, let us anticipate the delineation of a site, the familial residence and tomb of the proper in which is produced, by *différance*, the *economy of death*. The stone—provided that one knows how to decipher its inscription—is not far from announcing the death of the tyrant.” Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 4. Derrida makes these implications even more explicit later on in the same essay: “[*Différance*] governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything within us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. And it is always in the name of a kingdom that one may reproach *différance* with wishing to reign, believing that one sees it aggrandize itself with a capital letter” (22). These remarks are echoed and corroborated, both directly and indirectly, in a variety of works that span the entirety of Derrida’s career. See, for example, his suggestion that deconstruction “is not a discursive or theoretical affair, but a practico-political one” [Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 508)] and his insistence that his work is best characterized in terms of continuity rather than that of a ‘break’ or a ‘turn’ [Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 89, 153] as well as the general comments contained in John D. Caputo and Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1996); Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow . . . : A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House, 2011). The sentiment outlined here forms the basis for the notion of a “democracy-to-come” that Derrida develops in *Voyous*, as well as his reading of Marxism in *Spectres de Marx*, his analysis of justice in “Force de loi,” his deconstruction of the tacit ontological foundations embedded in the concept of law in “Devant la loi,” and his radical extension of the scope and aims of hospitality in *De l’hospitalité*, among other interventions.

inimitable specificities of the singular, the heterogeneous, and the distinctively variable. “I totally refuse the label of nihilism which has been ascribed to me,” Derrida tells Richard Kearney in a 1981 dialogue. “Deconstruction is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other.”²²⁷ Derrida’s later work, then, does not mark a rigid conceptual break. To the extent that it does form a turn of sorts it is one that consists in elaborating the essential stakes and overall timbre of his larger project, deploying its insights in new discursive terrains that make it possible to reconsider rudimentary elements of experience like nostalgia.

In *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II* (BSII), Derrida stages an encounter between perhaps the unlikeliest of bedfellows: Martin Heidegger and Daniel Defoe. Indeed, as a means of critically interrogating Heidegger’s famous theses in his 1929-1930 seminar *Die Grundbegriffe Der Metaphysik: Welt - Endlichkeit - Einsamkeit*—“the stone is without world,” “the animal is poor in the world,” and “man is world-forming”—Derrida proposes to read Defoe’s 1719 classic *Robinson Crusoe* in the margins of Heidegger’s seminar (and vice versa).²²⁸ As we saw in the last chapter, this is the same text where Heidegger, commenting on Novalis, claims that homesickness and nostalgia constitute one of philosophy’s most basic *Grundstimmungen*, one of its grounding moods and fundamental attunements. Derrida’s reading of this text eventually leads back to the orienting themes of sovereignty and animality, but it first confronts nostalgic desire and passes through its crucible in a manner that highlights both the distance and the proximity

²²⁷ Jacques Derrida and Richard Kearney, “Deconstruction and the Other,” *States of Mind: Dialogues With Contemporary Thinkers*, ed. Richard Kearney (New York, NY: NYU Press, 1995), 173.

²²⁸ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), §42.

his work maintains with Heidegger. Heidegger and Defoe are thus subject to a certain sifting that never ceases to guide Derrida's idiosyncratic reading practice, a type of phenomenological winnowing that displays a deep and abiding concern for the unceasing, transient, and generally episodic character of temporal experience. His readings in this seminar are thus emblematic of his own style of deconstructive thinking. They are animated by a profound desire to highlight, with rigor and care, the shifts and swerves of temporization, drawing attention to how they interact with memory's inscriptions to achieve belated understanding. The cumulative aim of this practice is to champion and defend the irreducible, at times incommensurable, differences that comprise experience and, especially, to do justice, as best one can, to the unceasing velocity of life as it is lived. Whatever else it may be and however else it may be deployed, deconstruction is fundamentally interested in attending to the deeply felt temporal effects of the human condition: that consciousness never manages to fully coincide with itself, despite its constitutive contiguity; that experience is unable to completely gather itself together, yet still proceeds, somehow, without the mollifying powers of sovereign self-consolidation, final unity, and conciliatory synthesis. These insights are propelled, finally, by an interminable desire, both bitter and sweet, to remain receptive to experience, to celebrate its arrival and mourn its passing, to bear with its flow and be carried by it, tarrying with its marks even and especially when they refuse immediate incorporation. For Derrida, the type of nostalgic desire engendered by temporized experience is one that remains acutely and painfully aware of itself, one that harbors no illusions of any full return to the past.

BSII broaches these themes in a slow, digressive, and indirect manner that builds upon and assumes some familiarity with Derrida's previous texts. He begins by invoking no less than three proper names—Martin Heidegger, Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe—that circumnavigate the entirety of his text. As a type of shorthand, he fashions a fictive proper name, 'Robinson Heidegger,' itself a trope for the sort of "binocular vision" through which the texts are read.²²⁹ In doing so Derrida takes as his clue the question of the proper path, i.e., the problem of how to proceed, how to move (either forward or backward), and how to orient oneself or get one's bearings amid temporized experience. How does life proceed? What is time's path? Where do they lead? Forward? Backward? Sideways and diagonal? What does it mean to (attempt to) orient oneself between these two questions? By crossing the paths of Heidegger and Defoe, Derrida questions the very idea of the proper path, of clear bearings and directions, interrogating where such a path might lead and to what consequence. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, stranded on a deserted island, is constantly looking for a new path, a path both promising and proper that might lead him home, to an equanimous new beginning. Heidegger, *mutatis mutandis*, opens his seminar by wondering what path is most proper for philosophical inquiry and decides, aloud and against his own best judgment, to set himself on a path first opened by a poet—and not just any poet, but Novalis, a most nostalgic poet, transfixed by the beguiling allure of Romantic homesickness. As we saw at the beginning of the last chapter, this is a most improper path by conventional philosophical standards, but one Heidegger chooses

²²⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2011), 34-35; 45.

more often than not in his later work, a path that he believes might provide new access to authenticity, i.e., the origin or *arche* of the philosophizing endeavor whose unactualized possibilities were present in early Greek thought but have since been forgotten.

Derrida, for his part, chooses the (im)proper path between the two, between the interstices of Robinson Heidegger's inventive identity as a figure of the type of ameliorative nostalgic desire indicative of modernity. Is there not, after all, a more nostalgic novel than *Robinson Crusoe* and a more nostalgic thinker than Heidegger, a text and a figure that exhibit a strong, wistful, altogether romanticized desire for the primitive and the primordial? Following this most (im)proper route, Derrida discovers that the path turns in on itself, leading not only toward the anticipated horizons of the seminar, but through that which destabilizes every anticipated horizon and diverts even the most proper of paths, an insoluble thematic that has haunted his work since the earliest stages of his career: the transient, enigmatic architecture of temporized experience. In returning to this leitmotif Derrida finds himself on the way to a self-reflexive understanding of nostalgia that suspends the rapprochement it is given in Heidegger and Defoe without denying the affective experience to which it refers. This improper path thus leads to an improper determination of a common and well-trod feeling, a feeling that emerges as a result of experience subject to the threshers of time and memory.

BSII is thus a seminar on a seminar, both an exercise in Derrida's characteristic reading practice and an indirect commentary on the nature of time and memory, one that proceeds on the basis of various serpentine detours through the dense thickets of homesickness and nostalgia. Given a mere two years before his death, it also represents a

final contribution to Derrida's decades long confrontation with Heidegger and the surreptitious nostalgia for presence he detects in fundamental ontology from the beginning.²³⁰ Confrontation is perhaps the most apt word here as Derrida's relationship to Heidegger is both insightfully complex and exceptionally fraught. He is always careful to acknowledge a certain debt to the set of questions Heidegger poses while also maintaining a heightening degree of critical distance, suspicion, and ambivalence toward Heidegger's proposed solutions.²³¹ In an interview with Dominique Janicaud in 1999 Derrida describes his "concerned relationship" with Heidegger as one of "frustrated admiration," tinted as it is with both respect and recognition as well as "profound allergy and irony," one of the many reasons why he turns toward both Heideggerian orthodoxy and anti-Heideggerian disregard with an equal measure of impatience and exasperation.²³² In this respect, Derrida's ongoing (re)reading of Heidegger best typifies his overall textual practice more than any other interlocutor. On the one hand, he senses a certain

²³⁰ Derrida identifies this furtive nostalgia for presence and its connection to time in a cluster of early texts—these include *Of Grammatology* (1967), "Différance" (1968), "Ousia and Gramme" (1968), and "The Ends of Man" (1968)—and it remains his primary point of intervention in Heidegger's thought up through his later seminars, including BS II.

²³¹ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 9-11. For a schematic overview of Derrida's relationship with Heidegger see François Raffoul's chapter "Heidegger and Derrida" in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger*, eds. François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 401-409. This piece skews toward a Heideggerian perspective, but is insightful nonetheless. Françoise Dastur, a chief critic of Derrida's interpretation of Heidegger, offers a similar summation in "Derrida's Reading of Heidegger," in *Interpreting Heidegger: Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 273-299. For an equally incisive perspective that is perhaps more charitable to Derrida see Christopher Norris's "Metaphysics" in *Understanding Derrida*, ed. Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 14-26. See also John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988); Herman Rapaport, *Heidegger & Derrida: Reflections on Time and Language* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), ix-lxxxix.

²³² Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 347.

novelty of thinking in Heidegger's work, the opening up of certain critical questions that he aims to examine, radicalize, and extend. On the other hand, however, he finds Heidegger's conceptual apparatus woefully wanting and sees within his thought a certain provincialism tethered to and supported by a desire to return to some lost provenance. This "endless debate," as Derrida puts it, centers on a series of interlocking concerns pertaining to Heidegger's thinking of the ontological difference (which Derrida *re-marks* as *différance*), his determination of Being as presence, disclosure, or un-concealment (which Derrida *re-marks* as the trace), and his method of *Destruktion* (which Derrida *re-marks* as *déconstruction*). Each of these strategic interventions is often supplemented by selective and equally strategic readings of other figures, and when it comes to time and temporization Freud looms especially large, as we soon shall see. Together these interventions constitute Derrida's full-throated rejection of Heidegger's romance with presence in favor of the play of absence, traces of a present that was never fully present, what he calls the spectral experience of haunting in his later work.

These various '*re-marks*,' as I am calling them, are consistent with Derrida's self-professed style of thought and deserve further comment. When it first appeared in print in 1967, the word "deconstruction"—now a loose shorthand not only for Derrida but the sort of Francophone inflected theory that has emerged in his wake—stood as Derrida's own translation of Heidegger's project of *Destruktion* or *Abbau*.²³³ That project, first

²³³ Heidegger, for his part, exclusively uses the word *Destruktion* in *Sein und Zeit*. Later, in his 1927 seminar *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, the first major follow-up to his magnum opus, he uses both *Destruktion* and *Abbau*. See Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 31/23. Derrida first uses the word *déconstruction* in its technical sense in *Of Grammatology*. It is also deployed, sparingly, in *Speech and*

announced in §6 of *Sein und Zeit*, is an enterprise whose genealogical roots are themselves both Lutheran and, apparently, biblical.²³⁴ But whereas Heidegger's aim is to raze the foundations of traditional metaphysics in Western thinking in order to (nostalgically) return to or uncover an authentic, primordial thinking of the meaning of

Phenomena, the first major text that engages in what is now known as Derrida's characteristic style of deconstructive reading. In that text, Derrida interrogates the conditions for Husserl's transcendental phenomenology (a necessary precursor to Heideggerian fundamental ontology), specifically as they pertain to the status of immediate temporal presence in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* and auto-affectivity in his lectures on internal time consciousness. The very first use of the word "deconstruction" appears to have come in 1964-65 in one of Derrida's first seminars on Heidegger given at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. See Jacques Derrida, *Heidegger: The Question of Being and History*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2016).

²³⁴ Derrida discusses the initial impetus behind his transposition and reworking of these Heideggerian ideas in his "Letter to a Japanese Friend" in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 1-7. See also the schematic discussions in Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf and Avital Ronell (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 85-87; Derrida, *Points . . .: Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Weber, Elisabeth, trans. Kamuf, Peggy (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 212-215; and Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow . . .: A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 165. John D. Caputo, drawing on the work of John van Buren, argues that the Heideggerian term *Destruktion* is a paraphrase and translation of the Latin *destructio* used in Martin Luther's 1518 *Heidelberg Disputation*, a text that, among other things, offers a proto-deconstruction of pagan (read: Aristotelian) philosophy. Caputo goes on to speculate that Luther's term is perhaps itself a translation and paraphrase of the Vulgate version of Paul citing Isaiah 29:14 in I Corinthians 1:19 ("I will *destroy* the wisdom of the wise"), thus drawing a clear, genealogical line that situates Derrida's work as both Heideggerian and prophetic. In Caputo's view, Derrida is translating Heidegger translating Luther translating Paul, who is citing Isaiah. See John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 139; *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 47; and Caputo and Gianni Vattimo, *After the Death of God*, ed. Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 186-87n17. Van Buren's pioneering work in this regard can be found in his *The Young Heidegger: Rumor of the Hidden King* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 167ff. Derrida briefly mentions these (newfound) genealogical connections in Dominique Janicaud, *Heidegger in France*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 348. For a helpful overview of Derrida's use of Heidegger's concepts in this regard see John Sallis, *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987); John D. Caputo and Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1996); and Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). For a more critical perspective see Hans-Georg Gadamer's "Destruktion and Deconstruction" and Robert Bernasconi's response "Seeing Double: Destruktion and Deconstruction" in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989).

the question Being,²³⁵ Derrida insists on shaking up the very terms of such a program in order to show how such a thinking of Being often resorts to theatrical, histrionic, and metaphorical modes of self-presentation. In deconstruction, the stakes lie in an elaborate demonstration, on a very granular and micro-logical level, of the manner in which a project as grand and ambitious as Heidegger's fundamental ontology remains, at root, within the very limits of the discourse from which it aims to move beyond.²³⁶ Derrida refers to this procedure as "the general strategy of deconstruction" in 1971, one involving the double-gestures of overturning or displacement, and, concomitantly, the intervention of re-marking (*remarquer*) within a particular structure of dyadic binaries (e.g., speech and writing, presence and absence, etc.).²³⁷ This gesture of re-marking, of intervening within a particular thematic or (con)text, is itself a means of "marking *the interval* between the inversion,"²³⁸ of tracing the gap that subsists between the terms, values, and significations in question, namely presence and absence.

²³⁵ Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 22/44. "If the question of Being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up, and the concealments which it has brought about must be dissolved. We understand this task as one in which by taking the question of Being as our clue, we are to destroy [*Destruktion*] the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences [*ursprünglichen Erfahrungen*] in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of Being."

²³⁶ As Derrida puts it in "Ousia and Gramme" his early essay on Heidegger's conception of temporality in *Sein und Zeit*: "At a certain point, then, the destruction [*Destruktion*] of metaphysics remains within metaphysics, only making explicit its principles." And later on, in the same essay: "Was this not Heidegger's experience in *Being and Time*? The extraordinary trembling to which classical ontology is subject in *Sein und Zeit* still remains within the grammar and lexicon of metaphysics." See Derrida, "Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*," in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 48, 63.

²³⁷ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 41-47. See also Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 1-61.

²³⁸ Derrida, *Positions*, 42. Italics mine.

Derrida's most infamous misspelling, *différance*—itself a *re-mark* upon Heidegger's lexicon—is a paradigmatic example of this tactic. This strange non-concept, a curious orthographic transgression, “puts into question the authority of presence”²³⁹ and its symmetrical opposite (absence) in a manner that would seem to lead back to Heidegger's ontological difference and his determination of Being as presence (*ousia, anwesenheit*). But *différance* is “older” (these scare quotes are Derrida's) than both the ontological difference the early Heidegger outlines and the truth (*aletheia*) of Being as presencing he aims to uncover or disclose later in his career.²⁴⁰ It “exceeds the alternative of presence and absence,”²⁴¹ collapsing the two senses of the French verb *différer* and its Latin root (*differre*) into a single, non-transitive sheaf or weave of vacillating movement—differing and deferral, spacing and temporization. Rather than constructing an existential analytic of *différance*, as Heidegger might, Derrida insists upon the “intensification of its play,” a play both strategic and adventurous, one that anticipates later notions like *destinerrance* and *verstimmung*, “a strategy without finality...the unity of chance and necessity in calculations without end.”²⁴² *Différance* differs (in) itself and defers (from) itself. It suggests that the value of ‘presence’ and the pull of ‘the present’ are contaminated by what they are *not*, constituted, from the inside, by what they cannot contain. Heidegger *marks* an essential distinction between Being (presence) and beings (the present) in the form of the ontological difference. Derrida overturns and intervenes

²³⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1984), 10.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 3, 7.

within this dyad through a strategic *re-mark* that works within and against the field of differences in which it is situated. *Différance* shakes and solicits the entire Heideggerian edifice (along with the metaphysical tradition of which it is a part), making it tremble through an ostensibly silent gesture of *re-marking* (its misspelling can only be read, not heard). Derrida *re-marks* or countersigns the Heideggerian text, which is to say he deconstructs it, or, better, he lets it deconstruct itself.²⁴³ The *re-mark* traverses the same terrain as the *mark*, while augmenting it and supplementing it, making the landscape it opens up intelligible in new, different ways. It is in this sense—and will become clearer below—that the experience of nostalgia is the experience of deconstruction: it traverses the familiar previously *marked* by experience and *re-marks* it, reworking it, and supplementing it with new insights, inscribing it yet again in order to make its *marks* differently legible.

²⁴³ Throughout this essay, Derrida emphasizes *différance*'s basic non-transitivity—it is neither active nor passive—suggesting that it operates (as a nonoperation, under the tutelage of no sovereign entity or individual) in “something like the middle voice.” See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, 9. Later, in his “Letter to a Japanese Friend,” Derrida expounds on this within the context of defending deconstruction against instrumentality, as if it were some pre-fabricated method or programme that could simply be deployed here or there, willy nilly. Rather, texts harbor deconstruction within themselves and are therefore always subject to auto-deconstruction. “Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even modernity. *It deconstructs itself. It can be deconstructed [Ça se déconstruit.]* The ‘it’ [*ça*] is not here an impersonal thing that is opposed to some egological subjectivity. *It is in deconstruction [en déconstruction]*. And the *se* of *se déconstruire*, which is not the reflectivity of an ego or of a consciousness, bears the whole enigma.” See Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume II*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 4-5. Derrida's readings often seize upon moments within a particular text that signal this sort of auto-deconstruction, a moment that can be pried open or leveraged in order to show how the text remains within the system of significations it aims to critique, how it cannot account for the sort of ur-values to which it appeals, how it depends upon certain elements it aims to exclude or erase, etc. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, commenting on this style of reading, suggests that deconstruction produces or generates readings and in so doing “opens the textuality of a text...the moment that is undecidable in terms of the text's apparent system of meaning, the moment in the text that seems to transgress its own system of values...the moment in the text which harbors the unbalancing of the equation, the sleight of hand at the limit of a text which cannot be dismissed simply as a contradiction.” See Spivak, “Translator's Preface” in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), xlix.

Derrida's Rejection of Heideggerian Nostalgia

“I am alone.”²⁴⁴ Derrida opens BSII with these lines, cribbed from Defoe, which ultimately lead him to conjoin Heidegger and Defoe—‘Robinson Heidegger’—surrounding the themes of loneliness, isolation, and the sovereign exception. Heidegger aims to investigate the ontological significance of nature, the world, the animal, and solitude in his seminar, while Defoe provides us with an epistolary account of a castaway stranded on a remote, tropical island for nearly three decades. Derrida is interested, at least initially, in the extent to which both texts orbit the themes of home, exile, and the possibility of movement between the two.²⁴⁵ Derrida holds together these themes, shared by an unlikely discursive couple, under the explicit rubric of *nostalgia* and homesickness (*heimweh*). He has in mind Defoe’s island of isolation and Heidegger’s other beginning, governing leitmotifs that reveal the degree to which both figures are stricken—that is to say, *re-marked*—by nostalgia, by longing to recover, retrieve, or return to something that has been lost. This unmarked rubric is first announced at the beginning of the second session of the seminar and persists as a minor refrain for the remainder of the text.

Novalis, again, lies at the crux of Derrida’s most unusual pairing. Novalis, who writes near the end of the eighteenth century, as we have seen, a time when nostalgia begins to take on a decidedly temporal character, no longer solely tethered to the spatial values associated with Hoferian homesickness and instead interiorized (or buried alive)

²⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Volume II*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2011), 1.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

as an affective response to the ceaseless passage of time. “Philosophy is really homesickness,” he tells us, “the desire or drive to be everywhere at home.”²⁴⁶ Heidegger invokes this claim as a type of guide (*Leitfaden*) for determining the proper course and scope of philosophy, outlining its status as a *Grundstimmung* and showing how it remains yoked to its opposite, the unhomely, even as it seeks rest and repose in the grounding force of hearth and home. As we saw earlier, to be at home, for Heidegger, is to be both where the philosopher is not and where she longs to go, “once and at all times within the whole [*im Ganzen*].”²⁴⁷ The whole here stands as a synonym of the world, for Heidegger, the totality, unity, and presence of Being itself, of “Being as a whole [*Sein im Ganzen*].”²⁴⁸ The philosopher constantly seeks out this whole and remains within it, searching far and wide for some means of becoming homely within the whole even as it remains unhomely and estranged.

In BS II, Derrida is interested, among other things, in how this reading of Novalis functions as something of a shorthand not only for the conception of ‘world’ outlined later in the text, but for Heidegger’s thought *as a whole*. Being *as a whole* is the world, where the world signifies both the totality of beings and the entirety of Being as continual presencing, a presencing that coalesces or discloses itself *as a whole*. Heidegger’s *Dasein* is thus nostalgically driven to be at home in Being and with every being. It longs to become homely, *as a whole*, in the world, *as a whole*. This, again, is the filiation Derrida detects between Heidegger and Defoe, the strange resonance he pinpoints by reading one

²⁴⁶ Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, translated and edited by David W. Wood (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012), 155.

²⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts*, 5.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

text alongside the other, the one generating a new reading of the other: island and isolation (separation), existential exile (dispersal) and future return (gathering), home and homesickness, nostalgia and reminiscence—the realization of loss and the ambiguous yet propulsive desire that accompanies it. But on Derrida's reading the ambiguity and bittersweetness intrinsic to nostalgia are assuaged and indeed eclipsed by Heidegger's broader concerns for presence and the orienting values of unity, harmony, and essential concordance. Nostalgic, scattered *Dasein* wanders in search of gathering, longing for a unified whole within which it might itself attain unity, *as a whole*. Unity within the whole, *as a whole*, is thus the object of nostalgia in this case and nostalgia itself receives a decidedly ameliorative valence. One longs to be at home in the presence of the whole, in the presencing of the whole, to be united with and subsumed by the whole in its totality, *as a whole*. The relevant Heidegger passage, referenced above, is reproduced below with some additional context. Here Heidegger is commenting on Novalis's aphorism, tying it to the larger concerns that Derrida believes animate his thinking:

This is where we are driven in our homesickness: to being as a whole [*Sein im Ganzen*]. Our very being is this restlessness. We have somehow always already departed toward this whole, or better, we are always on the way to it. But we are driven on... We are underway to this 'as a whole.' [...] Philosophy, metaphysics, is a homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere, a demand, not blind and without direction, but one which awakens us to such questions as those we have just asked and to their unity (*Einheit*).²⁴⁹

This desire for wholeness, unity, and homeliness is why Derrida is so careful, early in BS II, to meticulously parse out Heidegger's preoccupation with the specifically Presocratic and Aristotelian determinations of Being as presence and presencing (*physis*:

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

“to grow,” “to appear”). This nostalgia for ‘early Greek thinking’ subtends the Heideggerian project in aggregate, constituting what Theodor Adorno calls “the mental posture of a permanent ‘back-to.’”²⁵⁰ It reveals a desire to return to the forgotten “other beginning,” the unthought origin of metaphysics that must be authentically repeated to retrieve its as yet un-actualized possibilities, the truth (*aletheia*) of being as disclosure or un-concealment (*physis*).

This deep, abiding desire to return to the whole (*Ganzen*) and to be (re)united with Being as whole (*Sein im Ganzen*) is not merely perfunctory. It is operative in Heidegger’s primary mode of investigation, an inquiry into the (forgotten) meaning of the question of Being; in his subsequent determination of Being as presence; in the constant and consistent valorization of the proper and the authentic in *Being and Time*; in the attendant account of primordial, ecstatic temporality; and, especially, in the elegiac, almost mystical style of the late Heidegger’s turn to poetics which best approximates, he thinks, how Being emerges in presencing (*Anwesen*) and appropriation (*Ereignis*), constituting the specific milieu in which *Dasein* is meant to dwell. This style of thinking—what Heidegger variously calls authentic repetition (*Wiederholung*), commemorative thinking or thinking-back (*Andenken*), and proper recollection or remembrance (*Wiedererinnerung*)—is suffused with nostalgic desire to regain or reclaim the bygone primordality of yore, to become united with and at home in what he calls “a

²⁵⁰ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), 62.

single primordially unitary phenomenon [*ein ursprünglich einheitliches Phänomen*]” that is both within the whole and constitutes the whole, *as a whole*.²⁵¹

The point here is that Derrida, too, detects a surreptitious nostalgia for presence in Heidegger’s thinking. But while he roundly rejects this form of nostalgia early in his career, in BS II he nevertheless remains deeply interested in Novalis’ claim that philosophy begins in/with nostalgia. One of his primary aims is to examine the manner in which the structure of temporized experience necessitates affective responses like nostalgia that are often all too easily folded into a metaphysics of recursion and return. Unlike Heidegger, Derrida wants to tarry with nostalgia, redirecting the experience away from an understanding of temporality that might dampen its full force and impact. In this respect Derridean deconstruction and Heideggerian fundamental ontology could not be more at odds; the *re-mark* is surgical and devastating. Heidegger wants to return to lost Greco-Germanic provenance, to uncover the emerging presence of primeval Being (*physis*), while Derrida is interested in the manner in which time and temporization necessitate that this presence differ and defer from itself to such an extent that its status as presence is called into question. Heidegger, the austere, provincial German, is content to sequester himself in his isolated writing hut in the Black Forest, dwelling in the essential un-concealment of the pastoral four-fold, while Derrida, the urbane, cosmopolitan Parisian relentlessly traverses the interstices of various disciplines and contexts, performing writing as endless supplement and iterability.

²⁵¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 181/226.

Derrida's ostensibly anti-nostalgic position is explicitly announced in 1968, near the end of his essay on *différance*, a text where he excoriates Heidegger's desire to recover some form of Presocratic, ontological primordiality. "There will be no unique name," Derrida writes, "even if it were the name of Being. And we must think this *without nostalgia*, that is, outside the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought."²⁵² This is undoubtedly an unmarked reference to a crucial passage from *Being and Time*, one that Derrida and others, Richard Rorty most notably,²⁵³ take to be emblematic of the Heideggerian gesture *writ large*. In the middle of a discussion of *Dasein*, disclosedness, and truth Heidegger pauses to offer a prescriptive statement that stands as a salient crystallization of his nostalgia for presence and the other beginning. "The ultimate business of philosophy," he rhapsodizes, "is to preserve (*bewahren*) the force of the most elemental words (*die Kraft der elementarsten Worte*) in which *Dasein* expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from levelling them off."²⁵⁴ Heidegger, on Derrida's reading, longs to return to and preserve the unique *proper* name(s) indicative of both Being (presence) and beings (the present), a proper

²⁵² Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 27. Italics mine.

²⁵³ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 112.

²⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 220/262. Italics original. The phrase "levelling off" (*Nivellierung*) appears several times throughout *Being and Time* (most notably in Heidegger's discussion of primordial temporality) and is almost always deployed in order to make an essential distinction between the authentic, proper, primordial, or elemental, on the one hand, and the vulgar, derivative, resultant, or inauthentic, on the other. This distinction is, at root, tethered to a larger bifurcation between what Heidegger calls "authentic temporality" and the so-called "vulgar," "ordinary" or "everyday" conception of time. Derrida subjects this dichotomy to a rigorous deconstructive reading in "Ousia and Gramme" (1968), a companion piece, along with "The Ends of Man" (1968), to his seminal essay on *différance*. In that text, Derrida argues, through a preliminary reading of Hegel's *Jena Logic* and, especially, Aristotle's essay on time in *Physics IV*, that Heidegger's distinction between these two conceptions of time—and by extension his governing binary between the authentic and the derivative—retains all the values of presence characteristic of the sort of metaphysical discourse Heidegger aims to overcome.

name that sets thought along a proper path.²⁵⁵ Derrida, for his part, is interested in jamming up this procedure by demonstrating that there is no unique, proper name nor any fungible proper path, only what he calls, with the help of Freud, the errancy of “*différance* as detour.”²⁵⁶ If Heidegger, the twentieth century’s most specious nostalgic, aims to uncover or isolate a primordial, ontological origin, Derrida responds with a deconstructive *re-mark* by showing that this origin is essentially a phantom or prosthetic, constituted by the play of *différance* and another non-concept central to Derrida’s work, what he calls “the trace.”

The Logic of the Trace and the Timing of *Nachträglichkeit*

The invocation of Freud above is not merely ornamental and is worth parsing out a bit further. It serves to clarify both Derrida’s relationship to Heidegger vis-a-vis presence as well as his understanding of the trace as a type of *re-mark* that best typifies the work of nostalgia. Since at least the publication of *Of Grammatology*, the majority of Derrida’s work—and his readings Heidegger in particular—are strategically interrupted by Freud. The earliest, most paradigmatic example of this practice comes in 1966 with the publication of “Freud and the Scene of Writing.” In that text, Derrida seizes upon

²⁵⁵ Derrida goes on, in the final paragraph of his essay, to relate this (early) nostalgic sentiment of *Being and Time* to Heidegger’s 1946 commentary on the Anaximander fragment, a text often associated with a decisive shift in Heidegger’s thought, a shift Heidegger himself signals under the rubric of *die Kehre* (“the turn”). This shift is marked by a turn away from the earlier project of fundamental ontology and the existential analytic of *Dasein* in favor of what he calls the presencing of presence, the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*), and the essential, originary disclosedness or un-concealment of the truth of Being (*aletheia*) in the early Greek sense. As Derrida (and Rorty) point out, Heidegger’s thought following the so-called turn displays a striking, even amplified degree of heightened continuity with his early project to the extent that both corpora inscribe a type of nostalgia for lost presence, that is, a yearning for forgotten provenance, a desire to return to original primordality, to recover, retrieve or re-appropriate the halcyon days before philosophy went terribly awry.

²⁵⁶ Derrida, “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 19.

Freud's 1925 consideration of the psychic apparatus as type of writing machine and puts it into the service of his own burgeoning theory of *différance* in order to offer an immanent critique of both the metaphysics of presence and the ipseity of sovereign, selfsame consciousness. As with Heidegger, Derrida notes the affinities and resonances between psychoanalysis and deconstruction while also taking stock of the manner in which Freud's work retains a certain residue of the metaphysics of presence. Crucially, at the outset, Derrida notes that while his concepts "are neither Freudian nor Heideggerian," his work nevertheless necessitates "a comparison of the undertakings of Heidegger and Freud" that directly pertains to what nostalgia, by definition, tears asunder, i.e., "the meaning of presence in general."²⁵⁷ This gesture of *re-marking* is continued with varying degrees of scope and emphasis in *Of Grammatology* (1968), "Me—Psychoanalysis" (1979), "Envoi" (1980), "Mes Chances," (1982), "Fors" (1986), *Archive Fever* (1995), *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (1998), and *For What Tomorrow...* (2001). The most prominent and salient instance, however, and one that combines the influence of both Freud and Heidegger in a single, multi-valenced effort, is *The Post Card* (1980). Along with *Glas* (1974), an avant-garde, intertextual reading of Hegel and Jean Genet, *The Post Card* is often regarded as Derrida most literary work.²⁵⁸ The text itself appears to speak in

²⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Reprint (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 198.

²⁵⁸ Richard Rorty, for instance, takes *The Post Card* and its opening "Envois" essay especially, to be examples of Derrida at his best. Cf. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 126. See also Derek Attridge, "Introduction" in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 11; Peter Goodrich, "Introduction: Un Cygne Noir," *Cardozo Law Review* vol. 27, no. 2 (2005), 540; Christine van Boheeman-Saaf, "Purloined Joyce" in *Re: Joyce: Text. Culture. Politics* ed. J. Brannigan, Julian Wolfreys, and Geoff Ward (New York, NY: Macmillan Press, 1998), 250; and David Wills, *Matchbook: Essays in Deconstruction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 45.

multiple voices, a stylistic device that performs the deconstructive work set forth in the text, one that Derrida first experiments with in *Glas* and further refines in *Cinders* (1987) and *On the Name* (1993).

In *The Postcard*, Derrida stages yet another discursive encounter, another strategic *re-marking*, similar to the Heidegger-Defoe couplet explored in BSII, except this time it centers around a strange sort of clandestine correspondence he detects between Heidegger and Freud. “Here Freud and Heidegger,” he announces, “I conjoin them within me like the two great ghosts of the ‘great epoch.’ The two surviving grandfathers. They did not know each other, but according to me they form a couple...two thinkers whose glances never cross and who, without ever receiving a word from one another, say the same [*disent le même*].”²⁵⁹ Derrida’s play on the same (*le même*) here includes at least two levels. On the one hand, Freud and Heidegger *say the same*, i.e., they work within the conventions of metaphysics which, itself, *says the same*, inscribes *the same*, and installs *the same*, in terms of presence, identity, and homogeneity. This refers to Heidegger’s nostalgia for presence and Freud’s reductive biologism. On the other hand, however, Freud and Heidegger *say the same*. That is to say, they offer *the same* by providing insights that can be wielded against *the same*, ideas that can be leveraged in the service of a critique of *the same*, a critique that interrogates consciousness’s supposed immediacy and transparency. Yet, Freud and Heidegger fail to effectively marshal this critique themselves because they remain within and continue to

²⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1987), 191.

say, *the same*. Derrida, in other words, finds these two thinkers so important—reading them together, with and against *the same*—because they help facilitate his critical analysis of presence and absence. They allow him to further sharpen his deconstruction of the modern, post-Kantian subject and his growing suspicion that the endless play of *différance* is never not affecting—or infecting—individual consciousness.

At this point it will come as no surprise that Derrida’s conjunction of Heidegger and Freud revolves around the problem of time and temporization, a thematic that could no doubt be spun out in a variety of ways. Parallels between nostalgia and *re-marking*—both serve to highlight the interval between presence and absence—necessitate a prismatic view of this heading according to what Derrida calls the logic of the *trace*. The trace is one the earliest nicknames Derrida deploys to indicate “the unmonotonous...unnameable movement of difference-itself,”²⁶⁰ a movement that impels, among other things, the experience of time and the experience of nostalgia, the experience of nostalgia as the experience of time. This notion of the trace first emerges in Derrida’s earliest works and remains an orienting concern up through the BSII seminar. In *Of Grammatology*, it is situated as a means of generalizing the Husserlian structure of retention—the manner in which intentional acts of perception are held or preserved in temporal consciousness—clarifying Derrida’s larger relationship to transcendental phenomenology. His primary critique, as outlined in *The Origin of Geometry* and,

²⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 93. Other neologisms and non-concepts include *différance*, arches-writing, destinerrance, exappropriaton (a gloss on the late Heidegger’s notion of appropriation facilitated by *Ereignis*), hauntology (a notion to be considered further below), supplementarity, and iterability, among others. See, for instance, Benoit Peeters, *Derrida: A Biography*, trans. Andrew Brown (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012), 492.

especially, *Speech and Phenomena*, is that Husserl, in his discussions of temporality, tends to reduce the notion of experience in general to pure, transparent and immediate presence, what he calls The Living Present (*lebendige Gegenwart*).²⁶¹

In order to complicate this matrix—and to do justice to the play of what he terms *différance* less than a year later—Derrida borrows the term *trace* from the work of Emmanuel Lévinas and, with the help of Freud, *re-marks* it. For Lévinas, the trace “signifies beyond being” because it “escapes the bipolar play of immanence and transcendence proper to being.”²⁶² It refers to an “immemorial past” that was and is never fully present as such.²⁶³ Derrida seizes upon the manner in which the trace—which signifies without making appear—interrupts the metastatic inertia of presence, opting for the play of *différance* rather than the drudgery and bipolar play of the transcendence-immanence dyad. Like Lévinas, he is interested in that which never quite attains the impregnable status of presence proper. But, unlike Lévinas, he claims that his deconstructive version of the trace will be “reconciled...to a Heideggerian intention” (the delineation of originary difference) that sometimes extends “beyond Heideggerian discourse” (by unsettling the value of originality and the power of the origin), an intervention that “makes enigmatic what one thinks one understands by the words

²⁶¹ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 85ff; and Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 58, 136-137, 152-153. See also Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 61-62.

²⁶² Emmanuel Lévinas, “The Trace of the Other,” in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 356.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 355.

‘proximity,’ ‘immediacy,’ ‘presence,’ [and] the proper.’²⁶⁴ This “beyond,” Derrida tells us a few lines later, is made possible by Nietzsche and, especially, Freud. If Heidegger lays the necessary groundwork for Derrida’s critique of the metaphysics of presence, it is Freud who enables him to extend and radicalize the questions related to time and temporization initially outlined by Husserl and Heidegger. By excising the notion of the trace from the Levinasian corpus, Derrida offers his own *re-mark*, one that brings Heideggerian presence (*Dasein*) and Freudian absence (the unconscious) together by siding with neither. In the middle of a passage in *The Post Card* describing the strange “correspondence” between Heidegger and Freud, Derrida suggests that thinking the trace necessitates that one “reconsider the tranquil self-evidence of the ‘there is’ and the ‘there is not’...by exceeding, *à la trace*, the opposition of the present and the absence.”²⁶⁵ Deconstruction, it seems, can only abide the ‘Da’ of *Dasein* if it is interpolated by the ‘Da’ of *Fort!/Da!*. Like *différance*, the trace is one of Derrida’s many designations for difference and deferral, for the interval between presence and absence and the manner in which each term intervenes within and *re-marks* upon its other.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 70. As his pivotal “Violence and Metaphysics” essay demonstrates, Derrida often situates himself between these two thinkers. That is to say, deconstruction proceeds in the aftermath of Lévinasian alterity of the other and Heideggerian being-toward-death. Derrida adopts and adapts both notions, *re-marking* upon them as a means clarifying his own (non)concepts (e.g., *différance*, the trace, iterability, supplementarity, etc.).

²⁶⁵ Derrida, *The Post Card*, 357.

²⁶⁶ In a conversation with Elizabeth Roudinesco Derrida reflects on these connections in an especially lucid way: “Up until 1965, I had not yet realized the necessity of psychoanalysis in my philosophical work. Beginning with *Of Grammatology*, I sensed the properly deconstructive necessity of again calling into question the primacy of the present, of full presence, as well as self-presence and consciousness, and therefore of putting the resources of psychoanalysis to work. [...] Concerning the problematic of the trace, as an important principle of contestation and a strategic lever of deconstruction, situating it within and along the edges of psychoanalysis was indispensable. In *Of Grammatology* and especially “*Différance*,” I tried to situate, at least, the necessity of reinterpreting a certain path opened and left behind by Nietzsche

From Derrida's perspective, Freud's greatest achievement is his constant insistence that the human psyche retains indices of experience that are stored or archived in a manner that often escapes—and at times undermines—the sovereignty of consciousness awareness. This reading is first outlined in “Freud and the Scene of Writing.” The insights gleaned in that essay influence the majority of Derrida's marquee non-concepts—*différance* and the trace, most notably—and remain operative for the remainder of his career. The idea here, as Freud himself puts it in *Civilization and its Discontents*, is that “in mental life nothing which has once been formed can perish, everything is somehow preserved and...in suitable circumstances...it can once more be brought to light.”²⁶⁷ The experience of nostalgia may be one such circumstance, as Derrida intimates in BS II, though the degree to which it is ‘suitable’ or not is as ambiguous and ambivalent as the desire itself. Freud variously refers to these preserved impressions as “memory-traces” or “mnemic images” throughout his work (*Erinnerungsspur*: literally “the trace of a memory”).²⁶⁸ These residual imprints are

and Freud. The question of *différance*, or of the trace, is not thinkable on the basis of self-consciousness or self-presence, nor in general on the basis of the full presence and the present. I felt indeed that there was in Freud, in reserve, a powerful reflection on the trace and writing. Also on time.” Cf. “In Praise of Psychoanalysis” in Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow . . . : A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 170.

²⁶⁷ Sigmund Freud, Christopher Hitchens, and Peter Gay, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 30-31. Freud's corpus is replete with similar lines of thought. Take, for example, the following extract from “Constructions in Analysis” where he likens the analyst to an excavator or an archaeologist: “All of the essentials are preserved; even things that seem completely forgotten are present somewhere and somewhere, and have merely been buried and made inaccessible to the subject.” Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. XXIII (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 260.

²⁶⁸ Reference to the notion of “memory-traces” or “mnemic images” can be found in Freud's earliest works and remains a constant theme across his corpus with varying degrees of inference and explicit citation, as the quotation from *Civilization and Its Discontents* above suggests. See, for instance, “Project for a Scientific Psychology” (1895) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. I (London: Hogarth Press, 1971); *Studies on Hysteria*

inscribed upon the psyche in a way that suggests a certain incongruity between consciousness and memory, an incongruity that nostalgia both requires and exploits. According to Freud's topography, every instance of perceptual experience forges an indelible memory-trace upon the psychic apparatus. The majority of these traces never fully reach consciousness at the time of perception—that is to say, they are never completely present or cognized as such in the moment, hence Lévinas's aforementioned reference to a past that was never present. These traces do, however, accumulate over time, circulating just below the surface of conscious awareness. They are constantly in the process of being reworked and rearranged in light of new experiences and fresh perceptions.²⁶⁹ It is thus that each memory-trace remains “currently active,”²⁷⁰ according to Freud, constituting an accretive reservoir that subtends and affects consciousness in

(1895) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. II (London: Hogarth Press, 1971); “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1986) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. III (London: Hogarth Press, 1971); “Letter to W. Fliess, Dec. 6, 1896” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. I (London: Hogarth Press, 1971); *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vols. IV-V (London: Hogarth Press, 1971); *The Ego and the Id* (1923) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. XIX (London: Hogarth Press, 1971); and “A Note Upon the Mystic Writing Pad (1925) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, Vol. XIX (London: Hogarth Press, 1971). See also Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), 247-249.

²⁶⁹ See, for instance, Freud's correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess, particularly Letter #52 (dated Dec. 6, 1896), one of the earliest examples of Freud's burgeoning theory of the memory-trace. Cf. Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Vol. I (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 233.

²⁷⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (First Part)* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Vol. IV (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 228.

every instant, contributing to one's overall character and affective disposition in a manner not at all unlike Heidegger's notion of the *Grundstimmung*.²⁷¹

In his early essays on *différance*, *The Post-Card*, and, especially, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida is primarily interested in the manner in which familiar accounts of subjectivity and temporization—Kant's transcendental unity of apperception, Husserl's Living Present, and Heidegger's ecstatic, originary temporality—are found wanting when confronted with this trace-structure. "Life," he writes, "must be thought of as trace before Being may be determined as presence."²⁷² The trace signals neither complete absence nor full presence, but the interval or interstice between the two. Any presence whatsoever is contaminated, not necessarily by its diametrical opposite, but by the trace, which expresses, in a mode that is nearly undetectable, something like the presence of absence, an indefatigable mark left behind by something or someone whose presence was never fully apprehended in the present now past but is still, somehow, carried into the present now passing. To consider life according to the logic of the trace, then, is to broach what Derrida calls, in his earliest essay on Freud, a "discontinuous or episodic temporality"²⁷³ where experience is always contiguous but not necessarily continuous, shaped by the disparate fragments and scattered impressions that constitute memory. Life considered as trace, according to this temporality, results in an endless

²⁷¹ "What we describe as our 'character' is based upon the memory-traces of our impressions; and, moreover, the impressions which have had the greatest effect on us...are precisely the ones which scarcely ever become conscious." Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams (Second Part)* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Vol. V (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 539-540.

²⁷² Jacques Derrida, "Freud and the Scene of Writing," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 203.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 205.

phenomenon, one where the protean self is always both ahead of itself and behind itself, deciphering and translating itself without the aid of some Rosetta Stone or master key.

Derrida further clarifies the discontinuous, episodic temporality of the trace by *re-marking* upon yet another Freudian notion, that of deferral or belatedness (*Nachträglichkeit*). For Freud, *Nachträglichkeit* refers to the manner in which latent (or repressed) memory-traces have both a deferred effect and a delayed affect upon the subject. *Nachträglichkeit* is not a central concept in Freud, but it does emerge often throughout his work, particularly in discussions on the relationship between subjective memory and temporized experience, leading Derrida to suggest that it is perhaps his most significant discovery.²⁷⁴ The German expression here is polyvalent and difficult to parse. James Strachey, the editor and English translator of Freud's collected works, renders *Nachträglichkeit* as "deferred action" in the *Standard Edition*, while Jacques Lacan, who is responsible for introducing the term to French intellectual life in 1953, opts for the phrase *après-coup* (literally: "after the blow") in his commentary on the famous "Wolf Man" case.²⁷⁵ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, in their seminal *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, prefer the Lacanian designation and its English correlate,

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 203. Notable references to *Nachträglichkeit* in Freud's work include "Project for a Scientific Psychology" (1895), *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), his correspondence with Wilhelm Fliess, particularly "Letter #52" in Dec. 1896, "The 'specific' etiology of hysteria" (1896), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), "Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old-boy" (1909), and "From the history of an infantile neurosis" (1918). Jean Laplanche, in his *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, suggests that while *Nachträglichkeit* never attains the status of a primary idea in these works it still "form[s] part of Freud's 'paraconceptual' apparatus." Cf. Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 140n1. See also, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), 111ff.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" in *Ecrits* trans. Bruce Fink (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 197- 268. See also his "Position of the Unconscious," Ibid., 703-721.

“afterwardness,” arguing that Strachey’s more anemic and imprecise translation connotes “merely a delay or lapse of time between cause and effect”²⁷⁶ when the entire point of *Nachträglichkeit* in Freud is to invert this relationship or at the very least undermine the familiar, linear logics of causality and temporal succession. Simply put, *Nachträglichkeit* upends the myth of mono-causality. The delay or deferral involved runs in both directions, i.e., from the past to the present *and* from the present to the past. Afterwardness is not only the release or discharge of accruing tension or psychic energy, it is also—and especially—a retroactive re-working of experience in light of new circumstances. This is precisely what is at stake in Freud’s 1917 study of the Wolf Man. The primal scene is not experienced as such and only belatedly understood or worked over. The past is carried forward and, in light of fresh experience, it returns, belatedly, in the present to be heard again. Latent memory-traces that never fully reach consciousness facilitate this working over by virtue of the gap or interval between the times, between presence and absence. The essential, sequential distinctions between cause and effect, past and present, origin and epiphenomenon, therefore recede in favor of rhythmic co-implication. The (present) experience of (previous) experience endows both with new meaning and affective force, *ex post facto*—a *re-marking* after the fact.

This understanding of *Nachträglichkeit* coheres with Derrida’s own usage of the term. In *Of Grammatology*, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” and the pivotal essay on *différance*, Derrida reads the concept alongside the notion of the trace he borrows and

²⁷⁶ Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), 238n1.

adapts from Freud and Levinas—the temporality implied in *Nachträglichkeit* is the time of the trace, a time that both enables the presence/absence dyad while also complicating their identity and continuity. “To defer (*différer*),” he writes, in agreement with Laplanche and Pontalis, “cannot mean to retard [*verspätung*] a present possibility, to postpone an act, to put off a perception already now possible.”²⁷⁷ The deferral is always already on the scene, in the scene, and the delay always already infiltrates those possibilities taken or assumed to be immediately present. *Nachträglichkeit* is thus the ‘beginning,’ the non-originary origin constituted by the play of *différance* and the imbrication of traces. Afterwardness thus allows Derrida to think the problem of temporization outside the dialectical syntheses of experience explicitly outlined by Husserl and tacitly upheld by Heidegger.²⁷⁸ What we call the present or the now is not easily maintained—this is Derrida’s play on the French *maintenant*, “the now”—because the presence of the present is constituted by the logic of the trace, the work of memory, and the temporality of afterwardness.²⁷⁹ The capacious, opaque, and receptive character of consciousness discovered by Freud is generalized and extended by Derrida, applicable to the structure of temporized experience itself. Consciousness fails to assimilate fully and completely that to which it is subject because consciousness is not immediately present and transparent. But these experiences are nevertheless inscribed as traces, traces that continue to mark and *re-mark* experience. They are themselves *re-marked* upon *after the*

²⁷⁷ Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing” in *Writing and Difference*, 203.

²⁷⁸ Cf. Derrida, “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, 21. On the critique of Heidegger’s ecstatic unity of primordial or authentic temporality see “Ousia and Gramme: Note on a Note from *Being and Time*” in the same volume. See also, Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, 63.

²⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, 226.

fact—*nachträglichkeit*, *après-coup*, *ex post facto*—as the present confers with the past and vice versa. The temporal interval to which afterwardness bears persistent testament thus facilitates a boundless, interminable process of translation and re-inscription. Temporization is thus diffuse and time itself runs both forward and backward, sideways and diagonal, ordering and reordering memory and experience at speed.

In a letter to Wilhelm Fliess that also contains one of the earliest extant references to *Nachträglichkeit*, Freud suggests that the “psychical mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification” where “the material present in the form of memory-traces [is] subjected from time to time to a re-arrangement...*a re-transcription*...in accordance with fresh circumstances.” This is no doubt what Derrida has in mind when he refers to Freud’s work as a “diaphoristics” or an “energetics” of the trace, where consciousness is considered as text, “a weave of pure traces...consisting of archives which are always already transcriptions...repositories of a meaning which was never present...always reconstituted by deferral.”²⁸⁰ Through this process of translation and re-inscription—of reading and *re-marking*—past experience is continually supplemented by present awareness and reworked in light of new experience, instances that are themselves subtended by the activity of afterwardness. For Derrida, as for Freud, the meaning that is attained by deciphering and translating traces is always overdetermined, i.e., it is always the effect of many conditions or causes that are themselves constituted by accretive experience and the cumulative workings of memory. This meaning emerges through the play of *différance*, supplemented and augmented by other meanings, events, memories, or

²⁸⁰ Derrida, “Différance,” 18; Derrida, “Freud and the Scene of Writing,” 211.

experiences the full force and significance of which need not be and cannot be determined or contained by the dyadic representations of presence and absence. Traces, then, *re-mark* (upon) us and we *re-mark* (upon) them, belatedly—always belatedly.

Nostalgia, *Re-marked*

This leads us back to BSII, specifically to the important turning point in the second session where Derrida reads Heidegger reading Novalis on nostalgia. Earlier I suggested that Derrida remains deeply interested in Novalis' claim about philosophy and homesickness despite the sort of determination it receives in Heidegger. We are now in a position to make good on that claim as Derrida's readings here are motivated and informed by the foregoing, by his understanding of deconstruction as a critical gesture of *re-marking* and his consideration of Freudian ideas like the trace and *Nachträglichkeit*. These analyses reach their apex in a stunning moment in the second session of the seminar. Derrida continues to follow and *re-mark* upon Heidegger's clue from Novalis by providing a seemingly improvisational meditation on nostalgia, mourning and memory, and the episodic character of temporized experience. The muse here is a few lines from John Donne's *Holy Sonnets*—"I run to Death and Death meets me as fast / And all my Pleasures are like Yesterday"—lines which serve to indicate both his distance from garden-variety forms of nostalgia as well as his desire for a nostalgia without closure.

And all my pleasures are like yesterday, like the yesterday, as though come from yesterday, my pleasures are already of yesterday, my pleasures are the yesterday itself, in advance they are dated—from yesterday. In advance they have passed, they are past, already past and passed by, overtaken, already memories of bygone enjoyment or returns of pleasure. My present pleasures are in the present yesterday's presents, they are yesterday. Not: they have been or were yesterday, but they are presently yesterday. Their being-present is

yesterday. [...] What I live in the present, or even what I expect from the future, is already past, already memory and melancholy, or nostalgia (*Heimweh*).²⁸¹

The final sentence—‘what I live in the present...is already past, already memory and melancholy, or nostalgia (*heimweh*)’—is particularly instructive and directly links nostalgia with Novalisian homesickness, signaling that Derrida plans to overturn the Heideggerian determination and offer another deconstructive *re-mark*. While his 1968 comments on *différance* summarily reject nostalgia wholesale, Derrida’s prose in 2003 exudes desirous yearning, eulogizing what has been lost and what has passed away, present only in the fragmentary traces of memory. The key difference here—the difference *différance* makes we might say—is that this restive nostalgic desire expects no recompense and makes no attempt at propitiation. It subsists in itself and persists for itself, by virtue of the trace, thriving on the interval(s) between presents, between what was (passing) and what is (passing). It is a desire that is born in passing, remains adrift in passing, and continues to pine for what is past—because the ambivalent, bittersweet pleasure associated with the passing past is only presently recognized. This is an insolvent nostalgia that remains active, propulsive, and animating nonetheless, a longing, both plaintive and festive, that yearns for the very thing that generates consternation—the passage of time. Derrida continues, a few pages later, sharpening the distinction:

It is yesterday that gives the pleasure, pleasure is yesterday, like yesterday, it begins now by being yesterday, not only in the manner of yesterday, but as yesterday. I have pleasure only because there is the past of yesterday, only because pleasure is originally yesterday, it is in its essence, in its now, in the presence of its essence and in the essence of its presence, a having-been-yesterday, it is (present) in its *Gewesenheit*, it is in its essence (*Wesen*), a *Gewesenheit*, a *being-having-been*, and that’s the nostalgia of yesterday, of a death already come, an originary mourning, this is the nostalgia that does not come after pleasure but which, alone, gives me pleasure and gives it to me *as yesterday*. I do not enjoy a pleasure first present that is immediately past, nostalgic, in mourning: no, the pleasure is

²⁸¹ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II*, 50-51.

born only of the mourning, of enjoyment as mourning. And not any mourning and any memory of death, but the mourning of myself. I am from yesterday, I am no longer, I am no longer present, I am already yesterday, I enjoy from yesterday not because I have enjoyed or have been, or because I was born yesterday, but because only yesterday will have given me.... [...] Pleasure, my pleasures are yesterday, they are the yesterday, they are like yesterday. They are neither present nor future, I enjoy them only as a memory; and even then, “memory” and “past” are concepts that are too broad and vague. The yesterday is not only the past the memory of which I keep or lose: yesterday is the day ahead, the day that has just passed, who phenomenal light has just faded. Yesterday is the past imminence of today itself, the imminence of day’s dawning, the dawning that gives light to the day.²⁸²

Here, just a year before his own death, Derrida refers to an anticipatory nostalgia for experience, for more life and increased receptivity, a receptivity not fully available or recognized as such in the immediate instant of what we call the present—in other words, the experience of nostalgia as an unending response to or *re-mark* upon the force of time. On this reading, nostalgia accentuates the manner in which temporization is *felt* as interval, distance, stretchedness, and in-betweenness. Unlike Heidegger, nostalgia is considered here not as a form of restorative return, ameliorative repetition, or salutary preservation, but as a type of animating force, coeval with our experience of time—the ache that comes from irreducible non-coincidence, from being neither completely present nor fully absent, but carried across the times, thrown and strewn, *marked* by something inaccessible, *re-marked* by something spectral.

This Derridean form of nostalgia ironizes and frustrates desire with denying or glossing over its demands or the experience from which it emerges. It allows some enjoyment, remains painfully aware of the impossibility of its yearning and, harboring no illusions of final fulfillment, relishes the bittersweet nonetheless—and relishes it as mourning. Derrida, then, does not deny nostalgia. On the contrary, he welcomes it by

²⁸² Ibid., 52-53. Italics mine.

denying its teleological fantasies. That posture is indicative of his work *in toto*. He vigilantly maintains that time is generative yet always—increasingly, incessantly, irrevocably—passing away, that pleasure is in some sense born to us, in us, too late but also (partially) tasted *ex post facto*, that our most intimate, unstated, and accretive desires index us even as they escape and remain opaque. These insights (in)form deconstruction’s most animating concerns. Peggy Kamuf suggests that these concerns involve an ongoing, elaborate, and micro-logical demonstration that what we call experience is, ultimately, “the experience of experience,”²⁸³ a notion that is prominently on display as early as the initial interventions in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology where he explores the sense that even sense is, *in some sense*, nontransparent, that even immediacy is mediated, *immediately*.²⁸⁴ Derrida is concerned with—and feels some deep responsibility for—the irreducible force and exigence of afterwardness and the basic non-coincidence that forms the episodic vicissitudes of life as it is lived from the inside—a nostalgia without end.

²⁸³ Peggy Kamuf, *Book of Addresses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 154.

²⁸⁴ *Speech and Phenomena* comprises one third of a trio of texts first published in 1967—along with *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*—that are often said to mark the inauguration of Derrida’s professional philosophical career. It contains a rigorous deconstruction of Husserl’s understanding of time-consciousness and the living present and endeavors to radicalize his understanding of retention as a means of further elaborating the imbricative play of presence and absence (the interval of *différance*). It is a pivotal text that lays the necessary groundwork for the remainder of Derrida’s thought, including the notion of the trace. Leonard Lawlor, in his recent translation of the text, argues that the work is “the best introduction to Derrida’s thought in general,” containing the germinal structure of his entire project. See Jacques Derrida, *Voice and Phenomenon: Introduction to the Problem of the Sign in Husserl’s Phenomenology*, trans. Leonard Lawlor (Chicago, I.L.: Northwestern University Press, 2011), xi. Derrida himself has suggested that it is the essay he most values precisely because it calls into question the immense privilege that philosophy confers upon the value of presence and immediacy. Cf. Derrida, *Positions*, 4-5. David Alison, one of Derrida’s English translators, has suggested that SP contains “a full ‘deconstruction’ of perception as a past that was never present.” See Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 331n30.

Already, in 1996, decades after the famous “Différance” essay and nearly ten years before BSII, Derrida briefly evokes nostalgia in explicit connection with memory and mourning. Commenting on the possibility of a ‘resistance’ in psychoanalysis, he notes that the word *résistance* itself resists clear translation even as it conjures the specific *pathos* of *verstimmung* and a certain nostalgia for his Algerian childhood. The recollections themselves are neither clear nor transparent, however. Derrida feels nostalgia, but the precise specificity of his desired object remains indeterminate, undefined, and strangely cryptic. Indeed, the desire itself seems to impel him in the absence of any localizable object—how to decipher its tracks and traces, how to translate its impressions and imprints, its *marks* and *re-marks*? Nostalgia for...*what*? Which memories and recollections? Derrida responds: “I am going to tell you which ones even if I cannot discern the secret of my *inconsolable nostalgia* [*le secret de ma nostalgie inconsolable*]*—*which thus remains to be analyzed or which resists [*résiste*] analysis, a little like the navel of a dream.”²⁸⁵ An inconsolable nostalgia, wrapped around an intimate, tightly-kept secret whose umbilical center remains potent, yet barely legible, an almost indiscernible perforation. Like the Swiss peasants Kant discusses, Derrida remains inconsolable, remediless, incurable.²⁸⁶ The *pathos* and affective intensity of nostalgia

²⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁸⁶ This incurable, remediless nostalgia emerges again, five years later, in a dialogue with Elizabeth Roudinesco on the theme of choosing one’s heritage or inheritance, a type of undecidable (re)affirmation that is neither complete acceptance nor absolute rejection (other than his text on Marx, this dynamic is perhaps best typified, incidentally, by Derrida’s relationship to Heidegger). There, in the form of a career retrospective, Derrida suggests that his desire, the desire of deconstruction (in both senses), is like that of one “mad for the past, mad for an absolute past, a past that would no longer be a past present, a past whose measure or immeasure would be that of a bottomless memory.” Yet, at the same time, he is a madman who resists an obsessive fixation on the past, the magnetic gravity of what he calls “the cult of remembrance.” A

engulf him even if, *especially if*, the density and gravity of their force(s) far outstrip any future or present possibility of satiation. The reference to the navel of a dream inscribed here is, of course, another Freudian interruption, a wry allusion to *The Interpretation of Dreams* and the idea that every dream-work contains an intractable knot that resists or exceeds analysis, what Freud calls its “unplumbable...point of contact with the unknown.”²⁸⁷ Like nostalgia, the navel is, quite literally, the indication of lack and absence, a marker of distance and difference, of the impossibility of returning home and the irretrievable, irrevocable status of both *the* origin and its definite article. Yet, this marker is visible and legible. The absence is *re-marked* as a type of phantom presence. The absence this uncanny presence signals, though *résistant* and unnameable, is perceptible, detectable, *felt*, even as it is clothed and hidden, exposed in its concealment. The navel is inscribed upon the body as nostalgia is inscribed upon the structure of experience. It is, above all, a scar, the stigmatic trace of an old wound that remains both open and blocked, constituting the very center of one’s gravity, the fulcrum or point at which the cumulative mass of a body can begin to act, the silent custodian of movement and expression. The cut or score the nostalgic navel signifies reveals an opening, a depression or indentation that begins to *re-mark* the gap(s) of temporization, of time and timing as separation, scattering, and dispersal, the interval of *différance*. The navel of

few pages later he describes this desire as a type of “enormous nostalgia.” “You see,” he tells us, “I remain inconsolable....” Cf. Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *For What Tomorrow . . . : A Dialogue*, trans. Jeff Fort (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 4, 11.

²⁸⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 4, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 111n1. See also Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 5, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 525.

nostalgia: this shallow pit, this dry cistern, once the hole through which the unified whole was sustained, is now the hole around which the disjunctive whole moves, advances, and gathers itself—cut and cordless.

Scars and *re-marks* such as these constitute what Derrida calls a “congenital” or “originary” nostalgia, one that is ongoing, ceaseless, and interminable, one where “memory is... given over to mourning.”²⁸⁸ This is a mourning both propulsive and inconsolable due to the logic of the trace and temporality of *Nachträglichkeit* that accompanies it. Back to BS II, one final time: “I do not enjoy a pleasure first present that is immediately past, nostalgic, in mourning: no, the pleasure is born only of the mourning, of enjoyment as mourning. And not any mourning and any memory of death, but the mourning of myself.”²⁸⁹ The notion that present pleasure is felt, *presently*, due to its trace structure, its ‘presence’ in “the past of yesterday” and its ‘absence’ in the present of today—along with the notion that such pleasure is “originarily yesterday,” present only in its *Gewesenheit*, its being-having-been, “enjoyment as mourning”—this bittersweet experience of afterwardness, of mediated immediacy, does not install yet another familiar, recursive metaphysics of presence and primordially, it remonstrates it. By invoking *Gewesenheit*, a lesser-known Heideggerian coinage, and willfully playing it against itself, Derrida exploits and undermines the nostrum panacea of authentic

²⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 169; Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay et al., Revised edition (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1989), xviii. Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 61.

²⁸⁹ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II*, 52-53.

repetition and return, the supposed apodicticity of presence and identity.²⁹⁰ As we have seen, the character of this ‘having-been’ is intimately bound up with Heidegger’s concept of thrownness (*geworfenheit*) and the particular timing specific to affectivity (*befindlichkeit, stimmung*), a temporality that overcomes *Dasein* in its affectedness, in disclosing the facticity of its existence, the reality that it *is* because it *has-been*. Derrida rightfully suspects that Heidegger dampens the force of this affectedness and the thrownness that generates it by filtering both concepts through the ur-values of (original) unity, (primordial) proximity, and (future) gathering, ultimately rendering both sapid and toothless. But, as we have seen, the pleasure that often accompanies nostalgic experience only becomes legible and recognizable as such through the constitutive bitterness that triggers it, ‘enjoyment as mourning,’ as Derrida puts it above.

Perhaps a further *re-mark* upon nostalgia’s etymological roots can sharpen this distinction. *Nostos* refers to homecoming or return, particularly of the epic sort embarked upon by figures like Odysseus who are placed in exile or depart from home and then attempt to ‘go back’ despite being thwarted or foiled again and again. *Algos* carries

²⁹⁰ *Gewesenheit* first appears in *Sein und Zeit* as a sort of shorthand for ‘beenness’ or ‘having-been.’ Along with *Zukunft* (future) and *Gegenwart* (past), *Gewesenheit* functions as one of the three ecstases of originary, primordial temporality, ecstases, to be sure, that are subtended by the Heideggerian ur-values of (original) unity, (primordial) proximity and (futural) gathering. Heidegger is careful to distinguish *Gewesenheit* from the ordinary understanding of pastness as *die Vergangenheit*, i.e., the past as that which has already gone by and is therefore immobile, sterile, and over and done with. Cf. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 381/433, 326/373n4. The past as ‘having-been,’ however, is living and ongoing. This living past is, as Heidegger puts it, anticipating Faulkner, “anything but what is past...it is something to which I can return again and again.” Cf. Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time: The First Draft of Being and Time* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2011), 19. When faced with the cold matter-of-factness of death and the impossibility of future reckoning by the character of Temple in the first act of William Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) Gavin Stevens retorts: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” Cf. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York, NY: Vintage, 2012), 73. By returning to *Gewesenheit*, Heidegger’s *Dasein*, through authentic ownedness and anticipatory resoluteness, takes over, assimilates, and modifies its ‘having-been’ by taking control of its own existence and its own-most possibilities for being-in-the-world. It is this assimilation and the language of ‘taking over’ that Derrida disputes and overturns.

connotations of pain or grief that can result from the failure or impossibility of return, the travails undertaken during the return, or the additional losses incurred over the course of the return itself. As a compound, nostalgia internalizes both elements, suffusing both the word and the feeling it names with a productive tension, an animating ambiguity that offers attunement amid the vicissitudes of time and temporization. It is easy, all too easy, to excise that tension and alleviate the ambiguity by isolating one element at the expense of the other. In her book-length study on nostalgia, Svetlana Boym offers her own *re-mark*, situating each element as a type of subject position or affective sensibility—restorative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia, respectively—where the former emphasizes *nostos* at the expense of *algos*, and vice versa. But at a certain point the binary folds in on itself: nostalgia remains illegible without both terms, its bittersweetness remains neutered without the two movements or moments that together form its unique character.

Heidegger manages to construct an entire philosophy of *nostos* without ever deploying the word nostalgia because he remains interested in what is, or can be, appropriated, assimilated, or annexed under the determination of being as presence and disclosure. By tarrying with and recuperating *algos*, Derrida offers a plaintive if not corrective *re-mark*, one that calls into question the teleological presumptions embedded in concepts like *Gewesenheit* and *Geworfenheit*, subjecting both to “a principle of indetermination, chance, randomness, or *destinerrance*.”²⁹¹ The result of this

²⁹¹ Jacques Derrida, “Mes chances” in *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume I*, ed. Peggy Kamuf and Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 360; 352-353. See also his *Points . . . : Interviews, 1974-1994*, ed. Elisabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 270ff and *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 1993), 60-61.

deconstructive vigilance is an attunement to nostalgic experience as a response to the conditions of time. This experience cannot be easily or completely assimilated. It holds open the tension built-in to nostalgia and comports itself to the old aches to which time and memory give voice. This sort of nostalgia maintains an intimate, almost clandestine relation with the past, but, crucially, it is not directed toward the past, toward some primal origin or other beginning that might alleviate its intrinsic tension and restlessness. That provenance, too, is constituted by an amalgamation of available traces, after the fact, as a generative if not necessary phantom. The inconsolable, reflective nostalgia Derrida has in mind fully engages the future in the present by refusing to simply resuscitate the past and instead allowing it to exert a quiet, propulsive force, animated by the trace-structure that enables memory and reminiscence. Derrida's meditation on Donne—inspired by Heidegger and Defoe, haunted by Freud—provides us with a phenomenology of how temporization *feels*, a *re-mark* upon nostalgia that underscores its persistent exigence, the manner in which it, too, both inscribes strange, nearly indecipherable *marks* and retreads the traces of the past by *re-marking* (upon) them, *after the fact*, between full presence and complete absence. The feeling of nostalgia here signals a forfeiture of complete, sovereign control over the force the past exerts upon the present. It intensifies how temporized experience *feels*. When nostalgia wells up, I do not, by sheer force of will and remembrance, return to the past again and again. No, the trace of the past, rather, returns to me and *re-marks* me, again and again. It haunts me, unsettles me, transforms and transports me. The loss is not regained, however, and there is no recompense to sate my desire—except, perhaps, the desire for more desire, for more time to come, and for

more time to be lost. Traces of the past return to me and I am transported, not to the past's being as it was or to my being as I was, but to their ruins and remnants, to the past's being as it now is and my being as I now am. This emphasizes the difference and distance between the two, highlighting the interval between the times that facilitates my persistence across time in spite of the continual drift to which I am subject.

One cannot, then, return to the past, to *Gewesenheit*, to being-having-been, this much is clear. Yet, when the specificity of its aura is brought to mind, however it is brought to mind, one is touched by it, visited by it, (re)marked by it, solicited by the sway—not quite present, not quite absent—of its traces, of its being-having-been. To feel nostalgic, without expectation for remedial unity or authentic repetition, is to feel the vicissitudes of temporized experience, their whiplash and their discordance, at their rawest, most visceral, and fiercely tempestuous. Life as it is lived prohibits a return to presence; it both feels behind and just beyond reach. Nostalgia's *re-mark* emerges as a response to these conditions and heightens one's felt experience of time—one's experience of experience—precisely because it lays bare the distance and difference between the desired object, which may well remain undetermined, and the moment in which that accretive desire is most acutely felt, deepening and amplifying an interval that cannot easily be relieved. Derrida, in other words, is interested in the manner in which the affective force of nostalgia accentuates the internal tension of *Gewesenheit*, its subsistence as an intractable knot, inflected and refracted, through the flux and flow of time, neither here nor there, but between, *re-marked* and *re-marking* through the propulsive play of *différance*. The being specific to *Gewesenheit*, that is, its determinate

presence, is, for Derrida, no longer. Its essence lies in its 'having-been' in its '*being-having-been*,' in its having already past and gone by, as yesterday, something that cannot be given again. This being was (*Fort!*) and is no longer (*Da!*), accessible only through the faint but indelible traces it has left behind, marks and imprints that can only be translated, re-worked, and deciphered *après-coup*. It is thus that nostalgia provides what Walter Benjamin calls "a unique experience with the past."²⁹² An experience *with* the past, not *of* the past, to be sure; an experience formed by disparate, spectral traces and initiated by the time of deferral and delay, the temporality of belated feeling, both marked and *re-marking*.

Nostalgia, on this reading, can only emerge within the space of dissonance and disjunction, within the play of *différance* and *verstimmung*—it is a feeling borne of time past and time passing, forged in the gap between times, the interval between now and then. It emerges in the wake of unyielding irrevocability, its full weight and force predicated upon interminable disconsolation, endless disunion. "My present pleasures," Derrida tells us, "are in the present yesterday's presents, they are yesterday."²⁹³ The pleasure for which one pines, the irreducible yearning so specific to nostalgia, emerges today because of yesterday, emerges today because it is *in* yesterday. Its presence in the past, its *Gewesenheit*, its being-having-been, is what gives the pleasure because the pleasure itself is given *in* yesterday *as* today—*après-coup*. Nostalgia, then, can only ever be felt in the absence of that for which it pines, emerging in the distance between *now*

²⁹² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1969), 262.

²⁹³ Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign, Vol. II*, 50-51.

and *then*, the gap between *here* and *there*, *Fort!* and *Da!*. This absence is not nothing, however. Nostalgia's *re-marks* evince an absence that feels something like presence, a present absence, a palpable lack that constitutes the present even as the present must continue to endure it, like the persistent pain from an old wound, irritated, re-opened and inflamed. Presence and absence appear to coeval, it seems, slowly orbiting each other like blindfolded shadow-boxers, only ever able to land glancing blows that are as phantasmic as they are fantastic. It is thus that nostalgia does not come after this or that duration or period of time. No, nostalgia comes now because it is now given in that which has forever passed. This, and nothing else, is what makes such an experience nostalgic: the pleasure it gives does not come after present pleasure, it is given as yesterday's pleasure, as past, as being-having-been, a belated enjoyment that can only be felt as something that was never experienced as such, a loss that is to be both mourned and celebrated—an experience of the bittersweet.

Toward a Spectral Cinema

Perhaps this experience of bittersweetness is why Derrida speculates about “translating” and further *re-marking* Heidegger's ontological difference as a “rhetoric of memory.”²⁹⁴ To my knowledge, this is not a *re-mark* that Derrida himself performs in any sort of focused or organized way, but he does offer some intriguing clues. In the space that remains, I would like to briefly sketch out some possible avenues for those

²⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay et al., Revised edition (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1989), 58.

clues, to the extent that they link up with the remaining chapters on cinema. Cinema is often referred to as ‘the moving image.’ It mobilizes and animates still images much in the same way that nostalgia mobilizes and (re)animates memory. When Derrida wonders out loud about translating the ontological difference into a rhetoric of memory he notes that memory “gives access to [the] difference” not by linking “the essence of a being to its past-being” (this would be standard Heideggerian orthodoxy, the proper path from *Wesen* to *Gewesenheit*) but by “stay[ing] with traces in order to ‘preserve’ them” in a manner that respects their spectral status as traces, available yet not fully or immediately present, ungraspable but not completely abandoned to pure void or absence.²⁹⁵ Instead, this memory, which he consistently associates with “life,” spectrality,” and “haunting” in works from the same period, “projects itself toward the future...constitut[ing] the ‘presence’ of the present” where memory is mobilized and energized in advance, anticipating the incoming moment of *Nachträglichkeit*, of afterwardness, in a manner that “does not resuscitate a past that had been present [but] engages the future.”²⁹⁶ Derrida’s congenital, inconsolable nostalgia remains so irreducibly propulsive because it maintains a temporal orientation toward the future, toward what is to come, an orientation that is equal parts enlivening and melancholic, wholly bittersweet—*nostos* and *algos*, held together in precarious, animating tension.

Solicited, in the present, by both past and future, this form of spectral nostalgia draws attention to their very relation, stretched between the two, propelled by an errant,

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 58.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 57-58.

roving desire that persists without recourse to a clear, determined destination (*stimmung*). That persistence facilitates the bittersweet work of mourning nostalgia is predicated upon—“neither life nor death, but the haunting of the one by the other”—and in his eulogy of Roland Barthes, itself nestled within a work the bears the title *The Work of Mourning*, Derrida describes it thusly, as a type of return or visitation: “Though it is no longer (present, living, real) its having-been-there [*avoir-été-là*, *Gewesenheit*] presently as a part of the referential or intentional structure of my relationship to [it], the return of the referent indeed takes the form of a haunting [*le retour du référent a bien la forme de la hantise*].”²⁹⁷ He is referring to the photograph here, specifically Barthes’ key distinction between *studium* and *punctum* where each term serves as a shorthand for the capacity of the photographic image to simultaneously elicit general enthusiasm by virtue of its composition (*studium*) and also pierce through that frame of reference to make an affective *re-mark* that so often initiates the nostalgic experience of haunting (*punctum*).²⁹⁸ As especially forceful and propulsive traces, photographs figure a return of the dead—the experience, for instance, of looking at a photograph one has not seen before, either of oneself or someone who only remains in memory, a form of phenomenological whiplash. Barthes explicitly prioritizes photography over the moving image in this regard, due to the former’s special ability to fix or localize presence (his own nostalgia is very

²⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, ed. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago, I.L.: University Of Chicago Press, 2003), 41, 54.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1981), *passim*.

Heideggerian in this way), but Derrida, while somewhat reticent (he rarely discusses film in itself) is less circumspect.²⁹⁹

With this in mind, then, it might be more appropriate to refer to a cinematics of memory or a spectral cinema in an effort to *re-mark* upon Derrida's desire. Like the restrained experience of nostalgia deconstruction intimates, this spectral cinema would perform its own gestures of *re-marking*, gestures unique to its form. "The cinematic experience belongs thoroughly to spectrality," Derrida suggests, and this spectrality is irreducibly linked to "the very nature of the trace."³⁰⁰ Cinema mobilizes available traces and exploits their ambivalent relationship to presence and absence—their spectrality, their haunting effect—in a manner that allows the camera and the filmmaker to 'play' with or manipulate the different temporalities nostalgia so often engenders, temporalities not always immediately available or recognized as such. Film, in essence, captures the flux and flow of time. It preserves or inscribes, as trace, the transience of temporization, and offers ostensibly passed time back up for analysis and *re-marking* in the present. The medium relies upon the antinomies of nostalgia—its ability to impel a form of active desire that can never be fully fulfilled—and approaches the possibility of their resolution without ever filling the gap. Derrida, in an interview with *Cahiers du cinéma* in the late 90s, seems to have thought that this "spectral dimension" amounted to a new kind of phenomenology not possible before the invention of the camera and the moving image.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹ For more on Barthes position on this see his *Camera Lucida*, 78ff.

³⁰⁰ Antoine de Baecque and Thierry Jousse, "Cinema and Its Ghosts: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Discourse* 37, no. 1–2 (2015), 26.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 27. "Because the spectral dimension is that of neither the living nor the dead, of neither hallucination nor perception, the modality of believing that relates to it must be analyzed in an absolutely original manner. This particular phenomenology was not possible before the movie camera...."

Cinematic traces *move*, and by *moving* they *move* us. The animating movement they generate, like that of nostalgia, is neither dead nor alive, neither completely absent nor fully present. Elsewhere, Derrida calls this “the restitution...of what is dead,”³⁰² a means of bringing into the present traces of that which has died, passed on, or passed by, a means of mourning or *re-marking*, subtended by the most inconsolable of nostalgias. This nostalgia orients by disorienting and attunes by detuning, calling into question the determination of attunement (*stimmung*) by offering its own *re-mark* (*ver-stimmung*). How might this *re-mark* make us more attuned to the cinematic effects of haunting³⁰³ and the sorts of movements or desires that haunting might galvanize? It is to these horizons that the next two chapters turn.

³⁰² Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Malden, M.A.: Polity Press, 2002), 39.

³⁰³ Cf. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 2006), 138. “We have become attuned to a certain effect of haunting. Where it seems inaccessible to intuition and concept, the purely concrete starts to resemble the ghost, just when you start to believe that you can tell them apart.”

Chapter 4: Nostalgia and the Moving Image

Cinema began in wonder, the wonder that reality can be transcribed with such immediacy. All of cinema is an attempt to perpetuate and to reinvent that sense of wonder.³⁰⁴
— Susan Sontag

Film delivers baroque art from its convulsive catalepsy. Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were.³⁰⁵
— André Bazin

It makes sense, then, to reconsider nostalgia not as blindness but as sightfulness.³⁰⁶
— Peter Fritzsche

Cinema's "Perfect Illusion"

Three days after Christmas in 1895 members of the French public wandered into an unglamorous basement billiard room known as the Salon Indien, inside the Grand Café Hotel near downtown Paris. Paying one Franc each they came to see a show. But not just any show. This show, they were told, would be unlike anything they had ever experienced. Purported to have elements of theater, vaudeville, and photography, this event would present a series of successive images—except this time they would not sit still as before. No longer static or inert, these images would *move*, as if they were living and alive. And, miraculously, they would move *in time*. These images would *move*, they would move *in time*, they would move in time *for everyone*, and they would move in time for everyone *at the same time*. “Living photographs in natural size and motion,” the

³⁰⁴ Susan Sontag, “The Decay of Cinema,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1996, sec. Magazine, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/25/magazine/the-decay-of-cinema.html>.

³⁰⁵ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?: Vol. I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, C.A.: University of California Press, 2005), 14-15.

³⁰⁶ Peter Fritzsche, “Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 1, 2001), 1592.

advertisements read.³⁰⁷ This would prove to be the first public motion picture screening.

Local inventors Auguste and Louis Lumière were set to premiere a new creation, a supposed improvement upon Thomas Edison’s kinetoscope, one that would radically democratize the viewing experience. Debuting in Brooklyn, NY just two years prior, Edison’s invention was ground-breaking, but primitive. Billed as a device that would “do for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear,” recording and reproducing visible objects in motion, the kinetoscope depended upon a solitary viewing experience.³⁰⁸ For 25 cents, the same price as vaudeville or amusement park admission, a single individual would approach the instrument, a wooden cabinet equipped with a peep-hole lens and viewfinder on top. Inside, 35mm film threaded on large rollers and spools created a continuous ribbon, approximately 50 feet in length. Gazing into the aperture, lit by an electric lamp housed under the perforated film, the viewer would ‘see’ motion, a sequence of silent images delivered at 30-40 frames per second, depicting various scenes of everyday life—a group of blacksmiths hammering at an anvil, a man sneezing, a horse and rider, brief bouts of fisticuffs, etc. This was an *illusion* of motion, to be sure, but an incredibly compelling one nonetheless.

The Lumière brothers took this burgeoning technology and extending it, bringing it to the threshold of global popularization. They called their invention the

³⁰⁷ Quoted in Martin Loiperdinger and Bernd Elzer, “Lumière’s Arrival of the Train: Cinema’s Founding Myth,” *The Moving Image* 4, no. 1 (July 26, 2004), 97.

³⁰⁸ “History of Edison Motion Pictures: Origins of Motion Pictures,” Digital Collection, from the Library of Congress, *Inventing Entertainment: The Early Motion Pictures and Sound Recordings of the Edison Companies*, [https://www.loc.gov/collections/edison-company-motion-pictures-and-sound-recordings/articles-and-essays/history-of-edison-motion-pictures/origins-of-motion-pictures/.](https://www.loc.gov/collections/edison-company-motion-pictures-and-sound-recordings/articles-and-essays/history-of-edison-motion-pictures/origins-of-motion-pictures/), accessed June 25, 2019. See also David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1996), 23.

cinématographe, from the Ancient Greek, referring to the instrument's capacity to write, record, or inscribe movement in time. It functioned as both an early motion picture camera and a film projector, allowing a sequence of successive, moving images to be shown before a gathered audience for the first time. The images themselves were larger, sharper, and better lit than Edison's. Powered by a manual hand-crank rather than electricity, the device was much smaller, and therefore more portable than its American counterpart. Finally, a motion picture show specifically designed for a gathered audience, an *illusion* of motion closely approximating the transient, temporized nature of human experience—its flux, its flow, its expansive variance and capriciousness.

A total of ten short, silent films were shown that day in the dimly lit room, ranging in length from 38-49 seconds. One—*La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* (1895)—became one of the most famous and popular Lumière productions. Shot on 35mm film at 16 frames per second, the 17-meter strip lasted only 46 seconds, projecting a total of 800 movement-insinuating frames. Like many of the Lumière brothers' early shorts—*actualités* they called them—*La Sortie* was a sort of proto-documentary, depicting the minutiae of French socio-economic life in the late 19th century, a primitive form of the type of direct, observational cinema that would come to the fore in the late 1950s and early 1960s across North America. Its setting was simple and its *mise-en-scène* uncomplicated. As its title suggests, the black and white film captured employees leaving a Lumière factory in Lyon, France, a facility that was, at the time, one of the world's leading photographic product manufacturers, specializing in instant, quick-dry gelatin

plates.³⁰⁹

As the lights dimmed further and the *cinématographe* cranked on, the gathered audience was subject to series of seemingly familiar, flickering images. Uncannily familiar, yet strangely illusory. The factory doors open and a steady flow of workers stream forth, most of them women donning long dresses and ornate hats. Most bear right once out the door, but after a few seconds another line to the left emerges. Laborers leaving work, streaming left and right, some even appearing to head straight toward the camera and, by extension, the newfound audience. Again, mostly women but soon men, too, and some riding bicycles. About a third of the way through a large dog comes bounding out the door, followed by more workers, on foot and bicycles. Around the 40-second mark the stream begins to slow and dwindle with the last frame showing the factory door closing as slowly as it opened. Audiences were astounded. Here, for the first time, they could view duration and experience as they unfold, seeing, yet again, what every instance of nostalgia longs to revisit: past experience and passing time. Soon, a marketing slogan presented itself: « *La vie prise sur le vif* » (“Life caught in the act”).³¹⁰

The original première audience consisted of just 33 people, hardly a crowd. But word of mouth proved immensely successful and soon people came far and wide to catch a glimpse of these living photographs. In the weeks following the premiere the Salon Indien accommodated up to 2,500 curious individuals per day, despite the Lumière

³⁰⁹ Cf. Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*, 2nd revised edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.

³¹⁰ Loiperdinger and Elzer, “Lumière’s Arrival of the Train,” 97.

brothers' belief that their new device would likely never catch on.³¹¹ How might those original audience members in Paris have described the seemingly magical experience of viewing living, *moving* photographs? Early accounts and initial critical reviews provide some sense of just how moving these moving images turned out to be. One media outlet commended the screening with surprising prescience, offering both exaltation and circumspection. "Whatever the scene thus taken," the French newspaper *Le Radical* reported, "and however large the number of individuals...you see them *again* natural [in]

³¹¹ The Lumière brothers did not see much utility in the explosion of interest that occurred following the initial premiere. When Georges Méliès, an artist and stage magician who attended an early screening, approached them with an offer to buy the *cinématographe* he was met with stark, nearly exasperated and now, tragic, cynicism. "It [the *cinématographe*] can be exploited for a certain time as a scientific curiosity," Auguste Lumière is purported to have said, "but, apart from that, it has no commercial future whatsoever." See, for example, Robert Brasillach, *The History of Motion Pictures* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1938), 10. Several years later the brothers shuttered the filmmaking branches of their factories, turning their interest to color photography instead of moving pictures. Auguste and Louis Lumière never lived to see the full scope of how wrongheaded such as statement might be, and they never could have predicted cinema's relatively quick rise as an ascendant form of entertainment, cultural expression, and popular art. Méliès, who always had a certain flair for the fantastical and the illusory, went on to become a technical pioneer in the field, developing new tools for special effects, narrative plotting, and storyboarding. He produced hundreds of films over the course of his career, including the seminal *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902), one of the first films to contain elements of surrealism and science fiction. In 1905, just ten years after the Salon Indien première, the first theater fully devoted to cinema opened its doors in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a precursor to the extravagant, lavish movie palaces of the 1920s-1930s. That same decade feature-length films began to emerge and by the late teens-early 20s American filmmakers like D.W. Griffith and Cecile B. DeMille solidified the institutional and commercial status of what we now call "Hollywood" with immensely popular works like *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916), *The Squaw Man* (1914), and *The Ten Commandments* (1923). "Talkies"—films that synchronized sound and image—arrived on the mainstream scene around this same time and by 1939 a new, vibrant technique called technicolor was showcased in successful films like *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939), constituting a final, triumphant rebuke to the Lumière brothers, both of whom were still living at the time. In 1997, almost 100 years to the day after the first Salon Indien premiere, James Cameron's *Titanic* went in wide-release, crushing all expectations and earning a staggering \$2.1 billion in the international box-office. It remained the highest-grossing film in history for a mere 12 years and now sits at number three on the list. Quite the commercial future, indeed. For more on Auguste Lumière's fateful interaction with Georges Méliès see David Thomson, *The Big Screen: The Story of the Movies* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2012), 15ff; and Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 1-2.

size...with perspective...a *perfect illusion* of real life.”³¹² The Lumière brothers’ moving pictures re-presented objects, placing them in view yet *again*, but through an aesthetic vehicle of illusory artifice yet to be fully recognized as such. Temporized experience, hitherto withdrawn into the recesses of time and memory, gathered together and offered up for reflection and meditation—the marvel of being able to look at what we cannot see, as Jean-Luc Godard puts it.³¹³ “Speech has already been collected and reproduced,” the review continues, echoing the Edisonian parallel between the kinoscope and the phonograph. “Now, life is collected and reproduced.” Nearly 70 years later, in 1960, André Bazin, an early film theorist and co-founder of the preeminent *Cahiers du cinéma*, reiterates this sentiment. Developing his influential argument for cinematic realism, Bazin compares film to the ancient practice of Egyptian mummification. Both suggest an almost quasi-religious use that “lays bare [a] primordial function...the *preservation* of life by a *representation* of life.”³¹⁴ Another mainstream review of the Salon Indien premiere makes this connection even more explicit, casting cinema’s potential in compensatory, almost salvific terms. “When these cameras are made available to the public,” *La Poste* exclaimed, “when everyone can photograph their dear ones, no longer in a motionless form but in their movements, their activity, their familiar gestures, with

³¹² Quoted in Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, trans. Ben Brewster (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 20. Italics mine.

³¹³ This is one of Godard’s many pithy voice-over utterances in his massive *Histoire(s) du cinéma* project. This one comes during the first chapter, *Toutes les histoires (IA)*, when Godard is commenting on a juxtaposition of George Stevens use of 16mm color film in the Auschwitz and Ravensbrück death camps, Elizabeth Taylor’s ascendancy in Stevens’ *A Place in the Sun* (1951), and Giotto’s *Resurrection (Noli me tangere)*. As is typical with Godard, there are always many layers. For more on this see Richard I. Suchenski’s reading of the sequence in his *Projections of Memory: Romanticism, Modernism, and the Aesthetics of Film* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016), 143-201.

³¹⁴ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?: Vol. I*, ed. and trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 9-10.

words on their lips, *death will have ceased to be absolute.*"³¹⁵ *Le Radical* suggests a similar possibility, noting that "it will be possible to see one's loved ones *active* long after they have passed away."³¹⁶ These early critical evaluations are incredibly evocative, suggesting that technological innovations in popular art might finally be able to transcend, at least in part and for a brief moment, some of the most intractable limitations of the human condition: death and time.

This chapter takes the forms of longing and desire expressed in these statements as its major point of departure, exploring what Alessia Ricciardi calls the "inherently nostalgic function of film."³¹⁷ To the extent that this function attends to conditions of cultural and experiential belatedness, it finds initial expression in *Le Radical* as a *perfect illusion* of propulsive experience and animated life. Throughout I maintain that the illusory status of cinema remains 'perfect,' necessary, and inescapable against the backdrop of temporized experience explored in the last chapter, an experience whose character is always both ahead and behind (in time), never fully coinciding with itself to attain consolidated unity. Cinema aestheticizes this intrinsic belatedness in ways that closely correlate with the trace-structure contained in Derrida's *re-marks* upon the circuitous timing of *Nachträglichkeit*, the temporality of afterwardness, and his all too brief speculations about a rhetoric of memory, what I called a cinematics of memory or a type of spectral cinema near the end of the last chapter. Ricciardi's comment about the nostalgic function of film gets at this connection, as does the birth of cinema itself as

³¹⁵ Quoted in Burch, *Life to Those Shadows*, 21.

³¹⁶ Ibid. Italics mine.

³¹⁷ Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 141.

those early Lumière screenings—along with their reception, then and now—illustrate. I unfold these connections throughout as a means of reconsidering cinema’s relationship to nostalgia and setting the stage for my reading of Terrence Malick’s work in the closing chapter. I begin below by taking up Fredric Jameson’s notion of the “nostalgia film,” a useful conceptual category but one that remains constrained and cannot account for alternative views of nostalgia. This necessitates an examination of wide-ranging secondary literature on Jameson as well as certain antecedents in philosophy and film studies like Plato and Bazin. It also requires a re-evaluation of Jameson’s primary foil, George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973), a work widely regarded as the first and most influential nostalgia film. Whereas Jameson takes the film to be symptomatic of broader cultural diagnoses, I reposition it as more nuanced and complex, a work of cinematic *re-marking* illustrative of both the potential of film as an art form and the productive, propulsive understanding of nostalgia that forms the overall basis of this project.

The Lumière brothers and those early Salon Indien screenings remain so significant, in part, because they provide us with the precise moment when the powers of visual art began to develop a mode of expression equal to the temporal objects it aims to represent: images that do justice to the episodic nature of human experience by *moving* in and across time. Film, by virtue of its formal features, offers up images commensurate with this experience, images of passed and passing time. It transmits—and mediates—personal and cultural memory as well as their attendant histories, offering time and experience back up to us for reflection through the *perfect illusion* of the moving artifice. Because of its illusory status, cinema highlights, intensifies, and makes productive

temporal use of the long-standing tension between referent and representation, between the real and its image. For example, *Démolition d'un mur* (1895), another early Lumière picture and ostensible documentary, depicts Auguste Lumière overseeing the demolition of a factory wall. During one screening, by happenstance, an unsuspecting projectionist accidentally displayed the film while it was being rewound, screening it backwards, in effect.³¹⁸ Audiences were shocked and exhilarated by this, a moving picture that willfully exploited their subjective experience of time, fragmenting and reversing linear temporality. The Lumières capitalized on this and began showing the film in reverse as a standard practice. This sort of technique is now commonplace and has been used to some narrative success in films like Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000), Jean-Luc Godard's short *De l'origine du XXIe siècle pour moi* (2004), and Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufmann's award-winning *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004). In its earliest stages, however, film had yet to fully mobilize its potential achievements and limitations; likewise, audiences had yet to fully develop collective viewing habits and clear expectations of the form. But as the reception of early works like *Démolition* shows, audiences did exhibit some nascent understanding of film's power to represent, and in this case manipulate, ordinary, successive perceptions of time, offering up the movement of temporality itself as an object for reflection. This manipulation closely correlates with a fantasy that strikes at the heart of nostalgic desire: the wish to see time regained, to overturn its seemingly irreversible flow.

³¹⁸ *Démolition d'un mur* can be view here, around the 7:20 mark.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuG56syR19k>.

“Death will have ceased to be absolute,” says *La Poste*. The impossible desire to overcome or intervene within the conditions of temporality—and, by extension, the reality of death—forms the basis of nostalgic experience as we have seen. The drive to make death (and time) less absolute persists because and in spite of the partial failures it incurs. I say partial here because if we follow the link Bazin makes between mummification and filmmaking, some objects of nostalgic desire attain a second, re-animated life by virtue of aesthetic representation. In this respect, cinema mobilizes the productive ambiguities between life and death, movement and stasis, explored in chapter one vis-à-vis live burial, generating a type of spectral existence, both real and not, *a perfect illusion of real life*, to use *Le Radical*’s memorable phrase once again. Film is unique in this regard because it generates a representation of time, an image of duration, contingency, and change. But the representation is not the thing itself, as the phenomenologists constantly remind us.³¹⁹ The ecstatic, enraptured Lumière reviews in *Le Radical* and *La Poste* offer a more romantic take on this phenomenon, the tension between the real and its aesthetic representation in and across time. But these are not the only critical accounts. Standing in contrast is someone like Maxim Gorky, a Russian critic who lambasted Lumière films for what he took to be their lifelessness, their inability to adequately re-present the living objects to which they refer. Expressing disdain for the films’ lack of both sound and color, Gorky refers to the movie theater as a

³¹⁹ This is a key tenet of phenomenology that virtual every thinker since Kant has dealt with in their own idiom (Husserl, Heidegger, Derrida, etc.). For more on how this specific issue surfaces in film—which is adjacent to the concerns of this chapter but extends beyond its purview see, for example, Vivian Carol Sobchack, *The Address of the Eyes: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992) and Spencer Shaw, *Film Consciousness: From Phenomenology to Deleuze* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2008).

kingdom of phantoms, a chimera that produces only specters, generating “the movement of shadows.”³²⁰ These provocations—and their resonances in philosophy and film theory—will be more fully analyzed below. For now, it will suffice to simply take note of the undecidability exhibited by the popular French press, on the one hand, and more circumspect figures like Gorky, on the other. Film produces compelling representations of life, of the real, but they retain an eerie, haunting quality. We could say that they stand in or stand as, but we can’t because they don’t *stand* at all, they *move*. Therein lies the rub, the tension between real authenticity and inauthentic mimicry intrinsic to the image.

“Life is collected and reproduced,” *Le Radical* tell us, “a *perfect illusion* of real life.” Cinema may be an *illusion*, but it remains a *perfect* one to the extent that it mediates past and passing time, offering them back up to us for reflection and *re-marking*. Objects are seen yet again, collected and reproduced; their representations act as a *perfect illusion* of the real. The tension here between collection, preservation, or transcription and the duplicative connotations of a word like ‘re-produce’—to exhibit, generate, or present a second time, to see or *regain* something (back) *again* through an image—is as old as philosophy itself, hearkening back to Plato’s cave. *Le Radical* places this sentiment at the birth of cinema disclosing the same animating tensions intrinsic to nostalgic experience: a desire, both propulsive and insatiable; a feeling, both bitter and sweet, a preservation by means of representation, as Bazin would have it. Together, tension and time suggest a certain remove, a degree of separation from the real, the so-called original, suggesting a

³²⁰ Maxim Gorky, “The Lumière Cinematograph,” in Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and Karen J. Shepherdson, eds., *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2004), 7-8. This text can also be viewed here: <https://www.mcsweeney.net/articles/contest-winner-36-black-and-white-and-in-color>.

modification of the original, or, as we saw with Derrida in the last chapter, a supplement to or *re-mark* upon it. To reproduce or represent something is to augment or amplify it, to highlight or enhance some aspect of what Walter Benjamin calls its aura.³²¹ Like experience itself, the gesture retains a strange additive quality, which is why *Le Radical's* characterization of the cinematograph as a “perfect illusion” is so appropriate and suggestive.

Fredric Jameson and the Nostalgia Film

Certain elements of nostalgia may have been present at the birth of cinema, but it is not until the 1970s-1980s—following the so-called golden age of classic Hollywood cinema—that the notion of “nostalgia film” emerges as a formal conceptual category. And, of course, the timing here is not incidental; it is coeval with the “nostalgia boom” discussed in chapter one and the rise of high theory, in both its textual and filmic forms. During this time the focus is less on the sort of formal and temporal features of film that initially dazzled the early Lumière audiences. Those elements still exert some tacit force, to be sure, but the emphasis moves more toward the types of stories that are told, their setting in time, and, especially, how they are conveyed cinematically, i.e., how they re-

³²¹ For Benjamin, the aura that adheres to any work of art connotes a quality of presence and distance that, by definition, cannot be communicated through most modes of aesthetic reproduction. He discusses this notion most prominently in “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” Both essays are included in his *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1969). For an illuminating critical discussions of this concept and its use in cinema see Miriam Hansen’s work, particular her “Benjamin, Cinema and Experience: ‘The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,’” *New German Critique*, no. 40 (1987): 179–224; Miriam Bratu Hansen, “Benjamin’s Aura,” *Critical Inquiry* 34, no. 2 (2008): 336–75; and, more recently her *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

present a referent. Fredric Jameson stands a pivotal figure in this regard, largely responsible for the proliferation of nostalgia-related discourse in film studies due to his discussion of the “nostalgia film.”³²²

For Jameson, the nostalgia film exhibits the same features as other contemporaneous art forms that position the artwork more as a commodity or consumable product. In this sense, aesthetic production reflects the broader cultural logic of what Ernest Mandel first called late capitalism in 1975, a new postwar epoch that succeeds

³²² It is worth noting that Jameson is not the first to deploy or coin the “nostalgia film” category. That designation belongs to Marc Le Sueur, who I discuss more fully below. Jameson is, however, the first to popularize it, establishing durable conceptual coordinates. The enormity of his influence in this regard cannot be underestimated. As Michael D. Dwyer puts it, his analysis of the way nostalgia functions not only in film but mass culture generally “has become almost omnipresent in scholarly work on the subject. See Michael D. Dwyer, *Back to the Fifties: Nostalgia, Hollywood Film, and Popular Music of the Seventies and Eighties* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2015), 8. Similarly, Christine Sprengler, in her *Screening Nostalgia*, notes that his definition of the nostalgia film category “has nurtured a full continuum of scholarly literature on cinematic nostalgia” that “tend[s] to be dominated by the attributes assigned to it by Jameson.” See Christine Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York, N.Y.: Berghahn Books, 2009), 68. In addition to Dwyer and Sprengler’s own interventions, that continuum includes work that continues to apply Jameson’s conceptual apparatus like M. Keith Booker’s, *Postmodern Hollywood: What’s New in Film and Why It Makes Us Feel So Strange* (Westport, C.T.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007) and Jason Sperb, *Flickers of Film: Nostalgia in the Time of Digital Cinema* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2015) among others. Linda Hutcheon famously leads the more critical charge. See, for instance, her *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2003) and *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2003). I delve a bit deeper into Hutcheon’s critique of Jameson, and its yield, below. Additional work in this vein includes: Anne Friedberg, “Les Flâneurs Du Mal (I): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” *PMLA* 106, no. 3 (1991): 419–431; Barbara Creed, “From Here to Modernity,” in *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television, and Video*, ed. Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (New York, N.Y.: Arnold, 1997), 43–54; Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2003); Vera Dika, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses Of Nostalgia* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Amelia DeFalco, “A Double-Edged Longing: Nostalgia, Melodrama, and Todd Haynes’s Far from Heaven,” *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (September 1, 2004): 26–39; Grainge Paul, “Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling,” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 23, no. 1 (March 22, 2004): 27–34; Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2007); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (Routledge, 2012); Catherine Constable, *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood’s Aesthetics* (Columbia University Press, 2015); Frances Smith, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes: Re-Reading Gender in the ‘Nostalgia Film,’” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, March 7, 2018.

more industrial or monopolistic configurations by virtue of its multinational character and, especially, the ways in which it both encourages and depends upon mass media and globalized consumption.³²³ Jameson's project since at least the late 1980s involves excavating the extent to which late capitalism structures socio-political life. That endeavor also entails a rigorous investigation into how artworks and new modes of aesthetic production remain constrained by its all-encompassing conditions. Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980), for example, cannot measure up to Vincent Van Gogh's *A Pair of Shoes* (1886) in Jameson's view because it functions only as a representation of commodity fetishism. As such, it cannot support a properly hermeneutic moment that might allow us to reconstruct its initial historical situation and gain some greater awareness of our own. By contrast, Van Gogh's work encourages that moment and "can be taken as a clue or symptom for some vaster reality which replaces it as its ultimate truth."³²⁴ Pop artworks like Warhol's do emerge as symptoms for Jameson, but they cannot speak beyond those conditions. Such works are emblematic of "a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new superficiality in the most literal sense."³²⁵ This shallowness stems from "a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" that contributes to what he famously calls the weakening, enfeeblement, or eclipse of historicity in the late twentieth century.³²⁶

³²³ Cf. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (New York, N.Y.: Verso, 1999). See also, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³²⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 8.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. See also Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013), 179.

Jameson takes up cinema as an especially illustrative example of this phenomenon and a key symptom of the broader contradictions and antagonisms endemic to late capitalism. Because it is produced under the auspices of mass consumption, what he calls the “nostalgia film” functions as a recent iteration of commodity fetishism. It conjures the artistic codes and associations of a particular period or historical moment—the 1930s, the 1950s, and so on—but without clear historical grounding. This grounding, and the awareness that issues from it, constitute what Jameson calls historicity, i.e., a sense of and relationship to the present “which somehow defamiliarizes it and allows us the distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective.”³²⁷ By favoring a superficial history of aesthetic stylization over the depth and richness of, say, the historical novel, Jameson’s preferred counterweight to commodified art, the nostalgia film contributes to general loss or enfeeblement of historicity that he takes to be symptomatic of the broader cultural logic of late capitalism.³²⁸ Nostalgia films thus function as a deceptive representations that ultimately engender a form of false consciousness unable to grapple with its own moment in history, a sort of abdication or evacuation of the present. They accomplish this by means of stylistic free association, amalgamating, in aggregate, a set of glossy simulacra and glitzy images that convey surface-level pastness, gratifying collective fantasies by offering up the past as yet another commodity for mass consumption rather than an occasion for

³²⁷ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 284.

³²⁸ This appeal to the historical novel and, in some cases, high modernism as its recent extension, is a common refrain across Jameson’s work. In *Postmodernism* and his discussion of cinema it is the work of Sir Walter Scott, which provides (or used to provide) a contemplation of the past that supports a renewed sense of reading the present as history within a genetic series. Cf. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 284-286ff.

critical reflection. Within this new culture of the image all the aesthetic styles and artistic conventions once rooted in specific periods or historical moments are rendered omnipresent and made available for random re-ordering and cannibalization with impunity. Nostalgia films, with their enticing glossy images, construct a phantasmic, unreal version of the past, assembling its pop associations through a *mélange* of free-floating surfaces that connote a shallow veneer without depth or substance. They act as mesmerizing *illusions*, in other words, but not in the sense meant by *Le Radical*. Instead, they augur a moment where the “the world momentarily loses its depth and threatens to become a glossy skin, a *stereoscopic illusion*, a rush of filmic images without density.”³²⁹

Jameson’s general interest in reading through surface in search of depth is informed by psychoanalytic insights, Marxist dialectics, and the critique of mass culture put forward by Frankfurt School theorists like Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. He situates texts, films, and other aesthetic works as objects in need of decoding to ferret out symptoms of broader cultural pathologies. Jameson’s influential 1981 work *The Political Unconscious* sets the compass for these efforts and provides an initial outline of the interpretive schema that guides his later analyses, including his evaluation of “nostalgia film.” As he puts in that pathbreaking text, proper interpretation involves, or presumes, “some mechanism of mystification of repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretative code.”³³⁰ This *a priori*

³²⁹ Ibid., 34. Italics mine.

³³⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York,

posture of suspicion and incredulity—and the commitment to depth over surface that issues from it—resembles the forms of symptomatic or paranoid reading discussed in chapter one above. Unlike the affect theorists and scholars of post-critique, Jameson here outlines an eminently diagnostic program supported by values and critical habits of mind that lend themselves to a posture of detachment, distance, and disillusionment. If writers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Rita Felski display an interest in what Susan Sontag first called an “erotics of art,” i.e., an attention to the generative modes of attachment, desire, and relationality induced by artworks even and especially under compromised conditions of existence, then Jameson is more interested in rendering those modes problematic precisely because they remain compromised and complicit in the larger machinations of late capitalism.³³¹ Something is lost in those machinations, he thinks, and that loss must be overcome.

Others have noticed this too. Writers like Susannah Radstone, Catherine Constable, and, especially, Linda Hutcheon have pointed out that a deep sense of loss and decline permeates Jameson’s narration of this new dominant cultural logic and suffuses his assessment of cinematic nostalgia in particular. Constable compares Jameson’s discourse to that of Jean Baudrillard, whose pioneering theory of the simulacrum no

N.Y.: Routledge, 2013), 45 To use the deconstructive register I have been developing throughout this project we might say that Jameson does indeed perform a *re-mark* upon his objects of analysis (in this same passage quoted above, for example, he refers to proper interpretation as a type of “strong rewriting”). But unlike the Derridean *re-mark*—which intensifies the play through which generative modes of attachment, desire, and relationality are constructed, negotiated, and managed—Jameson’s more muscular interpretive approach problematizes those modes in an effort to compensate for a perceived loss of depth.

³³¹ This line from Sontag comes at the very end of her famous 1964 essay “Against Interpretation” which, in part, is devoted to a rigorous critique of the interpretive habits taken up by thinkers like Jameson. See her Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2013), 14.

doubt informs Jameson's thinking, and takes both figures to be emblematic of more nihilistic assessments of so-called postmodernism.³³² This positioning, she argues, "seriously circumscribes the aesthetic possibility of postmodern Hollywood film" as it emerges alongside the 70s summer blockbuster and beyond.³³³ Underneath that circumscription Constable detects a lament for "the end of modernism...the decline of the individual subject and the concomitant death of art as a form of personal vision," all of which signal "the end of the possibility of originality in aesthetic production."³³⁴ Radstone tends to agree, highlighting how "Jameson's descriptions of pastiche [the practice of assembling recycled images] and nostalgia convey an overwhelming sense of entrapment" characterized by attenuated realism.³³⁵ Along with Hutcheon, she connects this sense of entrapment to his mourning the end of modernism and attributes it to "Jameson's nostalgia for that depth of perspective lost to postmodern nostalgia and granted, on his terms, by Marxist historical consciousness."³³⁶ Hutcheon herself notices a similar valuation at work in Jameson's discourse, observing that when something is deemed nostalgic "nostalgia is meant to be taken negatively as regressive," a type of privation or loss that negates the possibility of enriching or substantive aesthetic

³³² Cf. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, M.I.: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

³³³ Catherine Constable, *Postmodernism and Film: Rethinking Hollywood's Aesthetics* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2015), 39.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

³³⁵ Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2007), 135.

³³⁶ Susannah Radstone, "Nostalgia: Home-Comings and Departures," *Memory Studies* 3, no. 3 (June 30, 2010), 189. See also Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," *Methods for the Study of Literature as Cultural Memory* 30, no. 6 (January 1, 2000), 203; and Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2003), 175-177.

representation.³³⁷ This view will be discussed a bit further below with regard to the merits of intertextuality, but the point here is that Hutcheon, like Radstone and Constable, complicates Jameson's more negative assessment of nostalgia by arguing that it ultimately depends on his own nostalgia for previous, once dominant modes of aesthetic and historical representation. As she puts it, construing "this loss of the modernist unique, individual style as a negative, as an imprisoning of the text in the past" prevents Jameson from viewing it differently, "as a liberating challenge to a definition of subjectivity and creativity that has for too long ignored the role of history in art and thought."³³⁸ This line of thought furthers the view I have been developing across this project, that nostalgia does indeed respond to instances of loss and discontinuity, but can provide generative means of engagement when decoupled from a dynamics of negativity, regression, and generalized pathology.

By equating nostalgia with negativity, loss, and regression as Hutcheon et al. suggest, Jameson's approach closely coheres with familiar appraisals that treat nostalgia as a form of pathology, on the one hand, while tacitly indulging it on the other. In chapter one we saw how this attitude informs the work of Christopher Lasch, who constructs a clear binary between older forms of memory and puerile, symptomatic nostalgic while lamenting, in a nostalgic key, the loss of the former. Modernist modes of historical representation provide clear access to the past, in his view, but when they are lost or in decline he resorts, in an unmarked way, to the phantoms and fantasies of nostalgia as

³³⁷ Hutcheon, "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern," 203.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

mourning strategy. Even Johannes Hofer, who introduced nostalgic experience to formal conceptualization, cannot see as anything other than what Jameson would no doubt call a surface symptom, i.e., an indication of some deeper condition of affliction or derangement—it fails to become legible otherwise. And, of course, Heidegger, despite his key insights in thematizing time and its affective implications, develops an entire philosophy tinged with a surreptitious for presence and primeval un-concealment. Each of these valuations take nostalgia to be an immediate manifestation of some deeper, more fundamental malady, a disease of the imagination or a misplaced sense of awareness. By positioning contemporary forms of aestheticized nostalgia as a less-than-desirable outcome of late capitalist culture, Jameson situates himself within a formidable tradition that adopts Hofer’s diagnostic frame of reference. As we have seen, that frame and the discursive habits of mind that buttress it all too easily occlude alternative views of nostalgia that complicate its status as unthinking illusion or pathologized fantasy.

Now, to be fair, Jameson himself seemed to have sensed the possibility of an alternative view albeit in some limited sense. As early as 1969 he refers to a “nostalgia conscious of itself” with reference to Walter Benjamin, a type of political stimulus that honors the future through lucid meditation on the past.³³⁹ And, over two decades later, in the same text that positions the nostalgia film as vacuous, superficial, and cannibalistic, Jameson allows some room for “postnostalgia” films like *Something Wild* (1986) and *Blue Velvet* (1986) that might, as he puts it, engage in “some properly allegorical

³³⁹ Fredric Jameson, “Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia,” *Salmagundi*, no. 10/11 (1969), 68.

processing of the past.”³⁴⁰ But even these instances still remain constrained and can only provide the preconditions for a heightened sense of historical consciousness. As Constable observes, “the sole distinction between the post-nostalgia film and the nostalgia film is that the former overtly fail to delineate the present, while the latter unwittingly obliterate it.”³⁴¹ The broader narrative of loss and decline identified by Radstone and Hutcheon thus shows how “the logic of negation that structures Jameson’s overarching aesthetic model prevents him from capitalizing on his own positive insights.”³⁴² In this context, the assessment of nostalgia films as empty and specious makes it exceedingly difficult to detect moments of disruption or meaningful engagement, however small or provisional. Is there space for a more capacious understanding of the nostalgia film?

***American Graffiti* as a Nostalgia Film**

George Lucas’s *American Graffiti* (1973) stands as Jameson’s prime example, a sort of nostalgia film ur-text that exhibits the superficial waning of historicity he sees as endemic to the new culture of the moving image. Other prominent films from the same period also figure into his analysis, including Roman Polanski’s *Chinatown* (1974), Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Conformist* (1970), and Lawrence Kasdan’s *Body Heat* (1980). But the full force of his critique is reserved for Lucas’s first major success, an unlikely but massive summer blockbuster that jumpstarted his career, ultimately enabling

³⁴⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 287.

³⁴¹ Constable, *Postmodernism and Film*, 66.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

him to fund his long-imagined dream, a small space opera pet project that would later become the generation-spanning, multibillion dollar *Star Wars* franchise. For Jameson, *American Graffiti* is all surface and no depth, opting, in the main, for style over substance, lacking adequate grounding despite its basis in Lucas's own personal history, his teenage experience with the cruising and rock 'n roll subcultures in his hometown of Modesto, California.

Set in Modesto in the early 60s, *American Graffiti* marks an interesting, even abrupt point of departure from Lucas's more somber, dystopian science fiction debut, *THX 1138*, released two years prior. Though the material for this more intimate, semi-autobiographical work had been gestating for some time, the story goes that on the set of *THX 1138* producer Francis Ford Coppola challenged Lucas to make his next film more "warm and fuzzy" to garner mainstream appeal.³⁴³ The wager worked and Lucas found himself turning to his own past with a twinge nostalgia. "Cruising was gone," he remembers, "and I felt compelled to document the whole experience."³⁴⁴ The first nostalgia film thus highlights a certain temporal discontinuity and takes memory *qua* mourning as its main impetus. Created out of an explicit desire to document a felt loss, it strives to preserve and remember through acts of artistic recollection and reminiscence, a means of working in and through a felt loss with all the bittersweetness it entails.

The film opens with a still shot of Mel's Drive-In, a classic American fast-food restaurant chain founded in 1947 in San Francisco. It remains the backdrop for an

³⁴³ Marcus Hearn, *The Cinema of George Lucas* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2005), 42.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

opening credits sequence buoyed by the rockabilly guitar and frenetic rhythm section of Bill Haley and His Comets' 1955 hit "Rock Around the Clock," a single that all but solidified rock 'n roll's status as a legitimate mainstream genre. The combination of the static frame—a photograph, in essence—and the era-specific song, the first of over 40 used diegetically throughout the film, suggest something of a familiar theme: the disjunctive tension between movement and stasis across the passage of time. This tension, which is intrinsic to both nostalgia and cinema as Hofer's dissertation and the early Lumière pictures indicate, evinces a desire to capture, freeze, or preserve something that cannot, by definition, be 'caught,': transient experience subject to the contingent and capricious conditions of time. Mel's Drive-In functions as a sort of rendezvous point or hangout spot throughout the film. Various characters end up at the diner, either by choice or happenstance, to meet others or simply pass the time. Some stay, some leave, either together or alone, as different social groups morph and coalesce, reforming themselves in light of changing circumstances. The loose plot follows a motley crew of close friends and recent high school graduates over the course of a single night. Facing the inevitable end of their time together, these friends quite literally 'rock around the clock' one last time before dispersing into their unknown futures.

Much of the action centers around obligatory adolescent rites of passage. Teenage dating rituals, moving away for college, and the potential guilt and shame that can accompany never leaving home all feature prominently and are punctuated by moments of combined euphoria and dread (scoring alcohol as a minor, facing the impending breakup of a high school relationship, the dangerously cool practice of drag-racing at

dawn, etc.). Curt Henderson (Richard Dreyfuss) and Steve Bolander (Ron Howard) are scheduled to leave the next morning, traveling to the east coast to embark on a new journey at an unnamed university. Curt receives a scholarship from the local Moose Lodge which plunges him into a mode of melancholic, nostalgic reminiscence. He spends most of the night mulling over his trajectory and questioning whether he should actually leave. After a stint at the high school sock hop and a brief run-in with “The Pharaohs,” a gang of local greasers, Curt sets out to find the beautiful blonde girl driving a white ’56 Thunderbird he spotted early in the evening. Steve dates Curt’s sister, Laurie Henderson (Cindy Williams). They attend the sock hop with Curt and a series of back-and-forth conversations portend the unraveling of their relationship with Steve’s impending departure. Laurie approaches the breakup with a sense of gloom, while Steve disingenuously redefines the scenario not as a breakup but as a chance to see other people and ultimately strengthen their relationship.

Terry “The Toad” Fields (Charles Martin Smith) is the quintessential geek seeking comeuppance but lacking sex appeal and an alluring but undefinable sense of “cool.” Early on in the film, at Mel’s, Steve gives Toad his ’58 Impala to borrow until Christmas while he is away at college, an indication of each character’s class position (Steve owns an enviable car and has no qualms letting it go for months at a time; Toad can’t even afford a clunker as his initial arrival at Mel’s in a beat-up moped demonstrates). Toad spends the majority of the night engaging in practices presumably inaccessible to him before due to lack of mobility: cruising, drinking, and developing the gumption to date. At one point he picks up the free-spirited Debbie Dunham (Candy

Clark) and the two drag the streets together in Steve's car. Finally, John Milner (Paul Le Mat), acts as both the film's affective center and its source of knowing nostalgic subjectivity. John is the self-proclaimed and undefeated drag-race king of Modesto. He spends the night cruising and inadvertently babysitting 16-year-old Carol Morrison, played by Mackenzie Phillips, an absolute revelation who makes the most of her unfortunately meager amount of screen time. John is annoyed by Carol but she remains playfully fond of him. As the night progresses one of the film's more developed and complex relationships begins to unfold, where the entrenched, nearly bitter form of nostalgia embodied by John is made more self-aware and self-reflexive by accepting its losses and confronting the possibility of a future that viewers in 1973 know will be more Carol's than his own. As the film commences, this initial ensemble—Curt, Steve, Laurie, Toad, and John—meet at Mel's around dusk and immediately disperse, reuniting again at sunrise to witness John's treacherous if not tragic race against a new, debonair challenger, Bob Falga, played by a young, unknown but rising actor at the time named Harrison Ford.

The disparate, meandering vignettes that compose *American Graffiti's* overall structure—its assemblage of small, discrete narrative elements into a single plot—were a new (and risky) innovation for commercial motion pictures at the time. In a 'making of' feature included in the 1998 DVD release of the film, Lucas reveals that this method was so controversial that many studios, including Paramount, Columbia, and 20th Century Fox, initially passed on the project. Even Universal Pictures, which agreed to distribute the film in part because Coppola was attached, said the move was "impossible" and

encouraged Lucas to adhere to classic Hollywood conventions (a single overarching narrative rather than four loosely connected stories intercut). Lucas refused and now this style has itself become a dominant convention in modern film and television.³⁴⁵ Each individual story and narrative element is set against a highly aestheticized backdrop of shimmering, deeply saturated images, a backdrop Jameson characterizes as illusory, fashion-plate glossiness. Period-specific clothing, hairstyles, and popular music all act as references, signifiers, and archival traces of the era—instances of *graffiti*, in other words, that constitute one node of American cultural memory, documenting its effects and *re-marking* upon its transmission. “No sociological treatise could duplicate the movie’s success in remembering exactly how it was to be alive at that cultural instant,” wrote the late Roger Ebert, referring to the film’s re-creation of the overall world, style, and mood of the late 50s and early 60s.³⁴⁶ This layering of different signifiers and cultural references reaches its zenith with the music and automobiles, Lucas’s own lost objects of personal nostalgic desire. Sleek, sporty hotrods—Chevy Impalas, Ford Thunderbirds and Deuce Coupés—with bright, primary colors and whirring engines evoke period sentiment more than perhaps any other stylistic element save Wolfman Jack’s iconic disc jockey narration streaming from car radios with near ecstatic constancy.

In Jameson’s view, *American Graffiti* provides no sense of depth or perspective precisely because of this surface-level stylization. All the period-specific detail Lucas provides in his series of Altmanesque vignettes situate the past as a mere set of

³⁴⁵ Special thanks to Mike Richard for drawing my attention to this documentary feature.

³⁴⁶ Roger Ebert, “American Graffiti Movie Review (1973) accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/american-graffiti-1973>.

consumable, retro images. According to Jameson, the film does not suggest a working through loss so much as it fetishizes loss and lost objects through new modes of aesthetic production. The film, in this view, does not re-present the past so much as it conveys ‘pastness’ through the glossy qualities of the illusory image,³⁴⁷ recapturing the allure of a period on the precipice of profound countercultural change and near total socio-political upheaval.³⁴⁸ He maintains that the film does not account for these historical realities by withholding any sort of comment on their events, events that continue to have present effects. Lucas never really complicates the privileged lost reality he so lovingly reconstructs, leaving affective attachments to its objects and values wholly uninterrogated. In Jameson’s hands, the film becomes a microcosm for nostalgia in general, a feeling that he takes to be inseparable from its more noxious effects and connotations. This “insensible colonization of the present,”³⁴⁹ as he calls it, valorizes a pseudo-past created for the expressed purpose of mass consumption through pastiche, simulacra, and stylistic free association. Because it remains so enfeebled, *American Graffiti* can only confirm recognizable, pre-existing historical stereotypes at the level of narrative and form, completely lacking any basis upon which to contradict, nuance, or otherwise complicate those conventions and clichés.³⁵⁰

In outlining his theory of the nostalgia film vis-a-vis *American Graffiti*, Jameson does not engage previous work that lends itself to alternate readings. Writing in the

³⁴⁷ In several instances Jameson refers to this as “the cult of the glossy image.” Cf. Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 116. See also Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19. See also Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, 179.

³⁴⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 20.

³⁵⁰ Cf. Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (New York, NY: Verso, 1998), 10; 130.

Journal of Popular Film four short years after Lucas's release and ten years before Jameson's *Postmodernism*, Marc Le Sueur coins the term "nostalgia film," largely in reference to *American Graffiti*. He carries the category in a different direction than Jameson, noting the presence of "surface realism" in the film, a stylistic choice that willfully muddles the way things were and the way they are preserved and circulate in culture.³⁵¹ Jameson rejects these surfaces for reasons outlined above, but Le Sueur suggests that the film may be aware of that and may even serve to question the normative assumptions about what surfaces are and what they can do. The surface-level colors that so exasperate Jameson are instructive here. All the deeply saturated images cast in primary hues emit an almost hyper-real quality, all but drawing attention to themselves as *simulacra*, as signifiers of the associations we have of the period. Members of his production team note that from the beginning Lucas wanted *American Graffiti* to "look like a jukebox."³⁵² Obviously the late 50s-early 60s do not look like a jukebox, they do not 'look' like anything, really, but the jukebox comes to serve as a type of aesthetic shorthand encoded in the story American pop culture tells about itself. This is a stylistic association, an instance of surface realism that willfully combines, plays with, and exploits both the period and our understanding of it, an understanding mediated through cultural artifacts like the jukebox that incite nostalgic desire.

Le Sueur also discusses what he calls "deliberate archaism" in relation to the film, another stylistic strategy that gives a work the "appearance" of age and vintage patina in

³⁵¹ Marc Le Sueur, "Theory Number Five: Anatomy of Nostalgia Films: Heritage and Methods," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 6, no. 2 (1977), 189.

³⁵² This is mentioned several times throughout the documentary feature included in the 1998 DVD release of the film.

order to exploit the disjunction and qualitative differences between past and present. Jameson does not notice any possibility for this exploitation beyond sheer commodity fetishism but for Le Sueur it, can “entail a healthy re-examination of old techniques and formats”³⁵³ that serve to accentuate distance and discontinuity. The most compelling example of this in *American Graffiti* is a subtle one and has to do with the use of cameras and film stocks. Lucas always knew that he wanted to give the film a documentary “feel,” but with a knowing wink. Because CinemaScope, the 35mm widescreen format dominant during the 60s, proved too expensive, the film was shot using TechniScope. A cheaper medium, this format uses 35mm film but only half of the standard frame, one step up from the more homey-looking 16mm in terms of negative size. The result is a grainier, grittier look, more documentary-esque, but still recognizably cinematic. As Ron Howard puts it in an interview, the film has all the grain and the documentary look of 16mm but presented in widescreen. An economic necessity turned out to be an artistic innovation. As Christine Sprengler puts it in her reading of Le Sueur alongside Jameson, the use of surface realism and deliberate archaism means that nostalgia films like *American Graffiti* harbor “the potential for more than just reactionary fantasies obfuscating truth and history.”³⁵⁴ They can, on the contrary, make legible the more generative work of nostalgic expression.

³⁵³ Le Sueur, “Theory Number Five, 192.

³⁵⁴ Christine Sprengler, *Screening Nostalgia: Populuxe Props and Technicolor Aesthetics in Contemporary American Film* (New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2009), 83.

Realisms, Old and New

Le Sueur's initial work on surface realism and deliberate archaism depends on the same ontology of the (moving) image that enables Jameson's negative assessment of the uses of nostalgia in cinema. This tradition could no doubt be narrated in a variety of ways, but given that our guiding thread here has to do with the image's capacity for representation and deception in equal measure—its function as a *perfect illusion*, to recall those early Lumière reviews—Plato and André Bazin stand as especially illuminating figures. Mobilizing insights first laid out by Siegfried Kracauer, a film theorist often associated with the Frankfurt school, Bazin develops a theory of cinematic realism that lays the groundwork for later critiques of filmic nostalgia like Jameson's.³⁵⁵ Like Kracauer, and other early thinkers of the cinematic image like André Malraux, Bazin positions cinema as a singular form of art, an extension of baroque painting and one that fulfills the realist aspirations he sees in the plastic arts. In doing so he draws the interesting parallel mentioned above between the “mummy complex” of ancient Egyptian religion and the emergence of film as a means of aesthetic representation.³⁵⁶ The primary

³⁵⁵ Cf. Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), ix; 30.

³⁵⁶ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in *What Is Cinema?: Vol. I*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 9. Written in 1940, Malraux's “Sketch for a Psychology of the Moving Pictures” stands alongside the works of Henri Bergson, Lev Kuleshov, and Sergei Eisenstein as one of the first extant texts anticipating the development of film theory in the early twentieth century. In his sketch, Malraux situates cinema alongside other classical art forms and emphasizes its ability to photograph movement by conveying rhythm and tempo, portraying a sequence of successive movements through cutting and montage. The latter, of course, comes into its own through the theories of Eisenstein, other Soviet directors, and, later, in the French New Wave, best typified by François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard. Cf. André Malraux, “Sketch for a Psychology of the Moving Pictures,” in *Reflections on Art: A Source Book of Writings By Artists, Critics, and Philosophers*, ed. Susanne K. Langer (Baltimore, M.D.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1958), 317-327. For more on montage theories see Sergei Eisenstein, *Towards a Theory of Montage: Sergei Eisenstein Selected Works, Vol. II*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (New York, NY: I.B.Tauris, 2010).

function of mummification and the significance of statuary in the sarcophagus symbolize, according to Bazin, the persistence of survival in the face death, a drive that necessitates “the preservation of life by a representation of life.”³⁵⁷ For the early Egyptians, death is warded off by mimesis and mortal existence kept alive through resemblance. Photography and cinema operate by the same logic, according to Bazin. They proceed by way of mimetic resemblance, extending and deepening the drive for survival or immortality that subtends the plastic arts.

This sentiment ultimately leads to Bazin’s notion of the “myth of total cinema,” an all-encompassing *illusion*, to be sure, but a necessary one that bespeaks the exigencies of cinema and sets it apart from photography given its capacity to record or preserve reality *at speed*. The key, of course, is temporal duration, the representation of contingency, flux, and variance. Unlike painting, photography, in Bazin’s view, achieves true objectivity—revealing the true power of the image—because it makes use of intervening technologies and techniques of mechanical reproduction that, in essence, depend upon the absence of the individual. It therefore frees itself from the “inescapable subjectivity” attached to interpretation and expressionism, representing the object itself, without manipulation (or appropriation, to use Jameson’s language).³⁵⁸ Photographic

³⁵⁷ Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 10.

³⁵⁸ As he puts it in *Signature of the Visible*, “the generic forms and signals of mass culture are very specifically to be understood as the historical reappropriation and displacement of older structures in the service of the qualitatively very different situation of repetition.” And later, in the same text, more pointedly with reference to Debord: “Looking is everywhere and nowhere in the ‘society of the spectacle,’ and a completely new relationship to the filmic image thereby appears in which the spectator simply rips it off and cannibalizes a ‘work of art’ designed for that very purpose in a random—but highly visual—appropriation of its various ‘bonuses of pleasure.’” See Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2013), 25; 298.

images thus act as “fingerprints” of reality, “contribut[ing] something to the order of natural creation instead of providing a substitute for it.”³⁵⁹ But while still photographs can only embalm single moments, out of sequence, the moving image mummifies duration, giving time, for the first time, a form of aesthetic representation.

Photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. Viewed in this perspective, the cinema is objectivity in time. The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber. The film delivers baroque art from its convulsive catalepsy. Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it were. Those categories of resemblance which determine the species photographic image likewise, then, determine the character of its aesthetic.... The aesthetic qualities of photograph are to be sought in its power to lay bare the realities.³⁶⁰

For Bazin, film documents the passage of time, achieving a visual transcription of sustained duration. *Cinéma*, a shorter nickname for the Lumière brothers *cinématographe*, combines the Greek *kinema* (“movement”) and *graphie* (“to write or draw, to scratch or cut into”). The cinematic image records motion in time, writing or marking movement by etching or imprinting patterns on the celluloid strip. But the recording itself is mutable and the deconstructive gesture of *re-marking*—of invoking, overturning, displacing, and reworking known traces, codes, and conventions—haunts Bazin’s desire for realism and verisimilitude. The insoluble aporia here, one that both Bazin raises but sets aside, has to do with the connections between temporality, the image, and the “proper corruption” that is supposedly absolved when the image is put in motion. This is the idea *La Poste* gestures toward in its review of the original Lumière

³⁵⁹ Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” 12-13; 15.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

premiere, that death will cease to be absolute. Kracauer, in the subtitle of his seminal work, calls this “the redemption of physical reality” and Bazin, for his part, emphasizes cinema’s power to record as a means of restitution via resemblance. The moving image documents, preserves, or catalogs the essential features of reality—generating a sequence of images in its likeness—and not only saves these realities from the corrupting accretions of time and contingency but *records*, for the first time, those very same accretions, achieving compelling aesthetic representations of movement, of temporal duration. Film, it seems, briefly—all too briefly—frees experience from the conditions of time by documenting its vicissitudes, by creating images congruent with its unfolding.

This version of cinematic realism motivates Bazin’s critique of montage, a riposte that anticipates Jameson’s critique of pastiche in nostalgia films like *American Graffiti*. Bazin remains suspicious of montage—the editing practice of intentionally ordering a sequence of images in time—on the grounds that it valorizes the image itself and what it “adds to” the representation rather than its status as an adequate reflection of reality.³⁶¹ Montage, through juxtaposition and collocation, creates or contrives a meaning not objectively contained in the image itself, where the image, *on its own*, adequately resembles reality, or so Bazin would want to argue. While the plastics of the image itself achieve objective similitude, montage, on this view, relies upon manipulation and beguilement, imposing interpretation on the viewer through metaphor and free association. Bazin has Soviet montage theorists like Sergei Eisenstein and Lev Kuleshov in mind here. Eisenstein, in written works and films like *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and

³⁶¹ Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” in *What is Cinema?: Vol. I*, 24-25.

October: Ten Days That Shook The World (1928), uses cinema to advance revolutionary political ideologies by formalizing Marxist class struggle, while the so-called “Kuleshov Effect” offers an aestheticized version of the Hegelian dialectic where a resultant third image in a given sequence—close-up shots expressive of joy or sadness, for example—shift in meaning depending on antecedent images and their position in the sequence.³⁶² For Bazin, these techniques undermine the supposed natural unity of meaning contained in a dramatic event. Montage creates a spectacle and proceeds by way of deceptive, illusory attraction, while cinematic realism provides a more clear-eyed view of reality.³⁶³

Bazin’s emphasis on natural unity free of intervening manipulation lays the groundwork for later iterations like Jameson’s assessment of *American Graffiti*, a reading that is predicated, at least in part, on the moving image’s capacity for illusion, deception, and beguilement. But this sort of realism pre-dates both figures and relates to certain nagging leitmotifs endemic in the history of western thought, namely, the longstanding distrust of the image, an anxiety closely related to the philosophical distrust of feeling discussed at the beginning of chapter two. Before Bazin, before Jameson, and before

³⁶² Eisenstein wrote extensively on film theory and montage in particular. See, for example, his Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York, NY: Harcourt, 2014). For more on the Kuleshov effect see David Gillespie, *Early Soviet Cinema: Innovation, Ideology and Propaganda* (New York, NY: Wallflower Press, 2000), 22-35.

³⁶³ Of course, Jean-Luc Godard’s long, prolific career stands as a striking example of how more mature and innovative uses of montage can serve to heighten the dramatic event, condensing temporality and extending to sound as well as the image. Films like *À bout de souffle* (1960), *Vivre sa vie* (1962), *Notre musique* (2004), and his magistral, decades long *Histoire(s) du cinéma* project refine the techniques pioneered by Eisenstein and Kuleshov, combining them with the surrealist achievements of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí’s influential *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). The contradistinction here is more than incidental. In 1956, *Cahiers du Cinéma* published a pair of point/counterpoint pieces featuring both Bazin and Godard, the former prohibiting the practice (“Montage Forbidden”) and the latter affectionately championing it (“Montage, my beautiful care) while also outlining a nascent critique of Bazinian understandings of deep focus and *mise-en-scène* that would guide his oeuvre for years to come. See Jean-Luc Godard, “Montage, mon beau souci” in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 65, December (1956): 30-31; André Bazin, “Montage interdit,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 65, December (1956): 32-36.

cinema, there was Plato, whose entire metaphysical edifice is based upon a foundational opposition that values the invisibility of the intelligible idea over the visibility of the sensible image. In Books III and X of his *Republic* Plato famously banishes poets from the *kallipolis*, his ideal city governed by the equanimous philosopher-king, a figure who, unmoved by appetitive, affective desires and guided by reason alone, retains privileged access to true, intelligible ideas.

But these aren't just any poets. In his quest for the true, the real, and the absolutely immutable, Plato specifically banishes imitative or *mimetic* poets. These are the artists who create images that acts as representations, stand-ins, or copies of the authentic, *eidetic* original. Plato worries that these images create—and here is that key word again—an *illusion* that appeals to the baser aspects of the soul at a distorted remove from the truth. They copy mere appearances, leaving too much room for subjective (mis)interpretation, ultimately leading the individual soul astray, rather than guiding it upward in its proper ascent toward the form of the good, the beautiful, and the real. So it is that Plato introduces a profound aesthetic anxiety into western thought, injecting a deep, distrustful incredulity toward images, their capacity for expression and representation, their *mimetic* function, and their affective power. This is the ancient “quarrel” he sees between philosophy and art, and nowhere is it more prominent than in his paradigmatic *image* of the cave as one of the first movie theaters, a wry cipher for cinematic experience, itself an aesthetic illustration, a means of using the image to critique its powers of representation.

Famously outlined in Book VII of the *Republic* alongside the analogies of the sun

and dividing line, Plato's cave is one of philosophy's founding myths, an allegory that pries open the essential distinction between *noumenon* and *phenomena*, between the things themselves and their sensible but sullied appearances, or so the story goes. In the darkened cave proto-moviegoers face the dimly lit grotto wall, their silver screen, anticipating those first Lumière audiences in the Salon Indien. They sit and watch moving images, flickering projections of compelling theatrical appearances. These images, Socrates tells Glaucon, are mere *shadows*, superficial reflections and illusory phantoms that our captive audience take to be real things, unvarnished by *mimetic* iteration. For Socrates, these primitive cinephiles are held hostage by the power of the (moving) image, unaware of its limited capacity for resemblance and adequation. Like the forced conditioning of Alex DeLarge, the disturbed, 'ultra-violent' protagonist in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), these prisoners are "compelled to hold their heads unmoved through life,"³⁶⁴ forced to passively transfix their gaze upon flickering mirages and glimmering apparitions that deceive and desensitize them.

The unsurprising hero of this story is the philosopher-king, the paragon of the soul's ascension to the intelligible realm and its contemplation of the authentic ideas the tawdry shadows simply ape. In Plato's imagination, this figure frees himself from the chains of aesthetic representation in order to gaze directly upon its blinding source. After fully apprehending this beneficent reality, he takes it upon himself to offer instruction to his peers. He models superior vision and the proper direction of the soul much in the

³⁶⁴ Plato, *The Republic* in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 515b1.

same way that Johannes Hofer initially proposed proper forms of movement to treat nostalgia and heal the imagination. In Plato's cave, the shadowy images only offer superficial images of the really real, like the animal spirits that plague the nostalgics diagnosed in Hofer's dissertation. They stand as cheap counterfeits that distract from the luminosity of the original just like the imitative and *mimetic* poets that bookend the allegory. No wonder, then, that Maxim Gorky dismissed the early Lumière screens as a mere 'kingdom of shadows.'

Interestingly, Plato's critique of images requires the use of images to really stick. Socrates asks Glaucon to "picture" the cave and the pitiful prisoners shackled to the floor, to imagine the flickering shadows cast on the cavern wall.³⁶⁵ After outlining the parable, Plato suggests that the entire "image" should be applied, *in toto*, to the entirety of the preceding text, i.e., the theory of the forms, the discussion of the soul, and the enumeration the *kallipolis*.³⁶⁶ The key to the efficacy of the *Republic* lies in an image that Plato deploys to diminish the efficacy of images and admonish its mavens. He uses aesthetic representation to delegitimize aesthetic representation, offering up an instructive image to advance an argument against the use of mimetic images. Plato may fail to make this contradiction explicit, but its exigence is prominently inscribed elsewhere in texts like *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, and, especially, *Phaedrus*.³⁶⁷ Images like those viewed by the

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 514a-b.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 517b.

³⁶⁷ In an astounding and deeply moving passage in *Phaedrus* which describes the phenomenological madness of love, Plato's Socrates draws upon yet another image to support his claims. He likens the individual soul to a chariot driven by a charioteer and two winged horses, one stately and dignified, the other wily and unrestrained. These steeds pull the charioteer in opposite directions, toward impulses of reason and impulses of passion, a variance in search of directed equilibrium. Yet both inclinations are

poor souls in the subterranean screening room facilitate the initial stirrings of philosophy and can ideally lead to contemplative recollection of the higher truths and more noble ideas. They are necessary, it seems, but deceptive at best and dangerous at worst because they all too easily pull a veil of illusory ignorance over the otherwise circumspect and judicious eye of the philosopher-king. Plato's concern, like that of Bazin and Jameson after him in their own registers, is that the semblance of a thing may be mistaken for the thing itself, that depth may all too easily be concealed by the glossy allure of surfaces. Images, in this view, are necessary illusions, but they can never be perfect in the manner *Le Radical* ascribes to the early Lumière pictures because they lack an immediacy of presence.

This anxiety infiltrates the discourse of both Bazin and Jameson. For the former, a normative thinking of the image celebrates its power to preserve and record reality. In the absence of this archival quality, images become mere wraiths and cheap imitations, feeble knockoffs that ape their source but lack its essence and vitality—illusions, in other words, perfect or otherwise. And this is where Bazin's debt to the legacy of ambivalence becomes most clear. In his rejection of Soviet formalism Bazin uses familiar Platonic tropes to identify an ostensible tension where fanciful, chimeric, and illusory images threaten to undermine the integrity of dramatic and historical events. In such cases, the

necessary, it seems, and both must struggle mightily, for “beauty alone this has been ordained, to be most manifest to sense and most lovely of them all,” plunging the ideal, philosophical soul into *anamnesis*, remembering “some likeness of the things yonder” (250d8, 250a7). The first inkling of wisdom, then, and the first movement of philosophy involves apprehension of visible images of beauty, which galvanizes the impulse to contemplate higher, intelligible ideas. As Socrates puts it in *Symposium*, the great companion piece to *Phaedrus*, one mustn't mistake the semblance of beauty for the thing itself (Cf. 218e6). Socrates, who brashly reproaches the unrequited Alcibiades's advances, takes him to be on the same level as the primitive moviegoers tethered to grotto floor in the *Republic*.

meaning of an object or scenario, Bazin claims, “is not in the image, it is in *the shadow of the image* projected by montage.”³⁶⁸ The reference goes unmarked here, but the allusion to Plato is clear. Assembled images function at a remove from the truth, so their manipulation and ordering must be scrupulous and discriminating. Jameson makes the connection even clearer in his critical discussion of nostalgia films that offer *mimesis* without substance or depth, transmitting the past in a limited way through the history of cultural and aesthetic stylization. Within this milieu the subject, as he puts it, “can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent but must, as in Plato’s cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls.” “If there is any realism left here,” Jameson continues, “it is a ‘realism’ which springs from the shock of grasping that confinement and of realizing that...we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images.”³⁶⁹ His sentiment echoes that of Hofer. ‘Pop images,’ like the form of nostalgia they rely upon, limit possibility, suggesting an afflicted imagination that cannot muster legitimate acts of memory or maintain a proper relation to its past.

³⁶⁸ Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” 26. Italics mine.

³⁶⁹ Jameson, *The Cultural Turn*, 10. I do not mean to suggest that Bazin and Jameson are straightforward Platonists in any sense, nor is my intent to position Plato as somehow more antagonistic to aesthetic representation than is already well known. My aim is more modest: to underscore the deep, suspicious ambivalence toward aesthetic representation Plato introduces into the thinking of the image and, especially, to note the sort of purchase it finds in considerations of film, especially those dealing with nostalgia. Jameson’s primary concern—and a noble one at that—is with new modes of aesthetic production in late capitalist societies and how those modes promote doltish, wanton, nearly automatic consumption. These are valid points, but my interest here is with the normative, diagnostic assumptions that subtends Jameson’s larger conceptual apparatus, with nostalgia and the moving image acting as especially prominent pressure points. These tacit suppositions simply assume too much, occluding the ways in which cinema uses self-aware intertextual strategies and “knowing” illusions to both conjure and displace feelings of nostalgia.

Intertextuality in Cinema

In Jameson's framework, pop images cannot help us better understand our present moment in history. They cannot communicate the present as history or galvanize thinking within such a perspective. All the stylized detail Lucas provides in *American Graffiti*—the sock hop fashion, the crewcuts and greaser comb-backs, the 50s era Impalas, the Thunderbirds and Deuce Coupés, the near mystical omnipresence of Wolfman Jack's raspy radio bravado—all these signifiers situate the past as a mere product, an aggregate of aesthetic associations and commodity reification. Bazin rejects montage because it adds too much to the natural realism of the image, undermining its unity. Jameson eschews pastiche on similar grounds. Both practices involve the process of assembling a composite from seemingly disparate elements. Nostalgia films like *American Graffiti* essentially raise montage to the next power by way of pastiche. According to Jameson, they "restructure the whole issue of pastiche and project it onto a collective and social level" resulting in the "desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past" through fashion-plates and the glossy qualities of the image.³⁷⁰ This leads him to the conclusion that pastiche is an especially vacuous form of imitation, a type of mimicry without conviction, a "statue with blind eyeballs," as he puts it.³⁷¹ In Jameson's view, the omnipresence of past styles and unfettered availability of previous aesthetic techniques means they can be freely assembled without much of a connection to their initial situation or set of references. He attributes this to a lack of perspective or historical consciousness—the

³⁷⁰ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 19.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 17

inability to apprehend the present as history—and sees it as a symptom of mass consumption and cultural amnesia under the new modes of aesthetic production. Stylized nostalgia is thus decoupled from memory and recollection.³⁷²

If we follow Jameson's claims about the waning of historicity this analysis might make sense. But Le Sueur's twin notions of surface realism and deliberate archaism seem to intimate that another, more capacious approach is available, as does the critical scholarship of Hutcheon, Constable, Radstone, and others. Does the nostalgia film really condemn us to a perpetual present, severing our access to previous periods and packaging them instead as glossy consumer products? Are the highly aestheticized representations of the past contained in such films no longer our own, as Jameson suggests? Are we now incapable of crafting compelling aesthetic representations of our current moment? Do the images Lucas and others pull together via pastiche only serve to mesmerize by confirming preexisting stereotypes and associations? Is aesthetic production under the conditions of late capitalism forever comprised and thus unable to speak beyond the determinations of mass consumption, reification, and commodity fetishism, or can it retain some critical capacity and reflective power despite its complicity?³⁷³ Jameson's

³⁷² Cf. Grainge Paul, "Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 23, no. 1 (March 22, 2004), 29. Grainge's intent is to show that there are available conceptions of memory that can incorporate the nostalgia film in ways that acknowledge but also extend his analysis. He locates one such concept in Andrew Hoskins' work. See Andrew Hoskins, "New Memory: Mediating History," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 21, no. 4 (2001): 333–46. See also Paul Grainge, ed., *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

³⁷³ This seems to be what is ultimately at stake for Jameson, an animating concern that drives his conceptual apparatus. One gets the sense that the structuring and totalizing power granted to late capitalism in his work—its ability to subsume and incorporate just about everything—makes it nearly impossible for cultural objects created under its determinations to anything more than reproduce prepackaged norms and values. Andreas Huyssen wants to hold open the possibility of a more generative approach in an essay

comparison of the late capitalist moment to the conditions of Plato's cave referenced above already contains something of an answer. When he says that today we 'can no longer directly look out at the real world for the referent' and are thus 'condemned to seek the historical past through pop images' he places the subject in an exceedingly passive position and further construes the historical past and its referents as inaccessible from that vantage point. In *Postmodernism*, he offers a clear description of this assessment:

This approach to the present by way of the art language of the simulacrum, or of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage. Yet this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborate symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way.³⁷⁴

For Jameson, the nostalgia film distills the formal impoverishment of contemporary aesthetic production and prohibits active engagement not only with the past but also and especially with the present as one possible future of that past. Hutcheon once again offers some instructive pushback that furthers her interpretation of Jameson's work as a narrative of negativity and privation, a form of mourning, nostalgic in its own right, for

published in 1984, the same year as Jameson's initial critique: "The notion of the artwork a critique actually informs some of the more thoughtful condemnations of postmodernism, which is accused of having abandoned the critical stance that once characterized modernism. However, the familiar ideas of what constitutes critical art (*Partielllichkeit* and vanguardism, *l'art engagé*, critical realism, or the aesthetic of negativity, the refusal of representation, abstraction, reflexivity) have lost much of their explanatory and normative power in recent decades. This is precisely the dilemma of art in a postmodern age. Nevertheless, I see no reason to jettison the notion of critical art altogether. The pressures to do so are not new; they have been formidable in capitalist culture ever since romanticism, and if our postmodernity makes it exceedingly difficult to hold on to an older notion of art as critique, then the task is to redefine the possibilities of critical art in postmodern terms rather than relegating it to oblivion. If the postmodern is discussed as a historical condition rather than a style it becomes possible and indeed important to unlock the critical moment in postmodernism itself and to sharpen its cutting edge, however blunt it may seem at first sight. What will no longer do is either to eulogize or to ridicule postmodernism *en bloc*. The postmodern must be salvaged from its champions and from its detractors." See Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," *New German Critique*, no. 33 (1984), 9.

³⁷⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 21.

the decline of modernism.³⁷⁵ She draws attention to how postmodern cinema, beginning in the 1970s with films like *American Graffiti*, works to *consciously* mediate collective histories and cultural memory through aesthetic practices like allusion and pastiche. Jameson does not notice this, she maintains, and thus fails to rethink what he calls ‘the openness of present history’ because he does not properly acknowledge “the distanced relation of every film from its historical referent.”³⁷⁶ Hutcheon attributes this limitation to Jameson’s understanding of history, rooted as it is in a version of Marxism that takes the unfolding of history to be a single story with a common, universalizing utopian theme—what Jameson calls a remembered “moment of plentitude”—refracted through contradiction and antagonism.³⁷⁷ As she puts it, “Jameson laments the loss of a sense of his particular definition of history...while dismissing as nostalgia the only kind of history we may be able to acknowledge: a contingent and inescapably intertextual history.”³⁷⁸ In this context, intertextuality refers to the myriad ways a text or object is shaped or

³⁷⁵ As indicated above, the dispute between Jameson and Hutcheon closely correlates with two different approaches to film and aesthetic production generally in the mid-late twentieth century. Brian McHale, in “Postmodernism, or the Anxiety of Master Narratives,” *Diacritics* 22, no. 1 (1992): 17–33, offers an early assessment and initial schema for these critical postures which for him ultimately boil down to differing positions in relation to operations of dialectics and totalization, and the value of positing an ultimate referent. See also Andreas Huyssen, “Mapping the Postmodern,” *New German Critique*, no. 33 (1984): 5–52. More recently, volumes like John N. Duvall, ed., *Productive Postmodernism: Consuming Histories and Cultural Studies* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 2002) attempt to make these tensions more transparent and thus, as the title suggests, more agile in application.

³⁷⁶ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 176. Here she is drawing on the work of Anne Friedberg who makes a nice gesture toward *Le Radical*’s initial description of film as a *perfect illusion*: “The narrative or art direction of a nostalgia film may confuse its sense of temporality. But cinematic speculation itself confirms *the illusion* of a perpetual present interminably recycled. Taken to its apparatical extreme, what Jameson describes only to the nostalgia genre is true of every film’s relation to its historical referent.” Anne Friedberg, “Les Flâneurs Du Mal (I): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” *PMLA* 106, no. 3 (1991), 427. Italics mine.

³⁷⁷ This mention of “some remembered moment of plentitude” comes in the same moment that Jameson’s evokes the notion of a “nostalgia conscious of itself” discussed above. See Jameson, “Walter Benjamin, or nostalgia,” 68.

³⁷⁸ Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 109.

determined by its relation to and connection with other texts, objects, weaves of references, etc.—a means of recognizing and *re-marking* upon available traces to use the deconstructive language developed in the previous chapter.³⁷⁹

For Hutcheon, acknowledging a contingent and inescapably intertextual history does not signal the enfeeblement of historicity. Instead, it enables us to “critically confront the past with the present...against the tendency of our times to value only the new and the novel” by thinking with artworks like the nostalgia film that “return us to a re-thought past to see what, if anything, is of value in that past experience.”³⁸⁰ To continue with Jameson’s comment on the passive, enchained prisoners in Plato’s cave, this more approach makes space for reconsidering the notion of the ‘referent’ and how we go about looking for it or seeking it out. For Hutcheon, this means focusing our attention on the textuality of the past and broadening its status as a discursive reality. “The past as referent is not bracketed or effaced as Jameson would like to believe,” she writes, “it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning.”³⁸¹ Writers like Richard Dyer agree and demonstrate how pastiche, an aesthetic practice deemed facile in Jameson’s thinking, often work to contest received notions of access, pastness, and referentiality.³⁸² Such practices rework available traces, offering a supplementary *re-mark*

³⁷⁹ Derrida, for example, uses intertextual strategies to situate his own text in relation to a host of others, including Heidegger, Defoe, Donne, and Freud. The result is both argumentative and performative. He works with an amalgamation of figures and texts to show how subjective experience functions *as a text*, constituted by the trace structure and the temporality of *Nachträglichkeit* which both induces a self-aware experience of nostalgia that frustrates desire by deferring its closure. Derrida works intertextually to elaborate his own understanding of intertextuality, in other words, and this effort serves to show how relations between key concepts are meditated, negotiated, and transmitted.

³⁸⁰ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 39.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁸² Cf. Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2007). As Paul Grainge puts it, “Dyer

that complicates the relation between referent and representation, demonstrating how the past is both mediated and constructed, thereby charting new avenues for active critical engagement.

The conceptual and cinematic precedent for this approach in film studies enables a reading of *American Graffiti* that runs counter to Jameson's assessment. In terms of nostalgia, Le Sueur certainly paves the way, developing notions like surface realism and deliberate archaism discussed above that served to heighten the discontinuity between the past and the present in productive ways. But additional examples abound and usually involve homage or self-reference to genre conventions, longstanding tropes, literary influences, and major cinematic milestones or techniques³⁸³. Noël Carroll is among the first film scholars to thematize this, discussing the potential merits of intertextual

holds a more positive view, suggesting a more complex cultural mode that has the potential to be critical and transgressive, but that can also suggest an awareness about the constructed nature of feelings and emotions while allowing them to be experienced and enjoyed." Grainge, *Memory and Popular Film*, 10.

³⁸³ Sometimes filmic intertextuality may simply entail the use of certain narrative elements such that the source material attains a sort of modernized adaptation. For example, *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) and *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000) give us updated, sardonic iterations of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* and Homer's *The Odyssey*, while more recent films like *Chi-Raq* (2015) and *Easy A* (2010) rework and *re-mark* Aristophanes and Nathaniel Hawthorne. But some of the most compelling instances of cinematic intertextuality involve affectionate, self-aware and knowing reference to iconic, influential shots, images, or archetypes—instances of creative expression, in other words, that are intrinsic to film as a form of aesthetic representation. This practice is now commonplace in contemporary Hollywood and the summer blockbuster especially, giving rise to the proliferation of sequels, reboots, and remakes, a climate of near incessant reiteration that remains successful, at least in part, because of its intertextual exploitation. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is composed of almost nothing but self-reference—a tactic that accounts for most of its dramatic payoff—and most Pixar films constantly refer to their antecedents, both within the genre and beyond. Other uses are more discerning and circumspect. Most Quentin Tarantino and Martin Scorsese films contain so many different homages, parodies, and referential layers that many viewers are likely to miss at least a few. The latter's *Hugo* (2011)—to provide just one recent and apropos example—exhibits cinematic intertextuality on several different levels. The film is inspired by Brian Selznick's 2007 *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, a work of historical fiction based in large part on the life and work of none other than Georges Méliès. Méliès (Ben Kingsley) plays a prominent role in Scorsese's adaptation, as does his seminal *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902). In gesture similar to that of Godard that combines the image with its history and memory, Scorsese also pays homage to the Lumières' *L'Arrivée*, recreating viewings of the film complete with shocked and surprised audiences.

referentiality in a pivotal essay published just two years before Jameson's initial critique of the nostalgia film. Using *Body Heat* (1981) as his chief example, Carroll observes "a tendency...that distinguishes the seventies and the eighties from every other decade in Hollywood's past—viz., allusion."³⁸⁴ He is especially interested in how this became, in his reading, the defining practice of the New Hollywood movement in which Lucas is often situated. Allusion includes a whole range of techniques—pastiche, reconstruction, homage, referential staging, etc.—and functions as "a mean that directors use to *make comments* on the fictional worlds of their films."³⁸⁵ Carroll thinks the rise in allusion is due, in part, to "an unprecedented awareness of film history" coming out of the 1950s-60s that results in a new style that works to change the nature of cinematic symbol systems.³⁸⁶ Created by informed artists for informed viewers, this "explicitly film-historical consciousness" entails "a reworking that evokes a historical genre and its associated myths, commonplaces, and meanings in order to *generate expression* through fiction between the old and the new."³⁸⁷ Carroll uses the work of Robert Altman to draw out his analysis, ultimately arriving at conclusion that allusion amounts to cinematic reworking or *re-marking* that functions as a deliberate assertion of style and expressivity that can, at times, subvert expectations and frustrate desire. Whereas Jameson reads these practices through as instances of passivity and amnesia, Carroll suggests that they begin from a position of active engagement and awareness. Hutcheon treads similar ground,

³⁸⁴ Noël Carroll, "The Future of Allusion: Hollywood in the Seventies (And Beyond)," *October* 20 (1982), 51.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 52. Italics mine.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 57

arguing that what Jameson sees as the enfeeblement of history is actually a mis-recognized obsession with how the past is constructed and how history is mediated and transmitted by aesthetic means.³⁸⁸ If “Jameson’s estimations of pastiche rely on a passive audience easily provoked into unthinking nostalgia,” as Amelia DeFalco puts it, then the view first signaled by Le Sueur and thematized here by the likes of Hutcheon and Carroll positions nostalgia films as a “text that affects and provokes the entire subject...encouraging self-conscious spectatorship in order to destabilize epistemologies of ‘history’ and ‘reality.’”³⁸⁹

This sense of provocation and self-conscious spectatorship is present in nascent form at the dawn of cinema, and the Lumière filmography offers an additional and instructive example. Earlier I mentioned that initial audiences at times displayed an impressive appreciation of cinema’s capacities for aesthetic representation and manipulation. Films like the backwards-projected *Démolition d'un mur* (1895) portray an impossible and nostalgic fantasy—the reversal of time’s flux and flow—that became popular precisely because audiences recognized it as such. But this was not always the case. *L'Arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (1896), one of the more famous Lumière productions, released about a month after the initial Salon Indien première, tested the limits of this recognition, complicating the idea that cinema acts as a perfect illusion of real life. Like many Lumière productions, the silent, black and white film, only 50

³⁸⁸ “Postmodernist film (and fiction) is, if anything, obsessed with history and with how we can know the past today. How can this be an enfeeblement of historicity?” Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 109. See also Dika, *Recycled Culture*, 14.

³⁸⁹ Amelia DeFalco, “A Double-Edged Longing: Nostalgia, Melodrama, and Todd Haynes’s *Far from Heaven*,” *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (September 1, 2004), 31.

seconds in length, shows a single, continuous, unedited shot of everyday life in real-time. The subject matter involves the arrival of a train at the *La Ciotat* railway station near the southern French coast. As the film opens, the train tracks are empty and in full view. After a few seconds smoke begins to build in the distance and suddenly a steam locomotive engine, initially quite small, fills the screen, first moving into, then across, and finally outside the frame. A new aesthetic medium, cinema had yet to develop conventions specific to its form and, likewise, audiences had not yet learned what to expect from the experience. The initial screening of *L'Arrivée* has attained near mythological status among cinephiles as a result. Legend has it that the audience was so shocked and overwhelmed by the image of a realistic train charging full speed directly at them that many cried out in fear, shielding their eyes, and retreating to the back of the screening room. The arrival of this phantom train—what Gorky calls a “train of shadows”³⁹⁰—also marks the arrival of cinematic perception and mis-recognition, a literal iteration of Plato’s anxiety later taken up by Jameson.

We now know that this legend is likely apocryphal and either did not happen at all or, at the very least, did not happen in such a dramatic fashion.³⁹¹ But these revelations are moot on a certain level. The larger point is that this myth was for many years—and still is—an integral part of the story that cinema tells about itself, a primal scene of sorts. The fantastical image of audiences flinching at a mis-recognized image—one not perceived as fantastical—has become a sort of short-hand for the uncanny power of images, their

³⁹⁰ Gorky, “The Lumière Cinematograph,” 7-8.

³⁹¹ See, for instance, Martin Loiperdinger and Bernd Elzer, “Lumiere’s Arrival of the Train: Cinema’s Founding Myth,” *The Moving Image* 4, no. 1 (July 26, 2004): 89–118.

ability to mobilize feelings and motivate reactions. The mythology surrounding *L'Arrivée* thus functions as a chief means by which the legacy, inheritance, and memory of cinema continues to be transmitted, an intertextual trace that constitutes its history and continues to be woven into the fabric of its self-narration.

Jean-Luc Godard affectionately portrays this self-narration in a pivotal scene from his *Les Carabiniers* (1963). At one point, Michel-Ange (Patrice Moullet), a poor peasant lured into the machinations of war on the promise of future wealth and riches, enters a movie theater for the very first time. He views a series of short films, including a scene of an arriving train, like the early Lumière audiences. And, like the early Lumière audiences, so the story goes, he covers his face in shock and fear, taking the image to be more than an image, a likeness of the real as real as the real itself. Later, when he sees projected images of a woman disrobing and entering a bathtub, he clamors to the front of the theater and attempts to enter the world of the film, yet another Godardian homage, this time to the famous *mise en abyme* sequence in Buster Keaton's *Sherlock Jr.* (1924), which also exploits the tension between image and reality. Michel-Ange desperately wants a better view, to see what the image suggests but the frame obscures. He takes the cinematic image to be perfect but hasn't read *Le Radical's* Lumière review and is unaware that it only remains perfect as an illusion. He tries in vain to peer over the edge of the tub, ultimately collapsing the screen in a gag that is played for ironic laughs. The viewing experience is thus interrupted by an attempt to catch a glimpse at what the image conjures but withholds. This scene is set within the context of a film that comments on both the importance of the image and its limited capacity to function as a substitute for its

referent. In the end, the treasure and wealth promised to Michel-Ange and his companion amount only to mere picture postcards documenting their travels and exploits. As Susan Sontag puts it, Godard's wry references and clever gags serve to highlight "the equivocal magic of the photographic image."³⁹² His deft *re-mark* not only pays homage to the Lumière brothers' *L'Arrivée*, but also references, even parodies, its apparently apocryphal reception and continued legacy by accentuating the tension between the real and the image. If this means that we are still within the confines of Plato's cave, as Jameson suggests, it is the cave re-figured, one where passive prisoners become active spectators, who come and go at will, exploring every nook and every cranny, focusing their attention on the shape and contours of each projected shadow to see how they interact and what they adduce.

***American Graffiti*, Re-marked**

So far, I have been suggesting, with reference to relevant secondary literature, the possibility of approaching Jameson's nostalgia film from a more generative position with a view beyond familiar modes of symptomatic reading. Such an approach acknowledges its allure, maintains some critical awareness of it, but goes further by taking it an occasion for additional engagement rather than diagnosis alone. In the space that remains I want to return to the founding nostalgia from such a perspective to see how it might be read otherwise in a manner that furthers Jameson's category by expanding its horizons and broadening its parameters. In light of the foregoing, my claim here is that Lucas's

³⁹² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 3.

American Graffiti induces a form of what DeFalco calls “productive nostalgia,” a notion similar to Boym’s reflective nostalgia discussed in chapter one. It does so by mobilizing familiar aesthetic conventions and stylistic association in a way that heightens the discontinuity between the present and its recent past to forge a propulsive relation with the unknown future. It is in this sense that all the ephemera and pop touchstones Lucas aggregates—the music, the sartorial codes and conventions, the cars and social mores, the overall mood, tone, and atmosphere—function as traces available for cinematic *re-marking*. The instances of surface realism and deliberate archaism referenced above—the use of “jukebox” colorization and Techniscope—work as instances of intertextual intervention as well, as do some of the more compelling composite characters. John Milner, for example, evokes cinematic predecessors, archetypes, and heirs, both in appearance and attitude. Equal parts juvenile rebel and washed up ‘has-been,’ Le Mat’s performance summons *Rebel Without a Cause*-era James Dean while also anticipating later, even more stylized iterations like a young Matthew McConaughey as David Wooderson, the puerile party animal in arrested development in Richard Linklater’s *Dazed and Confused* (1993). These cinematic traces, references, and signifiers signal mobilization and transmission to a knowing audience. They encourage creative and critical engagement with history and memory that not only discloses what we expect aesthetic representations of history to do for us, but also the ways in which memory and historical consciousness are themselves constituted, at least in part, by those same modes of representation. As Paul Grainge puts it drawing upon Kaja Silverman’s work on vintage and retro forms of fashion, these practices “need not entail a memory crisis” as

Jameson might claim “but can suggest an increasing semiotic awareness of the textuality of the past.”³⁹³ Nostalgia films and nostalgic experience take things a step further by mobilizing and *re-marking* upon the propulsive, animating, and in some cases haunting effects of that textuality, making them sharper, more legible, and acutely felt.

Nearly everything is already contained in the film’s title, a somewhat enigmatic heading that executives at Universal Pictures initially rejected. Lucas persisted, however, and eventually the studio acquiesced. Graffiti, of course, refers to the presence of markings, often scratched or etched, on public surfaces that contain sometimes cryptic messages and coded meanings for further iteration and dissemination. Traces, in other words, meant for supplementary comment or mobilization. The word shares an etymological and functional filiation with the early cinematic apparatus—Edison’s kinetoscope and the Lumière brothers’ *cinématographe*—as both bespeak the exigence of generalized writing, of deciphering and *re-marking* upon available traces, themselves marked by the march of time and the work of memory. The cars, the pop music, the vintage styles and dated social mores all function as traces in this regard, graffiti marks of American cultural history inscribed in the annals of cinematic memory.

Some of these graffiti marks suggest a particularly toxic and destructive form nostalgic desire, at least at first blush. For a long time, the critical consensus suggested that these traces and their intertextual *re-marking* form an overall composite evocative of a form of nostalgia that takes rampant patriarchy as its primary object of desire. Pauline

³⁹³ Paul Grainge, “Nostalgia and Style in Retro America: Moods, Modes, and Media Recycling,” *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures* 23, no. 1 (March 22, 2004), 29. See also Kaja Silverman, “Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse,” in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 139-152.

Kael, for instance, the longtime film critic for *The New Yorker*, anticipates Jameson's critique of *American Graffiti*'s surface-level aestheticization with her characteristic combination of acerbic wit and devastating exactitude. She lampoons the film's "shallowness" in using women as mere plot functions while allowing its audience to remain "happy condescending toward its own past."³⁹⁴ This, she believes, in a very Jamesonian turn of phrase, is because "there's nothing to back up the style." Kael chalks this superficiality up to the film's most flagrant omissions.³⁹⁵ For example, none of the major female characters receive any mention in the end credits epilogue that details the fate of each of the male leads. This suggests an unfettered nostalgia reserved "only for white middle-class boys whose memories have turned into pop."³⁹⁶ *Pace* Jameson, Kael's critique of the film does not contest the textuality of the past. It interrogates how that textuality is constituted and which traces are deemed worthy of *re-marking*.

Frances Smith, in a recent *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* article, works with and against this now conventional reading of the film. She has no desire to situate Lucas's sophomore effort as some sort of proto-feminist text, nor does she merely sideline Kael's valid concerns. Her aim, instead, is to complicate the omissions and occlusions Kael identifies in order to show—with an eye toward what she calls "nostalgia for potential"³⁹⁷—that they are not simple absences or straightforward erasures. Her

³⁹⁴ Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: Un-People," *The New Yorker* (1973), 154.

³⁹⁵ It should be noted that Jameson does not deal with issues of feminism and sexual difference in his reading of *American Graffiti* and the nostalgia film. For critical assessments of this aspect see Barbara Creed, "From Here to Modernity," in *Postmodern After-Images: A Reader in Film, Television, and Video*, ed. Peter Brooker and Will Brooker (New York, NY: Arnold, 1997), 43–54. See also Susannah Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007).

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 155; 156.

³⁹⁷ Smith, "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," 464; 473; 481-483.

reading of the film identifies instances where certain filmic clichés and genre conventions often associated with the past become what Vera Dika calls oppositional strategies and general resistant practices made possible through intertextual engagement.³⁹⁸ These strategies serve to highlight the disjunction between the past and the present through a juxtaposition of images and styles. On Dika's reading, Jameson does not consider these strategies and thus cannot account for the ways that "*American Graffiti* accomplishes a number of discontinuities that ultimately serve to destabilize its surfaces."³⁹⁹ This destabilization opens up a productive tension between memory and history encoded within the film. This tension mirrors the productive ambiguities of nostalgia explored in previous chapters, i.e., the manner in which the structural contradictions and antagonisms that form its bittersweet character can yield motivating, even animating effects. As we saw in the last chapter, these effects become hauntingly legible when the form of impossible desire nostalgia engenders is indulged, but not satisfied. In *American Graffiti* the friction generated by this productive tension—the clash of textual traces, surface aesthetics, and historical discontinuity—induce a nostalgic experience that is both ambivalent and propulsive, a strategy for mourning in the wake of loss and upheaval.

This reading of the film broadens the conceptual value of Jameson's nostalgia film category by highlighting the ways nostalgia accentuates and *re-marks* upon the disjunction between past and present. Lucas's work plays with and frustrates the

³⁹⁸ Vera Dika, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses Of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 11ff; 224.

³⁹⁹ Dika, *Recycled Culture*, 90. See also Michael D. Dwyer, *Back to the Fifties: Nostalgia, Hollywood Film, and Popular Music of the Seventies and Eighties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 10.

audience's own knowledge and understanding of the past (1962) in conjunction with its precarious, uncertain position in the present (1973). Only 11 years have passed. 1962 is the recent, almost immediate past, but the disjunction and discontinuity between '62 and '73 make all the difference as the film's promotional tagline—"Where were you in '62?"—indicates. The audience returns to its contiguous past knowing full well that the assassination of JFK, the blunder of Vietnam, the revolutions in civil rights, sexual liberation, and popular culture all lie just beyond the horizon. After all, Curt, whose "big ambition in life" is to become a White House aide and shake President Kennedy's hand, resolves, by the film's end, to complete his coming-of-age journey by boarding a plane flown by "Magic Carpet Airlines." In 1973, the audience is painfully aware that this dream will be prematurely foreclosed, and that Curt will soon be propelled into the tumultuous, psychedelic 60's (Steppenwolf's hit single "Magic Carpet Ride" was released in 1968, exactly halfway between the film's present and its year of release). Nowhere is this disjunction and the truly bittersweet nostalgia it produces more prominently on display than in the controversial postscript that details the fate of each male character. After the climatic drag race where John Milner, a cipher for the audience and an avatar of nostalgia at this point, narrowly beats Bob Falfa and reflectively admits, "I was losing, man" to Terry the Toad, the following postscript appears on screen:

John Milner was killed by a drunk driver in December 1964.
 Terry Fields was reported missing in action near An Loc in December 1965.
 Steve Bolander is an insurance agent in Modesto, California.
 Curt Henderson is a writer living in Canada.

Pauline Kael lambasts the film's more chauvinist elements, identifying in particular Lucas's failure to attend to Laurie, Debbie, and Carol's stories in this sequence. This

conservative penchant is an ever-present undercurrent throughout the film, to be sure, forming what Richard Brody calls “the relentless regime of catcalling and pickup-aggression to which women are seen enduring.”⁴⁰⁰ But Smith and Dika read this coda differently, more tragically, as an instance of nostalgic expression more indicative of oppositional strategy or resistant practice—using nostalgia to undercut its more readily available associations, in other words.⁴⁰¹ The credits plate and the tragic biographies that accompany it suggest, in the wake of the 60s and Vietnam in particular, that each of the male protagonists meet a literal or metaphorical death: John’s fate comes in the form of a car accident, perhaps similar to the one he has just barely escaped; Terry the Toad, like many of his socio-economic class, is drafted and killed in action; Curt lives in exile as an expatriate, presumably to avoid the draft; and Steve, initially deferring his college experience, never leaves home at all, and instead remains stuck in the past, succumbing to the sway of inert, suburban domesticity. The overall effect here is twofold. First, rather than simply underwriting, without equivocation, the retrograde gender norms identified by Kael, the film, according to Smith, “portrays moribund models of masculinity and heterosexual coupledness...demonstrating that they are not to be mourned.”⁴⁰² By invoking and subtly overturning these conventions through intertextual intervention, *American Graffiti* complicates the common associations adhering to “the 1950s” in popular culture and collective memory, its function as a sort of shorthand for tranquil, trouble-free *Pax*

⁴⁰⁰ Richard Brody, “What to Stream This Weekend: George Lucas’s Ambivalent Nostalgia in ‘American Graffiti,’” *The New Yorker*, January 4, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/what-to-stream-this-weekend-george-lucas-ambivalent-nostalgia-in-american-graffiti> (accessed April 24, 2019).

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Dika, *Recycled Culture*, 93-94; Smith, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” 480-481.

⁴⁰² Smith, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” 467.

Americana. It uses nostalgia to critique nostalgia, in other words. Second, the film gives full voice to nostalgia by contesting its transmission through a single, regressive valence and refusing to close its wounds. It produces and elicits feelings of nostalgic desire while denying their full satisfaction and highlighting their undecidable pleasure. The past is gone and (some of) its potential irrevocably lost. The viewer affectionately returns to its aesthetic surfaces fully aware of their ‘inauthentic’ status and impending dissolution, using them as a means of productive, propulsive memory. As Lucas puts it, the coda before the credits puts the entire film in perspective, highlighting its primary theme of change delivered through the compelling and effective vehicle of period-specific nostalgia.⁴⁰³

It is worth noting that certain elements of this reading of the film are not necessarily new, despite the preponderance of Jamesonian interpretations that dismiss it as indulgent, backward, or retrograde. “The nostalgia boom has finally produced a lasting work of art,” wrote *The New York Times*, which went on to characterize the films as both elegiac and “unsentimental.”⁴⁰⁴ The paper attributes this achievement to the film’s use of elements—cinematic traces, we might say—that evoke and illicit bittersweet feelings of longing and loss without lapsing into the sort maudlin schmaltz typically associated with nostalgia. “Although it is full of the material of fashionable nostalgia,” Roger Greenspun observed, “it never exploits nostalgia...in its feeling for movement.” Greenspun went on to suggest that, in spirit, *American Graffiti* is “oddly closer” to the early, oneiric work of

⁴⁰³ Lucas mentions this near the end of the 1998 documentary feature.

⁴⁰⁴ Stephen Farber, “‘Graffiti’ Ranks With ‘Bonnie and Clyde,’” *The New York Times*, August 5, 1973; Roger Greenspun, “Screen: California Elegy,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 1973.

Frederic Fellini than more cloying nostalgic films like *The Last Picture Show* or *Summer of '42*, both released just two years before Lucas's work.⁴⁰⁵ Likewise, Michael Dempsey, writing for *Film Quarterly* shortly after the movie's release in August 1973, notes that the film seizes upon the *pathos* of an audience primed for wistful longing but its "surprising resonance...stems from its understated but trenchant criticism of nostalgia."⁴⁰⁶ He suggests that while the film is clearly a product of the 70s 'nostalgia boom,' it still manages to capture "the sheer disposability" and fleeting transience of 1950s pop culture.⁴⁰⁷ The world Lucas depicts is barely past, yet its look and feel seem jarring and incalculably distant on screen. The nostalgia at play here, it seems, is more a vertigo-inducing experience of discontinuity than an uncomplicated desire to return or repeat.

Stephen Farber, in an interview with Lucas less than a year after *American Graffiti*'s blockbuster success, observes that the film succeeds by accessing and mobilizing a "depth of feeling" missing in Lucas's previous work, an affective and aesthetic achievement that serves to "recapture the past without sentimentalizing it."⁴⁰⁸ In the same interview, Lucas himself intimates that the film is, ultimately, about the continual pressure of impermanence, highlighting the necessity of moving forward while, at times, glancing backwards or swerving sideways, a sort of temporal torsion.⁴⁰⁹ For Farber, the film's unpredictable success can be attributed to the unique manner in which it elicits an undercurrent of potent *pathos* while also undermining its teleology, a move

⁴⁰⁵ Greenspun, "Screen."

⁴⁰⁶ Michael Dempsey, "American Graffiti," *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (Fall 1973), 59.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Stephen Farber, "George Lucas: The Stinky Kid Hits the Big Time," *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (1974), 2.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 8.

similar to Derrida's *re-marks* upon nostalgia explored in the last chapter. To reference *Le Radical* once more, the film acts as a useful, perhaps perfect illusion by propelling the viewer into an affectionate representation of the immediate past, a past now rendered strange yet intimate, familiar yet foreign. By amplifying the discontinuity between the 'present' of the film (1962) and the 'present' of its release (1973) Lucas forces the viewer out into the future by confronting a series of incurred losses.

The controversial postscript accomplishes this, but it is certainly not the only element. Despite what Kael would no doubt call its malignant, patriarchal nucleus, *American Graffiti* actually concludes with a subtle wink toward Carol's future.⁴¹⁰ In the middle third of the film, when an annoyed John finds himself cruising with the style-cramping Carol, the two engage in a brief dispute over pop music, an element that conveys the overall mood and outlook of the period more than perhaps any other element. Walter Murch—who Ebert has called “the most respected film editor and sound designer in modern cinema”—worked with Lucas on these aspects of the film, overseeing sound montage and re-recording.⁴¹¹ Prior to this time the position of music supervisor, a role designed to integrate sound and music in films, didn't really exist. Lucas more or less invented it by listening to records and painstakingly making selections for virtually every scene, contributing to what Murch calls the film's wall-to-wall popular music soundtrack, the first of its kind. According to Murch, the music is meant to immerse the viewer into the period-specific world of the film, a world completely natural and organic to its

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Smith, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes.”

⁴¹¹ Roger Ebert, “Why 3D Doesn't Work and Never Will. Case Closed,” *Roger Ebert's Journal*, accessed June 24, 2019, <https://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/why-3d-doesnt-work-and-never-will-case-closed>.

characters and their positions in space and time. More than that, he says, “the music sometimes acts like a Greek chorus, to sort of comment on the events taking place.”⁴¹²

The music, in other words, offers its own *re-mark*, drawing attention to its own position as a *re-marked* trace in the cinematic tapestry Lucas and Murch have woven together.

The scene in question is no exception and sets the stage for what is to come following the postscript. In a gesture of exasperation, John abruptly shuts off the car radio as a comment from our Greek Chorus blares through the speakers: the Beach Boys’ “Surfin’ Safari.” “I don’t like that surfing shit,” he mutters. “Rock ’n roll has been going downhill ever since Buddy Holly died.” At this point, John is already established as a walking anachronism within the world of the film, an old-school beat out of sync with the new tremolo-drenched rhythm, more James Dean than Frankie Avalon. He nostalgically pines for the pop music of an era on the cusp of profound sonic change, calling the viewer back to the opening sequence, the still shot of Mel’s Drive-In set against Bill Haley’s jangly opening number. Carol, on the other hand, thinks the Beach Boys are “boss” and affectionately mocks John for both his age and his aging taste. Later, as the final credits roll and the somber biographies of John, Curt, Toad, and Steve fade out, the film offers up its first non-diegetic song, a final comment from Murch’s Greek chorus in the form of a tune not firmly rooted in the 1962 setting and eerily out of step with the film’s temporality, forcefully pushing the audience out into the 60s counterculture. This number is the Beach Boys’ 1964 hit “All Summer Long” from the album of the same

⁴¹² Murch makes this statement in an interview filmed for the “making of” documentary feature included in the 1998 DVD release of the film.

name. Anticipating the sonic innovations of *Pet Sounds*, one of the most iconic records of the late 60s, the single is indelibly marked by Phil Spector's pioneering "wall of sound" production style that would soon come to define the era, a style Lucas mimics in his nonstop top-40 soundtrack. The cheery anthem revels in "having fun all summer long" but admits, in a lyric that is nothing if not nostalgically bittersweet, that it "won't be long 'til summertime is through."

The film opens with Bill Haley set against a still shot of Mel's Drive-In conveying stasis. Throughout it pays proper homage to Buddy Holly and, after the mournful postscript, ends with the ascendant Beach Boys, a sequence that conveys movement and transformation. It mobilizes these reference and traces, evoking nostalgia in order to effectively communicate one of its major themes: things move, people change, times change, and the present cannot last, cannot be long, as St. Augustine puts it.⁴¹³ Something is indeed lost and nostalgia, when given space for full expression, generates an active, ongoing relation with the past and its losses. Buddy Holly and Bill Haley's rock 'n roll made the present and enable the future but it, too, cannot last; it can only remain as one of many aesthetic reference points, an archival trace encoded within the accreting fabric of cultural history along with Wolfman Jack's howling rasp. In this sense, then, it could not be more fitting that the Beach Boys newfangled surf pop carries us beyond the past, beyond John's death, through the closing credits, through the present

⁴¹³ In Book XI of his *Confessions* Augustine observes that finite beings can only ever measure brief, fleeting "tracts of time." This means that the present is constantly on the move. "Immediately present time...cannot be long," he tells us. This forms the basis for his notion of *distentio animi*, the manner in which the individual is stretched across the times (past and future) while firmly situated in the slipping present. I discuss this in more detail in the concluding section below.

now passing, and into the unknown, propulsive horizons of Carol's future.

The Nostalgic Function of Film

As a cultural object, *American Graffiti* exhibits internal tensions that broach nostalgia's structural ambivalence and intrinsic bittersweetness. As imperfect as it may be—Kael and Brody's concerns will only increase as it continues to age—the film can be viewed as a propulsive use of nostalgia, a true work of graffiti that elicits the affective attachments specific to nostalgia while also *re-marking* upon the forms of desire it engenders. By deploying all the familiar aesthetic styles and pop ephemera of the period it conjures, which evoke and induce feelings of nostalgia, the film works critical displacements and subtle, granular oppositions that belie Jameson's reductive reading of the film as symptomatic of inauthenticity. The internal antagonisms it displays generate an organic type of resistance that works precisely because it is situated inside a variant form of nostalgic desire.⁴¹⁴ The film therefore achieves a level of *re-marked*, knowing, and self-reflexive nostalgia that extends the "nostalgia film" category beyond the determinations codified by Jameson.

This is no doubt what Alessia Ricciardi has in mind when she refers to "inherently nostalgic function of film."⁴¹⁵ The medium portrays durations of time, offering time back to us for meditation and critical intervention. It satisfies the nostalgic fantasy of regaining lost time, but only in part; it is a structurally unfulfilled fantasy, after all. The loss

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Dika, *Recycled Culture*, 18.

⁴¹⁵ Alessia Ricciardi, *The Ends of Mourning: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Film* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 141.

remains, made available for reflection only through its moving image. The image subsists as a memory apparatus, facilitating the work of mourning, to use the Derridean register. This apparatus galvanizes the Bazinian drive to preserve life through its representation, a means of investigating the past and its attendant losses in order to raise critical questions about future(s)—those imminent and those foreclosed—through the freshly cut prism of the present. Film aestheticizes afterwardness and *nachträglichkeit*, mobilizing the enigmatic function of belated recollection, and laying bare what Ricciardi calls the “complicated webs of temporality in which memory is not only taken in, introjected, or accrued, but reworked, projected, and given back.”⁴¹⁶ This was first made possible due to the formal features unique to cinema discovered by early filmmakers like the Lumière brothers: its ability to portray and manipulate the passage of time to compelling affective effect. Nostalgia films like Lucas’s *American Graffiti* do the same thing by underscoring the highly textual nature of our pasts, mediated as they are through aesthetic traces and cultural artifacts.

Richard Linklater, who has always had a deep interest in using film to mark the passage of time, pushes these features to their limits in *Boyhood* (2014), a drama filmed over the course of 12 years that quite literally documents its protagonist’s coming of age in real-time. As the child (Ellar Coltrane) grows and changes so do his parents (Patricia Arquette and Ethan Hawke), their bodies—faces and hands, most of all—bearing the effects of things in the process of passing away. In a final scene one character explicitly delivers the film’s main thesis: that moments seize people, not the other way around.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 13.

Before Linklater there was—and still is—the *Up* project, a series of documentary films produced by Granada Television and directed by Michael Apter. These films follow 14 children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, representing a cross-section of British life. Inspired by a Jesuit adage—“Give me the child until he is seven and I will give you the man”⁴¹⁷—the longitudinal series began in 1964 when each child is in primary school and checks back in with their lives every seven years (This leads to a series of titles: *Seven Up*, *7 Plus Seven*, *21 Up*, *28 Up*, and so on. A new installment, *63 Up*, premiered in early summer 2019). The result is staggering—equal parts exuberant and mournful, altogether deeply human. Some of the now late middle-aged adults pass away, others are subject to passings away of various kinds, and all are, themselves, in the process of passing away. They change and morph against the constant backdrop of time’s ceaseless pressure, at times looking back at their previous selves with longing and distaste in equal measure, noting the qualitative difference and discontinuity, a literal version of the sort of accomplishments Lucas dramatizes in *American Graffiti*. Could there ever be a more appropriately nostalgic gesture, a more bittersweet cinematic experience? Like living, visual time capsules, each *Up* episode exhibits its own organic tone befitting the stage of life it approaches. Some focus on mortality and regret, others youthful angst and restless uncertainty, and others still tranquility and quietude. In an interview with Ebert—who, echoing the early Lumière tagline, called the project “an inspired, even noble use of the film medium” where “life itself flashes across the

⁴¹⁷ Vanessa Thorpe, “Seven Up! Reaches 63: ‘I Started Filming Them When They Were Young. But We Are like a Family Now,’” *The Observer*, June 1, 2019, sec. Film, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jun/01/seven-up-at-63-documentary-michael-apter-cameraman-george-jesse-turner-interview>.

screen”—Apted expresses a deep desire to see the series continue because “it dignifies the ordinary life.”⁴¹⁸ He was 22 when *Seven Up* premiered, his first major film production. Now 78, eight installments later, Apted has wryly stated that he hopes to do *84 Up* in 20 years, around his 99th birthday.⁴¹⁹ Is he joking? The films’ scope, both intimate and metaphysical, universal yet specific, make it hard to tell.

Those early audience members seated in the Salon Indien that winter day in 1895 could never have anticipated how cinema would develop in this regard, and neither could the Lumière brothers. But they did recognize, albeit partially through works like *Démolition d'un mur*, that the art form retains a unique and singular ability to compellingly re-present (and disturb) the linear flow of temporality, a function that shares common ground with the experience of nostalgia. Cinema, like philosophy, begins in nostalgia, with the desire to see or experience yet again and recoup certain losses.⁴²⁰ The moving images that flicker past the screen allow us to return, yet again, to what has already passed away, depicting the very phenomenon of passing away, portraying things as they change, morph, grow, and wither away. The desire to see and experience again is the desire of cinema, a desire shot through with both nostalgia and spectrality. Gorky, Bazin, and Jameson were partially right when they invoked the crepuscular phantoms of Plato’s cave. These living, moving images are indeed shadows. But their tenebrous quality does not conceal the real. On the contrary, it heightens it, revealing opacities and

⁴¹⁸ Roger Ebert, “The Up Documentaries Movie Review (1985),” October 25, 1998, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-up-documentaries-1985>. Ebert’s extended interview with Apted can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGu470P7yfc>.

⁴¹⁹ Michael Apted, The “Up Series” at 56 | On the Media, interview by Brooke Gladstone, January 11, 2013, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/261818-up-series-56>.

⁴²⁰ Cf., Chapter 2 above.

imbrications not otherwise seen. The images generated in an explicit nostalgia film like *American Graffiti* complicate this relation between the real and its representation, ventriloquizing the referent, and destabilizing its orienting status. In doing so they draw close attention not only to the plurality of histories, but to the trace-structure of memory and the textuality of the past(s) toward which that memory stretches. This is possible because of the nostalgic desire that inheres within the moving image. Because of the temporal achievements intrinsic to its form—the ability to represent time, duration, and temporization, *in time*—cinema depends and thrives upon nostalgia. It can portray it, exploit it, mobilize and manipulate it, induce it, transmit it, dispel it, and critique it. This is its destiny, and its tribulation.

Chapter 5: Screen(ed) Nostalgia: The Propulsive Cinema of Terrence Malick

Guided by film, then, we approach, if at all, ideas no longer on highways leading through the void but on paths that wind through the thicket of things.⁴²¹
— Siegfried Kracauer

Return the past to the present. Magic of the present.⁴²²
— Robert Bresson

These are the images that have marked me and leaving me wondering still.⁴²³
— Kristen Johnson

From Philosophy to Cinema

Terrence Malick had every intention of becoming a philosopher. And perhaps he did, in a roving, roundabout way not at all unlike the cinematic style for which he is now known. In 1965 Malick completed formal study in philosophy at Harvard College under the direction of the late Stanley Cavell. Cavell, an American philosopher with continental proclivities and a vested interest in film, would later go on to suggest that Malick's *Days of Heaven* (1978) "contains a metaphysical vision of the world," bringing "the scene of human existence" into full cinematic view.⁴²⁴ Cavell has Heidegger in mind here. He suggests that the "formal radiance" of Malick's images depict what Heidegger calls the 'Being of beings' in *What is Called Thinking?*, the "presence of what is present" gathered together in sustained, iterative luminosity.⁴²⁵ But this is Heidegger at his limit, Heidegger *re-marked*, so to speak, by the spectral qualities specific to the moving image, iterative

⁴²¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1960), 309.

⁴²² Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York, N.Y.: Urizen Books, 1977), 26.

⁴²³ Kristen Johnson *Cameraperson* (2016; Cambridge, MA: Janus Films).

⁴²⁴ Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), xiv-xv.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, xv.

qualities first mobilized by the Lumière Brothers as we have seen. For Cavell, Malick's genius lies in his unparalleled ability to show or re-present how objects participate in their own recreation on a screen where "their presence refers to their absence," to their feigned origins in a different time and a different place.⁴²⁶ If nostalgia remains intrinsic to the experience of time as Derrida suggests,⁴²⁷ then the formal radiance Cavell identifies here begins to broach how Malick's cinema puts that dynamic to work through aesthetic representation. His films offer a compelling, evocative mediation on loss, memory, and the persistent passage of time that limits and conditions both. Malick's own abbreviated relationship to philosophy, a discipline that provides some conceptual coordinates for these themes, serves as an instructive microcosm of this dynamic between presence and absence, time and memory, loss and desire. His academic pursuit of philosophy was all too brief, yet his filmic contributions loom large, *re-marking* on the discipline and its concerns from without, a *re-marking* predicated on absence and enlivened by adjacency.⁴²⁸ Though fruitful now, this absence was not intentional, at least not initially.

Malick excelled in his studies with Cavell, so much so that he was awarded a prestigious fellowship to continue his work abroad. In June 1966 the Harvard chapter of Phi Beta Kappa announced its Rhodes Scholar recipients, among them "Terrence Frederick Malick of Bartlesville, Oklahoma."⁴²⁹ A small town just northwest of Tulsa near the Kansas state line, Bartlesville was home to the now defunct Phillips Petroleum

⁴²⁶ Ibid., xvi.

⁴²⁷ I discussed this in detail in chapter three above.

⁴²⁸ See, for example, David Davies' "Terrence Malick" in Paisley Livingston and Carl Plantinga, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2008), 569-580.

⁴²⁹ Paul Maher Jr., *One Big Soul: An Oral History of Terrence Malick* (Lulu, 2012), 18.

Company at the time. Malick's father, Emil, worked for the company as a geologist and projects director. As a boy, Malick and his family split their time between Bartlesville and central Texas, due in large part to the vicissitudes of the then booming oil industry—a far cry, in any case, from Oxford's hallowed halls. The Rhodes Committee awarded Malick a generous stipend to complete a doctorate in philosophy at Oxford's Magdalen College. It was a frustrating and deeply disappointing venture. Malick left the program almost immediately, exiting due to an apparent disagreement with his advisor, Gilbert Ryle, over the direction of his work. He had proposed a project on the concept of world in Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Wittgenstein, a continuation of his undergraduate work with Cavell on Husserl and Heidegger. Ryle, an analytic philosopher, evidently chided Malick for not proposing something more “philosophical,” or so the story goes.⁴³⁰ Hence the ensuing absence, an abandonment of philosophy in favor of cinema. Malick completed the translation of Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* (*The Essence of Reasons*) he had been working on and took his leave.

This chapter takes up Malick's work following that leave-taking and explores how themes like movement, loss, and the passage of time emerge and converge in his 2011 Palme d'Or winner *The Tree of Life*. I demonstrate how his cinematic approach, informed by Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian strains of thought, serves to open up nostalgic expression by highlighting its more propulsive and animating features. In the last chapter we saw how the formal qualities of the moving image put cinema in a unique

⁴³⁰ Simon Critchley, “Calm: On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*,” in *Film as Philosophy: Essays in Cinema after Wittgenstein and Cavell*, ed. Rupert Read and Jerry Goodenough (New York, NY: Springer, 2005), 138.

position to manipulate and *re-mark* upon temporality. We also saw how those qualities can be brought to bear on memory traces in ways that mobilize nostalgia without predictably acquiescing to regression. This chapter furthers that mode of inquiry. I begin by contextualizing Malick's filmography, noting how key themes like memory, loss, and temporal passage occupy a principal place in his work, achieving new meaning and significance in *The Tree of Life*. I then move to show how that film works with and against certain psychoanalytic concepts, orbiting insights explored in chapter three to portray compelling instances of nostalgic experience that facilitate the work of mourning in response to a felt loss. Malick embeds those instances in the story and structure of the film; he also elicits them in the viewer by wielding, in a manner all his own, filmic techniques especially suited to temporal manipulation and *re-marking*. As such, I claim that the film *screens* nostalgia in both senses: it offers a profound, arresting aesthetic representation of nostalgia on the cinema *screen* and uses nostalgia as a *screen* affect within the inner life of its main protagonist. The result is as personal and particular as it is universal and abstract, a work of unrivaled cinematic achievement that elevates the medium's capacity for temporal intervention to new heights.

Cavell was the first among many to observe that Malick's background in philosophy informs and nourishes his cinematic oeuvre. Malick's philosophical training focused on Heidegger's work. His filmic contributions deal with similar themes but extend them in a manner not unlike the deconstructive interventions explored in chapter three. But whereas Derrida can only speculate about a cinematics of memory that translates or *re-marks* upon Heidegger in a new, yet-to-be-developed register, Malick

enacts this form of spectral cinema across his career, achieving a new, spellbinding iteration in *The Tree of Life*. Should this lead us to believe that Malick succeeded in film where he failed in philosophy? It is difficult to determine whether Malick's work in film accomplishes what he sought to do through speculative reflection—his career ended before it even began, after all. But available philosophical texts do offer some very interesting clues. Malick's translator's introduction to Heidegger's *The Essence of Reasons*, for example, offers some interesting ideas that shed light on his turn to cinema. Those ideas appear to have occupied Malick's mind since his early years studying with Cavell. They form the basis for his 1966 undergraduate thesis at Harvard and likely would have extended beyond that arena, given what we know about his aims for doctoral study. It stands to reason that the ideas occupying his mind during the time he chose to turn to film might also affect his cinematic approach. What exactly are they?

In his introduction Malick rightly observes that Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* is principally concerned with the concept of "world," a notion Malick takes to be synonymous with "horizon" as his proposed doctoral project indicates. He goes on to point out that, for Heidegger, the world "is not the totality of things but that in terms of which we understand them." "The world," Malick writes, "is meant to be that which can keep us from seeing, or force us to see, that what we have *is* one."⁴³¹ First published in 1929, the text in question expands and clarifies what Heidegger called "the worldhood of

⁴³¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, trans. Terrence Malick (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), xiv-xv.

the world” two years earlier in *Sein und Zeit*.⁴³² It is also the text where Heidegger first turns an intransitive noun into a transitive verb.⁴³³ “The world never is,” he announces, “it worlds” (“*welt ist nie, sondern weltet*”).⁴³⁴ In his footnote to this line, Malick suggests that Heidegger coins this somewhat unwieldy phrase—the world worlds—in order to denote the sheer strangeness that attends to the ever-receding temporal horizons against which *Dasein* is thrown.⁴³⁵

In exploring that strangeness, and the attendant uncanniness of existence, Heidegger famously sought to abandon traditional philosophical language later in his career, turning instead to the poets. Malick shows great interest in this drive to push language to its limits (the phrase ‘the world worlds’ standing as prototypical Heideggerian example). He notes the difficulties in approaching Heidegger’s work but defends its opacity on precisely these terms. “If Heidegger resorts to his own peculiar language, it is because ordinary German does not meet his purposes,” he tells us. “And it does not because he has new and different purposes.”⁴³⁶ He says something similar in a more interesting way a several years before in his Harvard thesis noting that the “least

⁴³² See William McNeill’s introduction to an alternative translation of *Vom Wesen des Grundes*, which acknowledges and draws upon Malick’s, in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 97. See also Division I.III entitled “The Worldhood of the World” in *Sein und Zeit*.

⁴³³ Cf. Martin Woessner, “Brave New Worlds,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/brave-new-worlds/>. As Steve Rybin puts it, “Perhaps the most striking aspect of Heidegger’s concept of ‘world’ is the extent to which it pivots around world as an active verb, rather than a noun.” See his *Terrence Malick and the Thought of Film* (New York, N.Y.: Lexington Books, 2012), 14.

⁴³⁴ Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, 103.

⁴³⁵ “Heidegger makes a transitive verb of *Welt* (‘world’), as he did earlier with *Nichts* (‘nothing’),” writes Malick. He does this “evidently to encourage the reader to think of *Welt* and *Nichts* as existing, or functioning, *in a way so peculiarly their own that it can only be expressed tautologically.*” *Ibid.*, 142n44. Italics mine.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii.

accessible” points of departure may be the “most illuminating” and that “we can only hope to keep faith with that ambiguity, not to dissipate it.”⁴³⁷ Cavell identifies one such ambiguity in his comparison of Malick to Heidegger quoted above: the dynamic between presence and absence, concealment and disclosure, where a thing’s “presence refers to its absence.”⁴³⁸ Heidegger struggled to come to terms with this ambiguity and how to express it throughout his career, ultimately alleviating that ambiguity under the rubrics of authenticity, presencing, and primordial unity. Malick abandoned philosophy in order to pursue that tension through a different mode of expression and has been, by all accounts, fruitful. His films give the ideas they contain space to breathe and expand, highlighting, for example, how the ‘presence’ of moving images refers to something not fully present. By pointing to something not immediately there and holding that gaze, his images allow that not-there-ness to linger, loiter, and hold sway.

What I am suggesting here is not that Malick identified cinema as a viable arena in which to pursue his philosophical ideas, or even that he views cinema as a form of philosophy, although that may very well be the case, who knows. My point is less beholden to divining individual intentionality than that, and in this respect it is important remember that Malick’s only published text in philosophy is a translation accompanied with a critical introduction. Malick may have changed careers, moving from philosophy to film, but his relation to what Walter Benjamin first called “the task of the translator” remains, I think, the same. He strives to achieve a form of representation adequate to its

⁴³⁷ Terrence Malick, “The Concept of Horizon in Husserl and Heidegger” (Cambridge, M.A., Harvard University, 1966), 2; 18.

⁴³⁸ Cavell, *The World Viewed*, xvi.

subject matter, a form that lets the remote remain and approach in its remoteness, one that ripens the seeds of expression by creating echoes or reverberations of the ‘original,’ to use Benjamin’s language.⁴³⁹ It is in this sense that the remarkable value of Malick’s work, a value best typified in *The Tree of Life*, lies in his unparalleled ability express and enact notions like ‘the worlding of the world’ through means not readily available to speculative thought. He portrays, in minute detail, the manner in which our experience of the world often recedes as quickly as it emerges, adding rich cinematic texture to one of life’s deepest, most persistent conundrums: that although we may orient our lives around time’s delimiting determinations, our experience of its effects does not always align with those structuring conditions. That asymmetry or misalignment, which gives birth to

⁴³⁹ Benjamin introduces this phrase in a highly influential essay by the same name. See “The Task of the Translator,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1969), 69-82. The operative word in the title is the German *Aufgabe* which can mean “task” or “failure,” but also “to give up,” introducing an undecidable play in the intercourse between two languages. For Benjamin the *Aufgabe* of any translation is not to simply communicate or convey, but to continue and reiterate the creativity and formal ingenuity of the original, to allow what is remote, foreign, or unintelligible to approach us on its own terms. Although Benjamin is responsible for the seeds of this idea, it is Derrida who exfoliates its full potential in “Des Tours de Babel.” See Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2001), 102-134. There he provides his own commentary on Benjamin’s theory of translation, pushing it further toward the deconstructive logic of the supplement which makes the language of the original grow, not by reproducing but by adding. Derrida explicitly connects this to the notion of *re-marking* discussed at length in chapter three above. Instead of transporting, transferring, or representing communicable content, translations *re-mark* by respecting spectral absence, by “render[ing] present an affinity that is never present in the presentation...a presentation inadequate to that which is nevertheless presented (120). Because of this inadequacy, the original harbors a demand, injunction, or desire to be translated. “There is some to-be-translated” (Il y a de l’à-traduire) as he puts it (121). And, once again, the act of translation helps the original grow, giving it more life, what Derrida calls survival or living-on (*survivance*) where “the work does not simply live long, it lives more and better, beyond the means of its author (114). The gap or interval that subsists between language—original and translation—cannot be finally overcome; it can only be touched by an intensification of expression that “render presents what is absent...allowing remoteness to approach as remoteness, fort/da” (132). Derrida ultimately goes on to identify translation with experience as such, in a manner not unlike his meditation on nostalgia by way of John Donne mentioned above. Much remains to be written using this line of thought as an interpretive lens for demarcating, in a more direct and comprehensive way, the terms through which Heideggerian and post-Heideggerian strains of thought inform Malick’s body of work as whole.

nostalgic experience and suffuses Malick's work, also opens up space for increased movement and propulsion. By turning to cinema, Malick's philosophical failure in this regard becomes an enduring success, an exit that animates, gesturing toward new modes of movement and passage.

That exit took time to really solidify. Once back in the states, Malick taught as a visiting philosophy lecturer at MIT, filling in for Hubert Dreyfus during the latter's sabbatical. Dreyfus, of course, was a noted Heidegger expert and Malick stepped in to deliver his famous *Being and Time* seminar.⁴⁴⁰ A short time later, in 1969, he published his Heidegger translation.⁴⁴¹ Malick wore many hats during this time and these were not his only post-Oxford endeavors. He freelanced for *Life* and *Newsweek* and wrote obituaries of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. for *The New Yorker*. In late 1967, *The New Yorker* sent him to Bolivia for four months to cover the widely publicized trial of Régis Debray, a rising French philosopher who came under fire for his Marxist commitments and association with Che Guevara's guerrilla uprisings. The piece was to be on Debray, principally, but Malick had larger plans to profile Guevara himself. He traveled with Michele Ray, a former Chanel model and fellow freelance reporter who had just escaped the Vietcong and was herself under fire for her reporting on the Vietnam

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Thomas Deane Tucker and Stuart Kendall, *Terrence Malick: Film and Philosophy* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 80.

⁴⁴¹ Malick's translation, the first of its kind, remains an important version of that text. John Sallis cites it as a critical guide for his own translation of Heidegger's text in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeil (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1998). As others have noted, such a project perhaps indicates that Malick intended to operate as a sort of independent researcher and thinker, perhaps even a Heideggerian scholar. See Tucker and Kendall, *Terrence Malick*, 5.

War. They arrived on October 10, one day after Guevara was captured and summarily executed by Bolivian authorities. The essay never came to fruition.⁴⁴²

Malick's own restlessness and inner consternation further exacerbated these false starts. Thwarted scholarly and professional aspirations led to stagnation, self-sabotage, and personal turmoil. He intended to complete *The New Yorker* piece despite Guevara's death but failed to do so in large part because the project kept increasing in scope. He amassed copious notes but struggled to find clear focus. Friend and colleague at the time Paul Lee recalls Malick working on the piece for months and months. "I have memory of it piling up to six feet of copy. He got obsessed and he overwrote."⁴⁴³ Malick's family life was also marred by tragedy during this time. His younger brother Lawrence, a promising musician, moved to Alicante, Spain to study flamenco guitar under a virtuosic but extremely demanding instructor. The pressure proved insurmountable and Lawrence ultimately succumbed, dramatically breaking his hands during a manic episode. He later phoned his older brother before committing suicide in a hotel room. Malick's youngest brother, Chris, would also die by his own hand during an illness years later.⁴⁴⁴ It is difficult to watch Malick's 2011 *magnum opus* *The Tree of Life*—its familial reckoning, its tender homage to lost siblings with artistic potential—without bearing these events in

⁴⁴² Malick did, however, attempt to revive his work in filmic form decades later, working on a biographical Che Guevara screenplay based in part on his experience in Bolivia during this time. When funding eventually fell through, Malick left to complete *The New World* (2005). The Che project was eventually helmed by Steven Soderbergh, starring Benicio del Toro in the titular role.

⁴⁴³ Richard Brody, "Terrence Malick, the Way He Was," *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/terrence-malick-the-way-he-was>. Elsewhere, Lee suggests that "the issue was...he didn't know how or what to say, or what audience to address, other than writing for himself." See Paul Maher Jr., *One Big Soul: An Oral History of Terrence Malick* (Lulu, 2012), 29.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Peter Biskind, *Easy Riders Raging Bulls: How the Sex-Drugs-And Rock 'N Roll Generation Save* (New York, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 248-249.

mind, without detecting some sense of personal, autobiographical nostalgia, a type of ongoing *re-marking* and bereavement.

Professionally, Malick's experience teaching Dreyfus' Heidegger course in 1968 was also a disaster, similarly marked with nearly crippling disquietude, obsession, and one can surmise, grief. He felt that in order to teach the material one must experience it, which made for some palpably awkward moments in the lecture hall. "At one point," Dreyfus remembers, "[he] got to the part on anxiety and discovered he wasn't experiencing anxiety, so he couldn't talk about anything. He just stared off into space for about ten minutes."⁴⁴⁵ Perhaps Malick succeeded in inducing the experience he sought to impart that day, but such immersive strategies are rarely, if ever, effective. And he knew this. In one of the only public interviews he has ever given, a *Sight and Sound* piece published in 1975, Malick admits as much. "I was not a good teacher," he confesses to Beverley Walker. "I didn't have the sort of edge one should have on the students. So I decided to do something else."⁴⁴⁶

That something else was film—and Malick certainly had the necessary sort of edge. In 1969, he began study at the American Film Institute (AFI) alongside Paul Schrader and David Lynch, paragons in waiting of what would become the "New Hollywood" movement.⁴⁴⁷ Malick released *Badlands*, his first feature, several years later

⁴⁴⁵ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 25.

⁴⁴⁶ Lloyd Michaels, *Terrence Malick* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 102.

⁴⁴⁷ During this period Malick also met longtime collaborator and production designer Jack Fisk, one of Lynch's old childhood friends. While at AFI, Malick continued to pursue various freelance work and side projects. He worked as a script doctor on early, uncredited drafts: *Drive, He Said* (1971), *Pocket Money* (1972), and, most notably, *Dirty Harry* (1971). Under the pseudonym David Whitney he co-wrote *The Gravy Train* with Bill Kerby and penned *Deadhead Miles* himself. When Paramount Pictures shelved the latter project, preventing a full theatrical release, Malick began to consider directing his own scripts.

to impressive critical acclaim. It debuted in 1973 at the New York Film Festival—the same year, incidentally, as Lucas’s *American Graffiti*—and stole the show, even usurping Martin Scorsese’s highly anticipated *Mean Streets*.⁴⁴⁸ Warner Brothers picked up the film almost immediately. Five years later, Malick’s sophomore effort hit theaters. A romantic period drama set in west Texas during WWI, *Days of Heaven* (1978) is now widely regarded as the film where Malick really began to come into his own as a distinctive American director. Initial reviews were somewhat mixed and split along a familiar divide that still resurfaces with any new Malick release: those who find value in the poetic tone and visually stunning imagery, and those who find his work too elliptical and impressionistic, lacking a clear narrative and relatable dramatic stakes.⁴⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the film went on to garner four nominations and one deserved win in cinematography at the 51st Academy Awards. Malick also won the best director award at the 1979 Cannes Film Festival. The film built upon the critical success of *Badlands* and effectively launched Malick’s career, solidifying his position as a visionary auteur among his peers.

Charles Bluhorn, head of Paramount’s parent company Gulf+Western at the time, found *Days of Heaven* so compelling that he offered Malick a million dollars to fund his next big project, sight unseen.⁴⁵⁰ Malick accepted but old tendencies soon reemerged. As with the failed Che profile, he struggled to find focus and became more and more irritated

⁴⁴⁸ Peter Biskind, “The Runaway Genius: Behind Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*,” *Vanity Fair*, April 23, 2010, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2010/04/runaway-genius-199812>.

⁴⁴⁹ For example, Harold C. Schonberg of *The New York Times* and Monica Eng of *The Chicago Tribune* stated that the film “never really makes up its mind what it wants to be” and that “the story is secondary to the visuals,” while Robert Biskind called *Days of Heaven* “a dark jewel of a film,” going on to praise its “melancholic tone and dreamy landscapes” in *Vanity Fair*. See Biskind, “The Runaway Genius.”

⁴⁵⁰ Bilge Ebiri, “Thirty-Three Years of Principal Filming,” *New York Magazine*, March 13, 2011, <http://nymag.com/movies/features/terrence-malick-2011-5/>.

by the need to present an attractive project that adhered to mainstream standards. Pressure and frustration mounted, and he became increasingly detached and disillusioned. He eventually shelved the project and disappeared from public life altogether. Nearly three decades and two feature-length films later, he would finally return to that semi-autobiographical project, working a majority of its material into *The Tree of Life*. Years later, when asked about this hiatus, Malick displays striking modesty and characteristic intuitiveness, as if such a seismic decision were just another fleeting directorial impulse indulged on one of his sets, almost an act of habit. “I never even thought about it,” he says. “I was just in Paris. And suddenly it’s been 17 years.”⁴⁵¹

In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger reiterates his key phrase—the world worlds—adding that the worlding of the world brings it “more fully in being than the tangible and perceptible realm in which we believe ourselves *to be at home*.”⁴⁵² This is noteworthy on at least two fronts. First, it further conjoins the main themes discussed in chapters 2-3, i.e., the conceptual linkage between home, homesickness, affective attunement, and nostalgia. Heidegger, drawing on Novalis, defines homesickness, the fundamental mood of philosophy, as a form of desire that emerges in the wake of estrangement and loss, the drive to be at home everywhere, even in the most unhomely of places. As nostalgia, this homesickness registers as desire, the ache to dwell within the worlding of the world and make of it a home.⁴⁵³ Second, Malick’s short-lived

⁴⁵¹ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 109.

⁴⁵² Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, Revised and Expanded Edition, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), 170. Italics mine.

⁴⁵³ As Frank Schalow and Alfred Denker put it: “Dwelling is in its more profound sense a ‘homecoming.’ The basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve. [...] In dwelling, mortals take their

philosophical efforts draw out the connotations of movement and propulsion embedded in Heidegger's positioning of the world as a transcendental phenomenon, a horizon or limit concepts that both outstrips and conditions *Dasein's* modes of being.⁴⁵⁴ Transcendence, of course, carries connotations of exceeding or surpassing a boundary, of crossing a clear limit to the passage beyond. In Heidegger's thinking, alienation and estrangement (the inability to adequately move about) emerge due to our deep entanglement within the world, a world whose worlding teems with its own movement, what Heidegger calls unconcealment and emergent presencing.⁴⁵⁵ I have already discussed the entangled values that undergird Heidegger's determinations here (unity, wholeness, presence as such, etc.) and the tensions they create between loss, movement in time, and nostalgic desire. Malick is no doubt aware of these tensions too, but unlike Heidegger he does not seek to alleviate them. Instead, he makes productive use of them in his cinematic body of work by prising them open further, giving them space to breathe, and "dar[ing] to unfurl something of life in the present tense."⁴⁵⁶ That unfurling is shot through with, and in some cases motivated by, a form of nostalgic desire deeply

measure from the way that the world fits together and lets entities show themselves as they are. Dwelling is building a home in the world. [...] Human beings attend in their dwelling to the world by responding in their thinking to the address of being." See their *Historical Dictionary of Heidegger's Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Lanham, M.D.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 41.

⁴⁵⁴ Malick explicitly mentions this in his critical notes to *Vom Wesen des Grundes*. See Heidegger, *The Essence of Reasons*, 138n26.

⁴⁵⁵ James Morrison and Thomas Schur suggest that this is "the defining paradox of Heidegger's thought...that we are detached or alienated because we are so unavoidably entangled in the world." See their James Morrison and Thomas Schur, eds., *The Films of Terrence Malick* (Westport, C.T.: Praeger, 2003), 14.

⁴⁵⁶ Michael Nordine, "Hollywood Bigfoot: Terrence Malick and the 20-Year Hiatus That Wasn't," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 12, 2013, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/hollywood-bigfoot-terrence-malick-and-the-20-year-hiatus-that-wasnt/>.

concerned with how experiences of loss or temporal discontinuity continue to animate and *re-mark*.

Memory at Work

Taken as whole, Malick's cinematic oeuvre offers us a sustained and compelling meditation on the work of memory and the temporized nature of the human condition, the interminable stretching out of the moving subject across time.⁴⁵⁷ Nourished by the recollective absence of things past, propelled by the anticipatory absence of things to come, and longing for some repose through things presently becoming absent, this subject often seeks refuge in the solace of the (moving) image. Malick seizes upon this dynamic and combines some of the most radical insights of phenomenology—that, in time, the self never completely coincides with itself—with the formal qualities unique to the moving image, i.e., its ability to portray the fleeting passage of time. This is what Cavell has in mind when he refers to the “formal radiance” of Malick's cinema, the manner in which the director's images suggest a “metaphysical vision” predicated upon the interplay between presence and absence, things present and things past. Malick approaches this interplay with a probing, contemplative eye that focuses its attention on the fleeting nature of experience and the mutable traces of memory. If memory is more a leaking sieve than a perpetually open shutter—some things forever escape, others slip through, often unannounced—then Malick's camera isn't a camera at all, at least not in

⁴⁵⁷ St. Augustine is among the first to have pointed this out, referring to the experience of time as a type of distention or constitutive stretchedness, what he calls *distentio animi*. I turn to this idea briefly in the concluding sections below.

the traditional sense.⁴⁵⁸ Its aperture serves to shed some light on the persistent gaps lodged in recollective experience. It orbits those gaps and *re-marks* upon them, but ultimately withholds closure and resists finality. The gaps persist and remain; with enough time and distance they form the space in which nostalgia emerges.

These themes reach their sublime apex in Malick's 2011 masterpiece *The Tree of Life*, but nearly all of his features deploy them to some degree. His first two films are especially instructive. A continuation of his 1969 AFI thesis project *Lanton Mills*—a short Texas western starring Warren Oates and Henry Dean Stanton—*Badlands* tells a loosely fictionalized version of the Charles Starkweather and Caril Anne Fugate killing spree of 1958. Starring Martin Sheen and Sissy Spacek, young, unknown principal actors at the time, the neo-noir crime drama melds the lovers-on-the-lam motif of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) with the titillating adolescent delinquency of *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), forming the basis for the circuitous and atmospheric directorial style for which Malick is known: a loose, meandering plot firmly rooted in the modern American psyche, extensive use of enigmatic voice-over narration, symbolically rich visual imagery shot with cascading natural light, and a pronounced conflict or tension between the forces of nature and the arbitrary strictures of human civilization, between the cosmic and the mundane, the universal and the particular.⁴⁵⁹ In these early films, Malick knits these elements

⁴⁵⁸ This is a riff on John Green's musings on sports rivalries and Apple's Notes app. See John Green, host, "Notes App and Sports Rivalries," *Anthropocene Reviewed* (podcast), November 27, 2019, <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/anthropocene-reviewed/episodes/anthropocene-reviewed-notes-app-and-sports-rivalries>.

⁴⁵⁹ This may seem like an obvious point in hindsight. Malick wrote the screenplay in his late 20s and was only 30 when the film was released. But it is worth noting that there are those who valorize *Badlands* at the expense of later works. Lloyd Michaels, for example, claims that "Malick's first film

together with a concern for the passage of time and the losses or defeats that passage often entails.

In a glowing retrospective on the film, Roger Ebert situates *Badlands* within Malick's larger body of work, drawing particular attention to how he mobilizes these elements. When comparing Malick's debut with *The Tree of Life*, Ebert notices a curious similarity between the homes used in each film and observes that "we sense [Malick's] own memories at work."⁴⁶⁰ As we saw with Hofer, the concepts of 'home' and 'homeliness' give rise to more modern and contemporary forms of nostalgia that evince a longing to return to the time of formative provenance, a time characterized by a strong sense of belonging and identification. In *Badlands*, we see Malick working to develop a cinematic vision, one informed by his own memory and experience, that begins to approach a probing, meditative form of nostalgia more animating and propulsive than it is stultifying.

That vision deepens in *Days of Heaven*, the feature that gave Cavell good reason to link the director's cinematic vision with the nexus between presence, absence, and temporization. The film follows two lovers—Richard Gere and Brooke Adams—employed to harvest fall crops for a wealthy farmer (Sam Shepard, in one of his first major roles). Principal photography began in 1976, but the film did not see wide release

remains arguably the most perfectly realized of his four works to date." This is hardly the case now—Malick has made five more films since 2011's *The Tree of Life*, the apex of his career—and it is difficult to see how *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*, and *The New World* do not stand as important moments in his development, each film improving upon its predecessors and more fully realizing its intrinsic aims. Current critical consensus seems to suggest some stagnation or regression in Malick's post-2011 period, but this is certainly not the case in his earlier work. Cf. Michaels, *Terrence Malick*, 20.

⁴⁶⁰ Roger Ebert, "Badlands (1973): Movie Review," RogerEbert.com, June 24, 2011, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-badlands-1973>.

until 1978 due in large part to environmental factors and, especially, Malick's unconventional methods.⁴⁶¹ He rejected auxiliary lighting equipment in favor natural light, composing many shots around dusk, during "magic hour" when the light is soft and evenly diffuse.⁴⁶² He also pared down daily call sheets, enabling him to improvise on set and capture things on the fly as conditions warranted. His describes his approach during production as follows:

I was able to capture absolute reality. That was my wish: to prevent the appearance of any technique, and that the photography as to be processed to be visually beautiful and to ensure this beauty existed within the world I was trying to show, *suggesting that which was lost, or what we were now losing.*⁴⁶³

While met with some initial resistance, this technique ultimately proved quite successful, serving to formalize the approach Malick has deployed in virtually every feature since.⁴⁶⁴

This quiet, searching style prioritizes mood and atmosphere over histrionic dramaturgy, allowing Malick to evoke a very specific set of feelings. That set of feelings orbits the

⁴⁶¹ Production was notoriously arduous, Malick's developing style notwithstanding. Although the film is set in Texas, it was mostly shot in Alberta, Canada where the cast and crew had to contend with brutal conditions, including overpowering winds and the bitter cold. See Maher, *One Big Soul*, 80.

⁴⁶² For more on this approach and what it entailed see Néstor Almendros, *A Man With a Camera*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1984. Along with Haskell Wexler, Almendros worked as a principal cinematographer on the film.

⁴⁶³ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 82. Italics mine. This often meant changing or aborting plans in order to capture small, fleeting moments. Sam Shepard recalls: "Terry'd be all set up to do a scene and there'd be a flight of geese across the sky. He'd get everybody to turn their cameras and shoot this thing because it was happening right then. And the crew would be like, 'ahh shit, what is this bullshit?' And then there would be this absolutely gorgeous shot in natural light. There it was. But that's one of the parts of his genius, I think, is his ability to see the moment and say, "Okay, now, if we don't get this, we'll never get it," and to ignore the conventions of how you shoot a movie."

⁴⁶⁴ Malick's unorthodox style led to an air of discontent and impatience on set. Several prominent crew members quit, accusing Malick and his inner circle of unprofessionalism and a lack of technical knowledge. Actors like Gere were also a bit displeased, or at the very least disoriented, by Malick's manner of direction, a probing, curious style that valued mood and atmosphere over the histrionic dramaturgy of classical Hollywood. Nevertheless, Malick's main cinematographer, Almendros, went on to win an Academy Award for his work on the film and Malick was awarded the *Prix de la mise en scène* at the Cannes film festival. *Days of Heaven* continues to be a canonical reference in American cinema, largely due to its cinematography, shot composition, and use of natural light.

same affective terrain as nostalgia and coheres with Ebert's assessment of *Badlands*, eliciting an experience of bittersweetness that often emerges from the opacities of memory and wistful reminiscence, the stirrings that arise from some mythical idea of 'home.' Malick himself suggests that the film's title "comes from a feeling that a place exists that is within reach...where we will be safe...a place where a house will not rest on the sand, where you will not become crazier by fighting again and again against the impossible."⁴⁶⁵ These distinctly homely feelings—safety, security, belonging—surface in the wake of the losses and discontinuities generated by temporized experience, the phenomenon of being thrown hither and thither, cast here and there by the vagrancies of time and the vicissitudes of the human condition Malick takes great care to re-present on screen. The title also conjures Deuteronomy—"that your days be multiplied...as the *days of heaven* upon the earth"—a line uttered during the film as a nameless preacher prays over whispering fields of wheat. Those wheat fields occupy a central place in Malick's own homely recollections. "I have a very good memory of it," he remembers, recalling his work in the wheat and oil fields across the Great Plains of Texas and Oklahoma as a boy.

But, much like nostalgia itself, those affectionate, visually striking memories are not without ambivalence and equivocation. Malick disliked the unpredictable precarity of harvest time, both its unmoored transience and petty criminality. As he puts it in an interview with Michel Ciment of *Positif*, "I was raised in a violent environment...what struck me was how violence erupted and ended *before you really had time to understand*

⁴⁶⁵ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 72.

what was happening.”⁴⁶⁶ As time marches on understanding comes belatedly, as do the sometimes conflicting feelings associated with nostalgic desire, feelings that long to slow the passage of time so it might be experienced more fully. As in *Badlands*, *Days of Heaven* juxtaposes stunning natural beauty with the churning, ever-present threat of violence and indifference. In both films, Malick *re-marks* upon Heidegger’s ‘worlding of the world’ and in each case “the beauty of nature carries a penitential charge...the sense of irrecoverable loss the films convey.”⁴⁶⁷ This loss emerges in the moment and attains true recognition after the fact. Here, in this space of belatedness, nostalgia begins to come into view, taking root in the gap that subsists between lived experienced and delayed understanding, between the initial moment when impressions make their lasting marks and their deferred, sometimes retroactive effects. These are the main themes that undergird Malick’s filmography, themes that achieve new meaning and significance in his long awaited 2011 feature.

The Tree of Life opens with an utterance, a barely heard address to an as yet unknown recipient. So does nostalgia. In his 1688 dissertation Hofer writes that “it is possible from the force of the sound Nostalgia, to define the sad mood [*tristem animum*] originating from the burning desire [*ardenti desiderio*] for the return.”⁴⁶⁸ The force Hofer identifies suggests a nearly tangible intensity of feeling, a deep desire for return, rooted in recollection, in images that have made their marks and remain in memory. The sound

⁴⁶⁶ Michaels, *Terrence Malick*, 110. Italics mine.

⁴⁶⁷ Hannah Patterson, *The Cinema of Terrence Malick: Poetic Visions of America, Second Edition* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2012), 202.

⁴⁶⁸ Johannes Hofer, “Medical Dissertation on Nostalgia,” trans. Carolyn Kiser Anspach, *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 2 (January 1, 1934), 381.

nostalgia generates comes to us through two discrete sounds—*nostos* and *algos*, homecoming and ache—that together constitute the force, a force that forms an address. It is through this address, this sound, that nostalgic longing achieves recognition and expression, intimating a desire for movement in the form of return. The forceful address nostalgia forges cries out for return, a re-turning toward home, origins, beginnings, and provenance—a turning back toward something lost, perhaps even irrevocable, but no less animating. From a feeling, then, a proper name—nostalgia—a name in search of a recipient, a hearer, an addressee who might be able to sate the desire that both elicits the name and exceeds it. For Hofer this proper name indicates a seizure of movement, the inability to turn, to move, a failure to re-turn or go back suggestive of a doomed or thwarted passage home. Doomed or not, the address this name calls forth persists, impelling movement through a turning toward or turning away that reorients and unsettles.

The nearly inaudible address that opens *The Tree of Life* initiates one such turning, a turning toward some unknown other. This address goes on to take many serpentine, disorienting turns over the course of the film, acting as a strange sort of guide, unclear in its sense of direction. Each of these turns elicits the force of Hofer's neologism by virtue of the moving image. Initially, this enigmatic, indeterminate address is set against the image of a single, flickering orb light.⁴⁶⁹ "Brother. Mother." To whom or what

⁴⁶⁹ The orb of light (and, it seems, the much talked about cosmogonic sequence) was one of the first elements of the film to emerge, dating all the way back to 1979 when it was only known as "Project Q." In an early document titled "Cosmogony: First Light" Malick describes "a great rose window of light, lasting only five or six seconds, so you can't testify to what you have seen." Given the effects technology at that time, Malick presumed he would have to use lasers to accomplish this. By the late 2000s he had much

is this address addressed? And who issues the address? “It was they who led me to your door.” A door suggests a threshold of sorts, a sign of potential crossing or passage—*movement*, in other words, nostalgia’s most fundamental theme. Our as yet unnamed speaker thus faces a decision, a crossroads. Is the crossing completed? Does the passage occur? The film’s opening both raises the question and defers the answer, imparting a cryptic address that exerts a quiet force even as its precise sense and status remain unclear.

The film has a long history rooted, as I have intimated, in Malick’s own biography, and dating all the back to the years leading up to his infamous hiatus. After securing a deal with Bluhorn and Paramount, Malick commenced work on a strange, sprawling project known simply as *Project Q*. He produced pages and pages of enigmatic, tenebrous prose, but nothing that resembled a conventional Hollywood narrative. Studio executives found this exorbitant, unrealistic, and unacceptable, imploring Malick to “send a script that starts with page one and at the ends says, ‘The End.’”⁴⁷⁰ Malick continued to draft and refine the script throughout the 1980s while the mainstream press wondered where “Hollywood’s Bigfoot” might have gone.⁴⁷¹ But he

more at his disposal, opting to use the musician, inventor, and early light artist Thomas Wilfred’s penultimate lumia image “Opus 161” “to suggest ethereal light emerging from the darkness of the void” See Maher, *One Big Soul*, 101.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 104-105.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. Michael Nordine, “Hollywood Bigfoot: Terrence Malick and the 20-Year Hiatus That Wasn’t,” Los Angeles Review of Books, May 12, 2013, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/hollywood-bigfoot-terrence-malick-and-the-20-year-hiatus-that-wasnt/>. What Malick was doing during this 20-year hiatus instantly became the subject of massive speculation and has since become canonical cinephile lore. As Nordine observes, Malick’s near categorical refusal of the modern cult of celebrity only served, ironically, to solidify his absorption within it. See Ibid. Rumors proliferated. Was he living in a garage somewhere in central Texas? Was he working as a hairdresser? Maybe he moved back to Paris to teach philosophy at the Sorbonne, living in a garret with no phone or electricity. Perhaps he was dead or had

never really took the notes he received from Paramount seriously. When critics chided *Days of Heaven* for offering a thin narrative without enough story, Malick simply doubled down. “I want to go more in that direction,” he would say, expressing what some have called a deep “interest in non-narrative style, the cinematic equivalent of how...Beethoven structured his symphonies.”⁴⁷² Like the Che Guevara project abandoned years before, *Project Q* kept expanding in scope, nearly jettisoning narrative altogether in favor of poetic abstraction. The initial idea involved an impressionistic multi-character, multi-period drama set in the Middle East during the early 20th century with a prehistoric

traveled to the Middle East to explore his father’s Assyrian lineage. See Nordine as well as Gaby Woods, “Absence of Malick,” *The Irish Times*, February 13, 1999, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/absence-of-malick-1.152668> and Eric Benson, “The Not-So-Secret Life of Terrence Malick,” *Texas Monthly*, 2017, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/the-not-so-secret-life-of-terrence-malick/>. It turns out that American cinema’s own J.D. Salinger, a Hollywood version of Thomas Pynchon, was covertly splitting his time between France and Texas, nurturing a new love. At one point he ran into one of his *Badlands* principals, Martin Sheen, in Paris and gave him a copy of Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, a moment to which Sheen still attaches deep significance. Cf. Maher, *One Big Soul*, 106-107. During this time Malick also quietly resumed worked as a script doctor. He wrote his own version of *The English-Speaker*, based on Josef Breuer’s analysis of Anna O., a prominent case history in Freud’s *Studies in Hysteria*, and contributed to adaptations of Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer*, Larry McMurtry’s *The Desert Rose*, and Mori Ōgai’s *Sansho the Bailiff*, as well as an early and eventually completely rewritten iteration of Jim McBride’s Jerry Lee Lewis biopic *Great Balls of Fire!*. See “The Lost Projects And Unproduced Screenplays Of Terrence Malick,” *IndieWire*, July 12, 2011, <https://www.indiewire.com/2011/07/the-lost-projects-and-unproduced-screenplays-of-terrence-malick-117563/>. He was also attached to an early, undeveloped version *Elephant Man* (1980), a historical drama based on Joseph Merrick, before David Lynch signed on. None of these projects ever came to full fruition. By the mid-1980s he resurfaced in Austin, Texas, attending a screening of Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar* organized by Richard Linklater (a film inspired by *The Idiot*, yet another Dostoevsky connection). At the turn of the decade, he began to spend even more time there, supporting local artists and recruiting young, unknown talents to take on larger, more ambitious projects. Malick returned to prominence in 1998 with an adaptation of James Jones’ *The Thin Red Line*, a project subject to more than 10 years worth of extensive negotiation and lengthy pre-production planning. Peter Biskind documents this saga in detail in his “The Runaway Genius: Behind Terrence Malick’s *The Thin Red Line*,” *Vanity Fair*, April 23, 2010, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2010/04/runaway-genius-199812>. Tragically, the film was released just one month after Spielberg’s *Saving Private Ryan*—a classic Hollywood war film in virtually every sense—and continues to live in its long shadow. In the best way possible, Malick’s foray in the genre “seems [at times] to be a war picture in name only...as interested in a newborn bird on the battlefield as the ins and outs of combat.” Cf. Ebiri, “Thirty-Three Years of Principal Filming.” Famed director Martin Scorsese has stated that *The Thin Red Line* remains one of his favorite films of the 1990s.

⁴⁷² Nordine, “Hollywood Bigfoot.”

prologue. As Michael Nordine observes, many of “the prehistoric elements were eventually integrated into *The Tree of Life*,”⁴⁷³ while the more bizarre and cerebral sequences were excised. These included a sleeping, minotaur-type god who dreams of the origins of the universe while submerged underwater as fish swim in and out of its nostrils.⁴⁷⁴ The images Malick wanted to obtain were equally ambitious and while some can still be found in *The Tree of Life*’s illustrious cosmogonic sequence, much of the footage remains in storage.⁴⁷⁵ He sent close collaborators across the globe to “[capture] images nobody had ever seen before”—volcanic activity on Mt. Etna, ice shelves disintegrating in Antarctica, micro jellyfish along the Great Barrier Reef.⁴⁷⁶ Film crews captured a full lunar eclipse from an observatory near Palmdale, California⁴⁷⁷ and lemmings running into the sea in Nova Scotia.⁴⁷⁸

Malick was clearly separating himself from other more mainstream, tentpole-oriented directors—Lucas, Spielberg, Coppola—by forging a new aesthetic path unparalleled in American cinema, a new mode of expression not unlike the one Heidegger failed to obtain in his own register. The magnitude of what he was attempting to portray calls the scale and scope of *2001: A Space Odyssey* to mind, but even Stanley Kubrick managed to ground his epic in something tangible. In the early days *Project Q*

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Some collaborators suggest that Malick drew inspiration from the ancient Sumerian diety Apsu. Cf. Maher, *One Big Soul*, 103ff.

⁴⁷⁵ Some of that footage can be seen in Malick’s 2016 documentary *The Voyage of Time*.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Biskind, “The Runaway Genius.” See also Maher, *One Big Soul*, 102-103.

⁴⁷⁷ Eclipse footage is commonplace, of course. This was not what Malick was looking for. As Paul Ryan, who shot on *Days of Heaven*’s second unit puts it, “Terry wasn’t just interested in the classic shot of the sun being eclipsed. That’s a dime a dozen. I filmed a pasture, to see the effect of the eclipse on the animals, the darkening of the shadow across a field.” See, Ebiri, “Thirty-Three Years of Principal Filming.”

⁴⁷⁸ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 102-103; 104.

lacked this element. Malick ended up delivering “a poetic science book, pages and pages of prose with no dialogue.”⁴⁷⁹ The deal with Paramount stalled. Malick continued to let the idea gestate but would only return to it in earnest nearly three decades later once he identified where and how to anchor the more human side of the drama. That reworked, *re-marked* version would eventually become *The Tree of Life*.

An Initial Beginning

The film is set in Texas in 1956 and the loose plot revolves around an ordinary nuclear family. Mr. and Mrs. O’Brien (Brad Pitt, Jessica Chastain) have three sons and the film is principally interested in the eldest, Jack (Hunter McCracken). This frame story is more or less a standard coming of age drama and all the prototypical Oedipal motifs are on clear display. The gentle and benevolent Mrs. O’Brien—whom the film only refers to as ‘Mother’ throughout, signaling a familiar archetype—is, at various moments, seen glimmering before the radiant sun under a massive oak tree outside the O’Brien’s home; dancing in the front lawn with her children; and, in an especially spontaneous and organic moment, gently caressing a delicate butterfly on her fingertips, almost shimmering against stunning natural light filtered through leaves and tree branches. These images suggest Mother’s metonymic subject position as it unfolds over the course of the film. “The nuns taught us there are two ways through life,” she says. “The way of nature and the way of grace. You have to choose which one you’ll follow.” Grace “doesn’t try to please itself” while nature “only wants to have its own way.” If grace delights in granular

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 105-106.

details of the particular—the oak tree, the lawn, the precious butterfly—nature “finds reasons to be unhappy when all the world is shining around it, when love is smiling through all things.”

It comes as no surprise that the more adversarial subject position—nature—is occupied by Mr. O’Brien, who appears as the stern, excessively draconian Father. He goads his children into feigned self-defense, is quick to irruptive anger at even the smallest of improprieties, and displays characteristics of classic narcissism, both jealous and contemptuous of his family’s affection. His rigid, Darwinian approach compels him to advise Jack and his brothers that “it takes fierce will to get ahead in this world,” a stark contrast to the way of grace he dismisses as meek and naive. The film explicitly inscribes the tension between these two approaches within Jack’s own being. As his journey and coming of age gain more texture the dissonance infiltrates Jack’s guiding soliloquy, his internal address to himself that began, we discover, with the flickering orb of light that opens the film: “Mother. Father. Always you wrestle inside me, always you will.” The film never really alleviates this tension. Instead, it suggests a different manner of managing and maintaining it.

On the surface, then, the film presents an all too familiar coming-of-age narrative nested within a family drama complete with well-trod tropes: predictable domestic disputes, garden-variety adolescent angst, stereotypical gender roles, increased Oedipal conflict. If these psychoanalytic clichés seem too clearly on the nose it is because they do not encapsulate the entirety of the story nor do they completely exhaust the full depth of its demands. *The Tree of Life* does not present us with a standard story at all; it demands a

view beyond. The main narrative described above does not constitute the film's beginning; it calls the very idea of origins and beginnings into question. In lieu of a traditional three-act plot, Malick offers up an aggregate of fragmented, yet vivid memory-traces, a composite of abstract visions and impressions, an elaborate dream-work apprehended by Jack. As the film develops, we learn that this main narrative is not really a narrative at all, but a protracted sequence of nostalgic reminiscence set off by a sullen, despondent Jack decades later. And this—the film's 'present'—is itself introduced against the aftermath of a tragedy, an initially unremarked tragedy the full detail of which Malick withholds though its magnitude reverberates across nearly every shot. A different, more conventional film might violate that stillness, exploiting an unknown tragedy to build clear character arcs and sure-footed dramatic tension. One could imagine such a film eventually satisfying the desire to directly depict this unknown tragedy in gratuitous detail, as if such exposition could somehow explain the continued effects. But *The Tree of Life* is not a different, more conventional film and Malick rarely, if ever, depicts anything directly, opting, in the main, to frustrate desires for closure and continuity.⁴⁸⁰ In *The Tree of Life* we never directly see the tragedy that continues to torment Jack, only its persistent marks and *re-marks*. This event is only indirectly mentioned in passing, through a barely heard whisper, one of Jack's many addresses to himself and others. Yet its echoes resonate throughout the entirety of the film, forming a silent yet deafening knot, only ever glimpsed briefly and obliquely through the opacities of Jack's fragmented

⁴⁸⁰ Perhaps this explains why Malick continually faces complaints of pretension and inaccessibility, dating all the way back to his Oxford days and rebuffs from the likes of Gilbert Ryle.

memory. In light of all this, one might be obliged to wonder if there is a more appropriate psychoanalytic analog with which to read the film, something more commensurate than the now standard miscellany of Oedipal anxieties and pre-Oedipal symbiosis.

In the 1970s, when Malick was working on *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven*, so-called ‘screen theory’ was just beginning to gain traction in critical film studies. Closely affiliated with the *Screen* journal, a prominent film studies publication responsible for highly influential essays like Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,”⁴⁸¹ screen theory brings Marxist and psychoanalytic insights to bear on the moving image. Major screen theorists like Mulvey, Colin McCabe, and Stephen Heath “treat filmic images as signifiers encoding meanings but also as mirrors in which, by (mis)recognizing themselves, viewers accede to subjectivity.”⁴⁸² Charles F. Altman offers a particularly useful means of interpreting this development by noting how film theorists “often resort

⁴⁸¹ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18.

⁴⁸² Henry Krips, “Extract from *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture*,” in *Jacques Lacan: Society, Politics, Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2003), 163. This approach is best understood within the wider context of new developments in film theory throughout the 1960s-70s that sought to theorize cinema under the tutelage of adjacent disciplines like semiotics and literary theory. These methods mark a major departure from earlier formulations. Initial theorists like André Bazin, Siegfried Kracauer, and Sergie Eisenstein, in an effort to outline the defining elements of the nascent artform, focused more on cinema’s capacities for aesthetic representation, its ability to construct “perfect illusions” that closely approximate the contours of temporized experience discussed in the previous chapter. Starting with major works by Christian Metz, who adopts the same Saussurean distinction between signifier and signified deployed by Derrida, film theory began in earnest by exploiting the old Platonic tension between image and referent, working to generalize its effects with the constitution of subjectivity. While perhaps a bit unfair in his characterizations, David Bordwell, a prominent neoforalist, offers a useful narrative of this shift and its history in the first chapter of David Bordwell and Noël E. Carroll, eds., *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison, W.I.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). See also Andrew Dudley’s account vis-a-vis the concept of identification in chapter eight of his *Concepts in Film Theory* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1984), 133-156.

to *metaphors* which indirectly explain the nature and function of the screen.”⁴⁸³ Film theory, like most theories, analogizes through abstraction in order to identify mediating, explanatory concepts commensurate to cinema’s achievements. For Christian Metz, a precursor to screen theory, this meant developing a more specific understanding of the manner in which cinema generates animated impressions of reality through the screen apparatus, what he calls a “semiotics of cinema.”⁴⁸⁴ This is an analogizing gesture of the highest order. Cinema does not produce ‘language’ in any obvious sense just as films do not present themselves to us straightforwardly as ‘texts’ that invite ‘readings’ even if we tacitly treat them as such. Metz was keenly aware of this tension, but Altman again offers perhaps the most clear-sighted position, characterizing this shift as an “attempt to create a new metaphor for the screen, one which would take into account the process of signification itself.”⁴⁸⁵ Metz further extends this metaphor in his later work by turning to a more psychoanalytic frame of reference where the screen offers an apparition of the self

⁴⁸³ Charles F. Altman, “Psychoanalysis and Cinema,” in *Movies and Methods: Vol. II*, ed. Bill Nichols (University of California Press, 1976), 521. Italics mine. See also Dudley, 134. Dudley’s text also draws on Altman’s work and highlights the function of metaphor in film theorizing.

⁴⁸⁴ For Metz, this is necessary because “going from one image to two images is to go from image to language.” His envisioned semiotics of cinema would thus closely attend to how film differs from photography by generating a unique form of movement, one that “orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms...[and] which remain scattered and fragmentary within the open field of simple visual duplication.” See Christian Metz, *Film Language; A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1974), 46, 91, 105. This marks his point of departure with earlier film theorists. On Metz’s reading of the significance of the famous Kuleshov experiments does not simply validate the ‘montage or bust’ dogma of Soviet directors like Eisenstein and Roberto Rossellini. Instead, it “demonstrate[s] the existence of a logic of implication thanks to which the image becomes language.” See, *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁸⁵ Altman, “Psychoanalysis and Cinema,” 522. For his part, the driving motivation of Metz’s project is to explore this tension rather than simply gloss it. As he puts it: “When approaching the cinema from a linguistic point of view, it is difficult to avoid shuttling back and forth between two positions: the cinema as language; the cinema as infinitely different from verbal language. Perhaps it is impossible to extricate oneself from this dilemma with impunity.” See Metz, *Film Language*, 44.

rather than a Bazinian frame of reality.⁴⁸⁶ No longer simply a window to the world, the screen takes on reflective and spectatorial significance as a *mirror*, motivating (self-)viewership and assembling projections that orient and mediate experience.

Screen theory mobilizes this metaphor in full force. Mulvey, for example, combines Jacques Lacan's insights regarding the gaze and the mirror stage with a critique of patriarchal norms to complicate the politics of spectatorship. She notes the ways that "the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form"⁴⁸⁷ to occlude sexual difference by situating objects on screen that depend upon uneven dynamics of recognition and fascination. The structuring function at play here parallels the Lacanian symbolic order, one of several "elementary registers"⁴⁸⁸ that contribute to ego formation. In Lacan's work, the symbolic mediates between the imaginary and the real through various modes of reproducible—and calcifying—signification. The imaginary acts as the pre-linguistic arena where the subject first gains some nascent awareness of its ostensibly whole, imaginal self. The real, by sharp contrast, chastens both the imaginary and the symbolic, indicating an unattainable, unassimilable element that outstrips the ego's capacities for integration. If the imaginary provides a jejune illusion of unity and consolidated identity, the symbolic continually disabuses this fantasy by structuring and disciplining the ego, inculcating it into assigned subject positions that demand the

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1982). See also, Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*, trans. Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (Paris: Mouton, 1974).

⁴⁸⁷ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6. See also Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁸⁸ Jacques Lacan, "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" in *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 255.

reproduction of familiar norms. Lacan's most famous treatment of this tension is the mirror stage where he reads the child's first encounter with themselves via the mirror as both the apex of the imaginary and the beginning of entry into the symbolic.⁴⁸⁹ Before the mirror the child recognizes "the relationship between *the movements* made in the image and the reflected environment," attaining a sense of apperceptive identification that subtends the "ontological structure of the human world."⁴⁹⁰ This moment offers a situation in which 'the I,' is "precipitated in a primordial form" prior to social determination. It both installs an ego-ideal based on unity, permanence, and wholeness and demarcates that ideal's limits—the reflection is an image, after all, and retains the structure of subjective fantasy. Here the self receives its universal, determining function as a subject—that which is *sub-ject*—charting a circumscribed course that leads "in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual...symbolizing the 'I's' mental permanence at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination."⁴⁹¹ In other words, the self's encounter with its reflective image in the mirror marks the discovery of subjectivity and the beginning of its attenuated constraint. In screen theory, Mulvey and others posit an instructive homology between cinema's screening mechanism and the primal mirror stage based on this zero-sum economy of recognition, fantasy, and desire. Cinema offers us fantastical images in which we recognize our positions as subjects, confirming and shaping our desires as functions or effects of the symbolic order.

⁴⁸⁹ See Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" in his *Ecrits*, 75-81.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75-76. Italics mine.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Lacan's insights are not the only psychoanalytic themes that might relate to cinema despite their prevalence in screen theory. Freud, on several occasions, writes of the 'screen' mechanism that adheres to the machinations of recollection. In a cluster of texts written between 1899 and 1914 Freud discusses what he calls "screen memories." These special memories illuminate the relationship between ego formation and recollection, particularly as it pertains to memories forged in early childhood, the traditional material of nostalgia, the subject of Malick's film, and the same period in which Lacan situates the mirror-stage.⁴⁹² Such experiences, Freud tells us, perhaps anticipating Derrida, "leave ineradicable *traces* in the depths of our mind."⁴⁹³ These traces often correlate with random, seemingly indifferent or insignificant everyday events—minor details, in other words, that are later, through belated and retroactive processes imputed with great value.⁴⁹⁴ Freud speculates that these ostensibly trivial memories serve as a cipher for latent psychic content long since forgotten. They ventriloquize the fundamental through the nonessential, veiling deeper, more objectionable events subject

⁴⁹² The principal texts in this regard are Screen Memories," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 303-322; "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," in Sigmund Freud et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 419-428; "Childhood Memories and Screen Memories," in Sigmund Freud et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 6 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 43-52; and "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through," in Sigmund Freud et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 12 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 147-156.

⁴⁹³ Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 3 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 303.

⁴⁹⁴ I discussed this phenomenon at length with regard to both Freud and Derrida in chapter three above, but I am not the only person to draw these connections between *Nachträglichkeit* and the screening function of both memory and affect. Jean-Claude Rolland, for example, explicitly yokes the two concepts together because they attend to the manner in which "memory disorganizes time," thematizing, as it were, "the temporal flux of mental life much better than a direct reference to time...could ever do." Cf. his "Unconscious Memory From a Twin Perspective," in *The Experience of Time: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini and Jorge Canestri (London: Karnac Books, 2009), 48-49.

to repressive processes. Fragmentary recollections such as these quite literally ‘screen’ their correlate, suggesting a “value that lies in the fact that [they] represent impressions...of a later date whose content is connected...by symbolic or similar links.”⁴⁹⁵ The ‘original’ impression is therefore worked over, or *re-marked*, belatedly, and translated or re-inscribed in memory as a benign association. This reworked impression thus “owes its value as a memory not to its content but to the relation existing *between* that content and some other.”⁴⁹⁶ What is forgotten or repressed is never really gone, it seems, only quietly circulating beside and astride, available for reworking due to the same logic of implication that adheres to the cinema, a type of mental Kuleshov effect central to the screening mechanism.

The screen apparatus applies to affectivity as well, especially in cases where memories are bound up with present and prior feelings that can function as a surrogate or substitute. As thinkers like David. S. Werman have shown, nostalgia stands as a particularly paradigmatic example of this phenomenon due in large part to its internal ambivalence, its combination of both negative (bitter) and positive (sweet) feeling. Nostalgia, for Werman, “not only serves as a screen memory but may also be said to operate as a screen affect” precisely because it is so often associated with mourning and loss. In this view, screen affects like nostalgia represent an attempt to “master” earlier experiences by “present[ing] themselves to hide others,” concealing and reworking

⁴⁹⁵ Freud, “Screen Memories,” 315-316.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 320. *Ibid.*

something much more elemental.⁴⁹⁷ This screening aspect, in addition to subjecting prior memories and affective states to various processes of *re-marking*, also tends to “deceive as to chronology,” engendering a more fluid and flexuous form of temporality that closely orbits the twin notions of *nachträglichkeit* and *après-coup* explored in chapter three.⁴⁹⁸ By unsettling time and offering up ideal images and memory-traces of the past, nostalgia provides the ego-subject with a means of incorporating and retaining part of the lost object along with the bittersweet feelings associated with it.

This is precisely what takes places in *The Tree of Life*. Malick crafts a cinematic labyrinth that contains various marks, fragments, and impressions that refuse the more doctrinaire psychoanalytic glosses offered by Lacan and screen theory. These memory-traces exercise a decisive influence upon Jack’s subject position, but they increase, rather than impoverish, his capacities for movement.⁴⁹⁹ Malick mobilizes feelings of nostalgia,

⁴⁹⁷ David S. Werman, “Normal and Pathological Nostalgia,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 25 (1977), 398, 395-396. See also Bertram David Lewin, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation* (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), 70-73.

⁴⁹⁸ Bertram David Lewin, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation* (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), 70-73.

⁴⁹⁹ Lacan and the screen theorists are only partially to blame here. Freud, for his part, authorizes this sort of passive fatalism as others have noted. With regard to the screen memory, he claims that the impressed mark remains, as a trace, “exercis[ing] a determining influence for the whole of . . . later life.” Cf. Sigmund Freud, “Childhood Memories and Screen Memories,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 6 (Hogarth Press, 1971), 45. In Freud’s view screen memories mainly serve as a tool to isolate and ferret out various neuroses, as do so many of his concepts. Nostalgia, too, emerged as a diagnostic tool during Hofer’s time and continues to circulate with those same negative associations. Ever the grand master of suspicion, Freud is concerned with diagnosing the pathological, proliferating decidedly symptomatic readings that pit the constrained, impoverished ego against intransigent outside forces, as pointed phrases like “determining influence” suggest. For his part, Lacan, places an even stronger, more doctrinaire gloss on this tendency, as we have seen. Malick does not, however. Instead, he offers us a cinematic view of the untapped potentials of Freud’s insights, insights partially identified by Derrida that service to complicate Freud’s more immovable, zero-sum proclivities. The screen memory conceals a deeper, more all-encompassing truth, to be sure. But it also owes it status as a memory to the mnemonic links and symbolic associations it shares with the forgotten content it ensconces. Freud himself tells us that these links and associations exist *between*. In Malick’s film, this liminality suggests possibilities for movement beyond the usual psychoanalytic bromides, beyond the simple enfeebled-subject versus fixed-structure dyad where strategic interventions are always already doomed to reproduce familiar norms.

depicting the type of desire those feelings engender by demonstrating how screened and screening memories show that “the past is present,” pointing toward “a continual remaking in the present” where the past takes on a life of its own inside the life of the mind.⁵⁰⁰ Nostalgia screens Jack’s grief and bereavement, making it possible for him to engage in broader, more propulsive forms of movement initially inaccessible to him. Through nostalgia he pursues the work of mourning via reminiscence and recollection, a *re-marking* of impressed memory traces that continue to persist. The enigmatic address that opens the film already raises the possibility of this transformation and acts as a sort of lighthouse signal that guides Jack through this journey. This address is accompanied by and set against innumerable snapshots from Jack’s memory. Malick knits these images together in a manner that willfully frustrates the determinations of linear time and playfully resists the long-standing conventions of traditional cinematic storytelling.

With this in mind, it is worth noting that while the main narrative of *The Tree of Life* certainly consumes a majority of screen time, it is bookended by several enigmatic, dreamlike vignettes indicative of the film’s strange, serpentine sense of timing, the same timing so often characteristic of nostalgic desire. We are presented with at least six different time periods: 1.) snippets from Mrs. O’Brien’s childhood; 2.) Jack’s childhood memories of living in Texas, i.e., the nostalgic ‘narrative’; 3.) later memories, belonging to Mrs. O’Brien it seems, in the immediate aftermath of tragedy; 4.) the cosmogonic emergence of our current universe and organic life on earth; 5.) the future destruction of

⁵⁰⁰ Henry F. Smith, “Foreword” in *The Experience of Time: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini and Jorge Canestri (London: Karnac Books, 2009), xv-xvi.

our solar system and the emergence of new planets; 6.) the ‘present’ in which the previous five emerge and converge. Though numbered here for the sake of convenience, Malick does not *present* these ‘periods’ in successive, sequential order; he *re-presents* them as fragments that often overlap and snake back upon another. Linearity itself is immobilized in favor of belated (re)working and retroactive *re-marking* as the film unfurls. Jack, our fledging protagonist, appears to apprehend these seemingly incommensurate ‘times’ within the span of a single day—perhaps even a single instant—holding them in ponderous tension as he contends with his own memory, desire, and potential for movement. He vies with the contrast and discontinuity that inheres within and between these ‘times,’ hence the difficulty in localizing a definite start point—the origin or *the beginning*.

Every film has an identifiable beginning, but in *The Tree of Life* Malick manages to portray, in a deeply compelling way, something already underway. We encounter Jack *in media res*; we watch as he finds himself in the midst of things, as he discovers himself thrown ‘here’ and ‘there,’ to use the Heideggerian register. Many films rely on this sort of device as a mere gimmick; Malick does not. Where a more mainstream Hollywood blockbuster might throw its viewers into the ‘middle’ of some frenzied action sequence meant to grab immediate attention, an extended car chase or a conversation in process for example, *The Tree of Life* manages to sustain a useful form of disorientation for the majority of its runtime. That disorientation is an effect of one of the film’s finest achievements: its ability to offer compelling moving images that convey how temporized experience feels and how memory makes nostalgic desire manifest. Eschewing the

machinations of a linear narrative anchored to clear beginnings and full, final closure, Malick depicts the fluid movement between seemingly disparate periods and events, the various ‘heres’ and ‘theres.’ Rather than sating the desire to fill in the blanks or close the gaps, he offers us apertured remains, and through the aperture of the camera he shares with Emmanuel Lubezki we receive a cinematic assemblage that closely approximates the work of mourning, the timing of memory, and the propulsive force of nostalgic desire.

To Begin, Again

The film’s multiple timelines create space for multiple beginnings and entry points. Let us begin again, then, in order to track the itinerary of the work’s main character. A middle-aged Jack (Sean Penn) works as an architect in an unnamed metropolitan area. The tedium and movement of modern life appear overbearing, exhausting, and jumbled. The shiny surfaces of the skyscrapers, windows, and mirrors reflect only themselves, revealing a noticeable absence of nature and organic life, a lack of latitude and expansiveness. As Jack traverses this anesthetized, anemic environment we learn that it is the anniversary of a death, that of his younger brother R.L., who “died when he was nineteen.” This brief, almost missable revelation frames the entire film as an intricate scene of loss and grief. Triggered by bereavement and commemoration, Jack slowly begins to re-turn to his childhood in order to *re-mark* (upon) his memory and facilitate the previously arrested work of mourning. This takes time to fully develop and unfold. In a phone conversation with his father—which intimates that Mrs. O’Brien is also now deceased—Jack, *an architect*, tasked with creating commodious external space,

reveals that he lacks a sense uncluttered internal space. “I just feel like I’m bumping into walls,” he mutters. Malick depicts Jack’s rote, habituated milieu here as one of dispassionate, slap-dash mobility. There *is* movement, to be sure, but it is cloistered, suffocating, aimless movement with fast, jarring cuts that suggest a lack of rhythm or passage. The harsh, sterile lighting stands in stark contrast to later sequences in the film, further contributing to a Jack’s stifling, inhibited disposition. In one brief shot an eminently distracted Jack, on the phone yet again, double and triple-checks a blueprint draft to ensure that the building in question will have proper depth and dimension. But under Malick’s direction this juxtaposition signals a lack of dimension, depth, and texture both on the part of Jack and his work environment.

Skywalks and elevators in particular figure prominently in these scenes. Jack is constantly traversing, ascending and descending his office building. Again, technically movement, but no extension, no breadth. Cowering alone in the corner of an elevator, he invokes his lost brother. “I think about him every day.” This invocation conjures a specter, of sorts, perhaps two: R.L. (the brother) and Jack’s younger self, his memory of himself as a child. Malick assembles images of these specters that remain with Jack and the viewer for the remainder of the film, screen markers of discontinuity, separation, and loss. Haunted by his past and his lost brother, Jack becomes increasingly detached from his work environment. Conversations with co-workers become indistinct. Meetings drone on, his gaze and attention cast elsewhere. His inner thoughts take the mode of yet another distinctively Malickian address, a repetition of the breathy, prayerful voice-over that

opened the film, an intimate, almost elegiac expression of nostalgia: “How did I lose you? Wandered? Forgot you?”

Like the previous address that opens the film, we are left to wonder to whom this wandering solicitation is addressed. The precise status and direction of these addresses become increasingly unstable as the film unfolds. They emerge, often quietly, through different characters and iterations, mingling and intercrossing, ultimately forming a contemplative, polyvalent manifold. In this particular instance, the address seems to come from Jack, directed toward his dead brother, an absent addressee. The camera, however, is directed elsewhere, panning sideways and craning upward—constantly *moving*, in stark contrast to Jack. The fluid, searching maneuvers of Malick’s direction and Lubezki’s camera suggest that this address, while not *not* oriented toward R.L., already begins to hint at the possibility of a broader, more capacious and propulsive mode of movement. It is through the address and its multiple crossings and turnings—its persistence across the film’s multiple timelines—that the work of mourning, screened by nostalgic desire, works itself upon Jack, in something like the middle voice.

The elevator serves as a bookend, of sorts, a figure of transition and passage. It sets off the beginning of Jack’s waking vision, his means of screening grief through nostalgia. It returns again near the end of the film as Jack re-turns once more, this time away from the memory-scape of his past and back to the world, his present, itself refigured in light of his journey. It is through his itinerary as an elevator *passenger*—traversing various *passages between*—that Jack begins to slip into the oneiric state that overtakes him until the film’s final moments. Immediately before this vision commences

Jack wanders across a skywalk, an especially unmoored means of crossing and passage. He stops—abruptly—*between* two buildings, which is to say between two ‘times,’ past and present. *Turning away* from both ‘origin’ and ‘destination,’ as if to draw attention to their very relation, he pauses, a gesture that blurs the lines between the two ‘times.’ *Turning toward* the act of turning, the crossing itself, Jack, in a gesture indicative of nostalgic movement, glances *sideways*.⁵⁰¹ Facing the skywalk’s glass edges and the city beyond, he begins to find himself subject to memory traces that *re-present* and *re-turn* him to his past. The address also *re-turns*, this time in the form of R.L., the absent brother. A faint murmur: “Find me.” Images, memories, and fragments come flooding in, reveries of Jack’s childhood interrupting his wearisome, unvaried day-to-day. It is within *the architecture* of this vision, this dreamwork, that Jack, *the architect*, begins to nostalgize, to mourn something lost by remembering and *re-marking* upon it.

As these recollective traces emerge the address widens, incorporating a chorus of guiding voices, both past and present. Mother, Father, Brother, and the larger universe itself all appear, speaking through and to various iterations of Jack as the film *moves*, sliding between the personal and the impersonal. Returning to the voice-over technique he perfected in films like *Days of Heaven* and *The Thin Red Line*, Malick works to disorient the viewer’s sense of temporal direction, highlighting Jack’s position as a nostalgic subject freely traversing the ‘times’ that have shaped him. As we are led into the cracks and crevices of Jack’s memory-scape, Malick presents us with a striking series

⁵⁰¹ Cf. Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and Its Discontents,” *Hedgehog Review* 9, no. 2 (2007), 9. “Sometimes [nostalgia] is not directed toward the past either, but rather *sideways*. The nostalgic *feels stifled* within the conventional confines of time and space.” Italics mine.

of sustained, impromptu images characteristic of his free-flowing style. At dusk, as the sun sets, the camera, still constantly moving, follows a massive colony of bats, a singular plurality, as they move, morph, and circulate. As the group and groups within the group veer and swerve, shimmering gradations of black, gray, and brown emerge and recede. Soon the entire whole pulsates, mutating into new, more capacious configurations.

This intermediate image stands in stark contrast to the washed-out, stagnant movement characteristic of Jack's 'present' and portends the forms of propulsion to come. Supremely nocturnal creatures, these bats mark a transition, instantiating a type fluid, meandering movement with spacing, rhythm, and variation—a manifold of torsions, twists, and turns. This lingering image propels the viewer headlong into Jack's passage, into his visionary dreamscape of nostalgic reminiscence. Comprised of fragmented impressions and disparate memory traces, this dreamscape centers around Jack's childhood home in Texas. His wistful desire for this period is triggered by ongoing, memorative grief following the death of his brother. That same desire enables him to more fully attend to the unassimilated loss of R.L. as the film unfolds. Back (again) to (yet) another beginning, a return to birth, infancy, early childhood, and the onset of adolescence.

Lacan and the screen theorists would be disappointed to discover that there are not many mirrors in this film. There are, however, plenty of windows, doors, gates, doorways, sidewalks, and ladders. Like the elevator and the skywalk, these figures suggest the presence of a liminal threshold and the chance of movement. Malick inserts these images through brief, propulsive shots that signal a boundary or limit, the

possibility of crossing or passage. What are we to make of these images? Given the psychoanalytic associations that characterize the *topos* of Jack's memory-scape—the Oedipal and pre-Oedipal histrionics mentioned above—one might expect mirrors to emerge at some point. This is Jack's own inner journey, after all, and what else is a mirror but the reflection of self? Can it, too, act a figure of movement like the elevator or the skywalk? For Lacan the mirror does the opposite, constituting a primal scene of sorts, ground-zero for one's soon-to-be expansive contention with constraining and deterministic outside forces—no latitude, no leeway, only symbolic assignation. Malick frustrates and reframes this expectation, offering propulsive images that refuse easy assimilation into classic screen theory or Lacanian models of ego development.

The only shot featuring a mirror in *The Tree of Life* comes early on once Jack enters the space of nostalgic remembrance and childhood recollection. Then a toddler, he approaches a full-length mirror as his Mother follows closely behind. This mirror *is not static*. It rests on a wooden stand with a swinging swivel. It can *move*, in other words. As Jack approaches, he pushes the mirror ever-so slightly and it sways back and forth, delivering a moving image that contains both his reflection and that of his mother—the mirror itself moves just as the mirror-image Malick offers also moves, the camera quickly panning in, anticipating an impending cut. Unlike Lacan's enfeebled subject, Malick's vivacious subject appears more interested in the mirror's movement than his own reflection, more fascinated by its three-dimensional extension in space than the flat reproduction of self-image. Immediately following the cut, Malick gives us a very brief shot that provides a key to the distinction between the stasis of Lacan's mirror-stage and

the type of propulsion the film generates by way of nostalgic recollection. We see the mirror again, from Jack's POV, as his Mother stands behind it. This time the reflective image moves, rather than the mirror itself. Jack sees his Mother's hands and wiggling fingers—both their physical presence and their reflection—as she playfully hides behind the mirror. This moment does not confirm a preconceived ego-ideal nor does it solidify the constitution of impoverished subjectivity. It is simply *there*, alongside other equally important snapshots, fragments, and memory-traces, contracted together as Jack revisits his early childhood—and it connotes *movement*, or at the very least, its inviting possibility.

If there is anything remotely correlate to Lacan's mirror-stage it comes near the beginning of this montage when Jack meets his brother, R.L., face-to-face for the first time. In a brief, accidental, yet eminently powerful scene, Jack's Mother brings the infant R.L. in close and the two share a small encounter that has, for reasons that become clearer as the film develops, prominently lodged itself in the annals of Jack's (adult) memory.⁵⁰² Jack stares at R.L. with an equal measure of curiosity and reticence, accumulating affection and almost instinctual distrust. The wonder is almost palpable as Jack, inquisitive scrutiny clearly visible across his face, searches for some form of

⁵⁰² This scene was not "acted" or rehearsed in the traditional sense. As Lubezki puts, it Malick often pushes shooting "to a place where these wonderful accidents start to happen." Of the scene in question, he recalls: "You have to be ready to capture all these things that could just fall away in a second and it's beautiful. [It] is such a true moment. I have kids and I've seen it and it's fleeting. You cannot talk to a 3-year-old and say, 'Hey, man listen this is the first time you see your brother.' It has to happen in front of you and with Terry, these things happen. He allows them to happen and it's not like he's waiting, but there is a little of that with shooting and shooting and shooting and shooting and suddenly something like that happens. And then it happened, I remember feeling such an emotion. I was about to cry." Maher, *One Big Soul*, 216

recognition in R.L., his strange, new other. Initially startled as R.L.'s tiny hand brushes across his face, Jack leans in closer and the *mirroring* begins. R.L. lets out a sharp cry and Jack attempts to mimic him, letting out a louder, sharper cry of—or for—recognition. This encounter barely lasts a moment and Jack, of course, goes on to exhibit classic elder toddler behavior: acting out, orchestrating stunts to regain his Mother's attention, announcing what is *mine* in defiance, etc. But the point here is that Jack's nostalgic return to this set of memory images begins to open up space for increased movement, a possibility intimated by the swaying mirror, the wiggling hands, and Jack's recollection of his first encounter with his lost brother. The entire memory-scape acts as a means of Jack's return, of course, and return is, above all, the primary movement of nostalgia, as Hofer first noted—an achy yearning for return or a pain that (re)surfaces when full return proves impossible. Jack returns to his childhood to remember and attend to the loss of his brother, a loss that still *marks* him. But here, in the wake of that loss, we find him returning to a loose composite of equally primal scenes that screen—for him and for the viewer—his mourning process through nostalgia. Jack's nostalgic desire propels him throughout this sequence, allowing him to revisit his relation with his brother and initiating the elegiac journey to come by *re-marking* upon those traces he has deemed prominent and originary. By revisiting this relation, Jack works through a profound loss that, while permanent and in some sense final, need not be debilitating or immobilizing.

So many of the scenes in this section of the film exude this same quality, allowing Jack to revisit and *re-mark* the formative moments that continue shape and afflict him. Somehow, Malick has managed to fully (re)capture something usually assumed to be

inaccessible and forever lost: the sincere wonder, overwhelming magnitude, and penetrating fascination so often associated with childhood. Under the auspices of bereavement and nostalgic recollection he offers us a deeply compelling and truly original picture of our own ancient alchemy, the rise of the thinking life, the memory of our memory of emerging consciousness: screen(ed) nostalgia.⁵⁰³ Trace after trace, fragment upon fragment, Jack finds himself subject to the memory of memory, a type of heightened remembrance in which past and present momentarily coincide. “Tell us a story from before we can remember,” Jack recalls a younger version of himself exclaiming, interrupting his Mother’s animated reading of *The Jungle Book*. The film gives us this story, one that predates us and our capacity to mark dates, our inner ability to register (the) time(s). Jack’s re-collective vision, set against and upon the screen of nostalgia, evokes the past and its losses alongside the possibility of brief, fugacious moments of intimate connection. Muted colors against golden natural light imbue these scenes with the aura of things past, while close-up shots with an extremely wide lens render objects and faces enlarged and outsized, amplifying the detail and enormity of the world from Jack’s (past) perspective (as a child).

Editing, like cinematography, also conveys this newfound sense of rhythmic, propulsive movement. Malick’s strategy here consists of a conglomeration of techniques that achieve a type of melodious pacing consistent with nostalgic desire and the manner in which it manipulates and unsettles time. As André Green observes, the film

⁵⁰³ Albert Paretsky, referencing both Malick and Andrey Bely, calls this “the adult’s memory of the child’s memory of...emerging consciousness.” See Albert Paretsky, “The Persistence of Memory: The Quest for Human Origins and Destiny in Andrey Bely’s *Kotik Letaev* and Terrence Malick’s *The Tree of Life*,” *New Blackfriars* 98, no. 1073 (January 2017), 73-74.

“agglomerates recollections belonging to different periods of life,” assembling them together, collage-like, such that their detail and particularity “rarely present in the form of a continuous [linear] chain of events.”⁵⁰⁴ Instead, Malick uses the tactics specific to filmic montage to mimic and depict the sort of internal, mental montage nostalgic subjects experience. This editing style has its origins in Malick’s early work. He spent nearly two years editing *Days of Heaven*, working to assemble shots together in order convey the sense of transience, reflexive impermanence that film evokes. A breakthrough of sorts occurred when he returned to voice-over experimentation, a feature he toyed with to some success in *Badlands*. This allowed him to emphasize the strictly visual elements of his footage, excising unappealing dialogue in order to establish a clear, rhythmic cadence that elicits a deeper sense of contemplation and emotionality. He recorded over 50 hours of meditative voice-over narration for *Days of Heaven*, often seizing upon one or two lines here and there and playing them on loop against 10-minute film reels to see if, when, and where they might evoke the set of feelings he wanted to achieve.⁵⁰⁵ In *The Tree of Life*, a wide range of disparate ostensibly unconnected voice-overs form the manifold address that opens that film and continues to guide Jack throughout its twists and turns, through the different ‘times’ he experiences as he moves through nostalgic remembrance.

Film scholars often resort to designations typically reserved for other art forms when characterizing cinema—“painterly” stands as a particularly prominent superlative—and in this respect Malick’s work is no different. Many formal elements of

⁵⁰⁴ André Green, “From the Ignorance of Time to the Murder of Time. From the Murder of Time to the Misrecognition of Temporality in Psychoanalysis,” in *The Experience of Time: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, ed. Leticia Glozer Fiorini and Jorge Canestri (London: Karnac Books, 2009), 3-4.

⁵⁰⁵ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 88-89.

his style, luminous shot composition and impressionistic editing especially, invite this sort of comparison. Several of Malick's closest collaborators over the years offer similar insights. Costume designer Jacqueline West suggests that Malick frames his cinematic ideas "like a painter, like Van Gogh," the Dutch artist renowned for both his unyielding self-portraits and a post-impressionistic style that values expression over realism, distorting the viewer's perception in order to achieve the desired emotional effect.⁵⁰⁶ The most insightful accounts come from Lubezki, Malick's cinematographer, and Mark Yoshikawa, one of his editors, who suggest that the director's approach attains a type of "cubizing" in film, a strategy presumably borrowed from the early 20th century art movement of the same name. Picasso's work, for example, depicts objects from multiple points of view, manipulating perception to achieve representation within a broader context. For Lubezki, Malick's films do something similar and possess the added advantage of being able to depict temporization and manipulate time.⁵⁰⁷ This creates multiple, fragmentary layers from different angles, offering them up for assemblage. Malick knits these layers together such that they converge around the same feeling or cluster of feelings, in this case longing, grief, and loss, the very substance of nostalgic

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 231. Dan Glass, a visual effect specialist, makes a similar observation: "A lot of what you see in the film is something closer to poetry or painting in the way that it was made up. But I think the beauty of that is it allows everyone to draw their own different impressions of what they're seeing and enjoy it in a personal way." Ibid., 236. Cinema scholars have made this comparison as well. See Steven Rybin, *Terrence Malick and the Thought of Film* (New York, N.Y.: Lexington Books, 2012), 72; 79 and David Davies, ed., *The Thin Red Line* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2008), 57-58.

⁵⁰⁷ To Lubezki, like Tarkovsky and others, this is something that only cinema can accomplish: "Films inherit a lot from other arts, like theater and literature. Since I first met him many years ago, I have felt that Terry is trying to make films, and to express himself, without using the part of film's DNA that comes from these other arts." Cf. Maher, *One Big Soul*, 213. See also Bill Desowitz, "Immersed in Movies: Cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki Climbs 'The Tree of Life,'" *IndieWire* (blog), February 10, 2012, <https://www.indiewire.com/2012/02/immersed-in-movies-cinematographer-emmanuel-lubezki-climbs-the-tree-of-life-182992/>.

desire. This often means rejecting the traditional shot-reverse shot approach—a popular editing convention whereby shots are assembled to establish successive continuity—in favor of something more diffuse and ethereal. As Yoshikawa puts it, Malick “wanted to avoid anything with even a hint of being presented or intentional,” opting instead to shoot and edit “multiple scenes covering similar ground” where a dominant theme, mood, or feeling can emerge to produce a sense of flow and movement.⁵⁰⁸ In order to achieve this, Yoshikawa reports that Malick would often “prefer to speak in metaphors.”⁵⁰⁹ These metaphors—‘Make this scene feel more like a fleeting thought,’ for example—tend to evoke the same sort of experience nostalgia engenders, an experience that tries, in vain, to catch up to the ever receding horizons of temporization.

In basic cinematic grammar, establishing shots offer context by providing some background for the relationships between the people we see, the objects they interact with, and the ensuing events that unfold. Images of recognizable skylines and aerial shots of prominent landmarks establish a certain environment or milieu. Calling specific memories to mind may feel ‘cinematic’ at times, but we don’t always get grounding images that immediately orient us in space and time. Memory rarely offers establishing shots. Neither does *The Tree of Life*, almost aggressively so. Viewers are left adrift and unmoored. Like Jack, we often see “cubized” movement, multiple shots of the same action, suggestive of the way memory often offers up and contracts many instances in a

⁵⁰⁸ Bilge Ebiri, “They Live by Night: Growing The Tree of Life: Editing Malick’s Odyssey,” *They Live by Night* (blog), October 12, 2011, <https://ebiri.blogspot.com/2011/10/growing-tree-of-life-editing-malicks.html>.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

single impression—a type of highly concentrated reminiscence that “marginalizes consciousness”⁵¹⁰ in order to emphasize memory’s marks and nostalgia’s *re-marks*.

In one sequence, a small movement within a larger montage-like section of Jack’s early childhood, we see Jack and his brothers throwing a ball on the roof and watching it roll down before they compete to catch it. But we don’t see the entire duration of this event. Instead, we see many repeated iterations of the event across time, quickly edited together out of order. Duration is excised in order to highlight iterative repetition, a manipulation only possible given the formal qualities of the moving image. Later, in the same sequence, the film offers a similar assortment as Mrs. O’Brien enters the children’s room to turn off the lights and kiss them goodnight. And again, the event is never seen directly or in its entirety, at least not in one instance. Instead, we see a crystallization of the passage of time, an image of temporized experience that contains a plethora of iterations from multiple angles, standpoints, and periods in time, a series of affectionate moments consolidated in memory and offered up as a single trace fragment. As Yoshikawa puts it, these sequences unfold “like a memory that is crawling, [like] a broken record.”⁵¹¹ Malick and his team of editors knit these images together in a manner that closely approximates not only the nonlinear workings of memory, but especially the process of recollection under the conditions of nostalgia and mourning.⁵¹² Together they establish a vivacious, almost lyrical rhythm reflective of propulsive, nostalgic *re-*

⁵¹⁰ Todd McGowan, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory and The Rules of the Game* (New York, N.Y.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 14-15n7.

⁵¹¹ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 233.

⁵¹² See Ebiri, “The Live By Night.”

marking. The film *moves*.⁵¹³ And, by the end, Jack, like the viewer, moves and is moved too.

A Beginning Before Beginnings

We first began with an initial beginning: adult Jack recalls and continues to mourn his brother on the anniversary of his death. Then, we began again with another beginning, one a bit more difficult to suss out: Jack's ongoing grief plunges him headlong into a vision of 'before,' a vision propelled by nostalgia, that links past and present, leading him to the threshold of his birth, his own beginning. But is there a beginning before these beginnings? A beginning that sets in motion all subsequent beginnings? Where *do* we begin, after all? A young Jack's discovery as he plays with his brothers in a grassy meadow provides us with a clue. "I found a dinosaur bone!" he exclaims in an almost ecstatic central Texan drawl. Malick goes on to offer us a glimpse of what this primordial beginning might have looked like, delivering one of the film's more stunning and much-talked-about sections, an extended cosmogonic sequence portraying the beginning of beginnings, complete with images of the Big Bang and proto-reptilian creatures that almost look like something cribbed from Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993). Has Jack found their remains? If the film's more narrative-driven section offers up 'a story from before we can remember' from Jack's perspective, this section expands that same scope, raising it to the highest possible power. Is it possible for the universe to

⁵¹³ Early *Project Q*-era documents suggest that "Malick wanted the film to move like the constant flow of water," a sentiment corroborated by the film composer Alexandra Desplat who, at Malick's urging, worked backwards so to speak, writing music prior to editing so the film could be edited to music. Maher, *One Big Soul*, 102; 212, 241.

be nostalgic for itself? Jack feels a form of nostalgia triggered by grief, a form that drives him inward so he can be moved and propelled outward by the film's conclusion. Here Malick depicts a universe directed in on itself, a universe that contracts in order to move and expand—a move from individual, to familial, and finally cosmic reflection.

The sequence is often compared to *2001: A Space Odyssey* and for good reason—thematic content and cosmic scope notwithstanding, the film relies on many of the technical innovations pioneered in Kubrick's 1968 masterpiece.⁵¹⁴ The main concept dates all the way back to the early *Project Q* days as does much of the material and footage, greatly enhanced by advances in effects technology unthinkable at the time. Taken together, the visual choices are just as speculative as Jack's own memory of his memory's beginning, attending to the phenomenon temporal non-coincidence. Volker Bromm, an astronomer who focuses on the formation of stars in the early universe, worked closely with Malick and his team on this sequence out of the Texas Advanced Computing Center in Austin. He notes that Malick's intention was to portray the origin and evolution of the universe with as much realism as possible. This, of course, presents

⁵¹⁴ Renowned special effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull worked on both films. CGI was utilized in early versions of this sequence, but Malick was not happy with the results so Trumbull suggested, "Why not do it the old way? The way we did it in 2001?" Cf. Rebecca Keegan, "TCM Festival: Hollywood Visionary Douglas Trumbull Working on Terrence Malick Movie," *Vanity Fair*, April 25, 2010, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2010/04/tcm-festival-hollywood-visionary-douglas-trumbull-to-work-on-terrence-malick-movie>. As effects specialist Dan Glass notes, this retro-style process was highly experimental and improvisational, indicative of Malick's overall directorial approach both on set and in pre-production: "We worked with chemicals, paint, fluorescent dyes, smoke, liquids, CO2, flares, spin dishes, fluid dynamics, lighting and high speed photography to see how effective they might be...it was a free-wheeling opportunity to explore, something that I have found extraordinarily hard to get in the movie business. [Malick] didn't have any preconceived ideas of what something should look like. We did things like pour milk through a funnel into a narrow trough and shoot it with a high-speed camera and folded lens, lighting it carefully and using a frame rate that would give the right kind of flow characteristics to look cosmic, galactic, huge and epic." Cf. Hugh Hart, "Tree of Life Visualizes the Cosmos Without CGI," *Wired*, June 17, 2011, <https://www.wired.com/2011/06/tree-of-life-douglas-trumbull/>.

the same sort of problem as recalling early childhood and typifies the antinomies of time and memory. “The closest we can come is a computer simulation,” Bromm admits, “because at this point *we cannot directly observe it.*”⁵¹⁵ In a certain sense, this illuminating admission thematizes the film as a whole: it offers a compelling visual representation of what was not and cannot be directly seen, an achievement wholly unique to cinema, i.e., its ability to portray duration and temporization, its capacity to “sculpt time,”⁵¹⁶ as Andrei Tarkovsky famously puts it. The problem of presence and absence, which is to say, the problem of time, resurfaces, always lurking nearby. Malick does not attempt to solve this problem or alleviate its pressure. Instead, he mobilizes cinema’s formal achievements to offer a re-presentation that mirrors Jack’s plunge into his memory, a sequence that depicts something that cannot be apprehended in the moment, at speed, as it happened—a visual response to the intractable, incessant passage of time.

This primeval beginning also sheds some further light on the provenance of the film itself. One of the main reasons why Malick shelved *Project Q* and went on extended hiatus is that he could not figure out how to meld the more abstract and cosmic elements

⁵¹⁵ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 221. Italics mine. Bromm continues, even more pointedly, linking the beginning of the universe with Jack’s own journey and re-turn to origins. “It’s a very metaphysical moment—it was a long period of boring, almost depressing darkness and then suddenly activity explodes, kicks in. This resonated with the story line that the movie wanted to tell. What did the universe have to go through to eventually enable intelligent beings like us with our emotional life? It’s this very long cosmic timeline that led to it. The movement of first light has a very special place.” Cf. Maher, *One Big Soul*, 226-227.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. Andrei Tarkovsky and Kitty Hunter-Blair, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema* (University of Texas Press, 1987). Donna Cox, one of Bromm’s associates in Austin, puts an even finer point on this commensurability, noting how the film offers visual images above and beyond previous cinematic achievements. “We wanted to combine accurate science with artistic sensitivity,” she adds. “Cosmic events are powerful visual metaphors for the human condition.” Cf. Maher, *One Big Soul*, 221.

of his vision to something more intimate and particular. He always knew he wanted to underscore “the powerful connection to be made between the universal and the personal”⁵¹⁷ but struggled to combine the two. It was only years later, following a series of personal tragedies, that Malick, a notoriously private and hermetic filmmaker, pinpointed the loose through-line necessary to integrate those elements. He did so, *Vulture* film critic Bilge Ebiri observes, by “turn[ing] the camera on himself, figuratively speaking.”⁵¹⁸ By reframing the unresolved problem at the heart of a passion project he tabled so many years ago Malick was able to “marry the cosmic and natural journey of [*Project Q*] with a semi-autobiographical story...seen through the eyes of the oldest child.”⁵¹⁹ So the personal, more human side of the story came to center around Jack O’Brien and his family in 1950s Texas, slowly refracted through the dual prisms of time and memory.

Instead of showcasing the origins of the universe as the center of the film, Malick situates this sequence as a flashback to the beginnings of time, a waking vision triggered by Jack’s existential crisis and ongoing grief for the loss of his brother, a loss that bears striking resemblance to Malick’s own, as mentioned above.⁵²⁰ Sarah Green, one of

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 208-209. For a similar take on this see Bilge Ebiri, “Will Terrence Malick Ever Really Finish *The Tree of Life*?” *Vulture*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.vulture.com/2018/09/will-terrence-malick-ever-really-finish-the-tree-of-life.html>. “The ambition and scope of *Q* presented plenty of challenges, but one of Malick’s biggest obstacles turned out to be his inability to nail the human story that would be the heart of his epic about time, space, and creation. At one point, he contemplated a second-half love story set thousands of years ago.”

⁵¹⁸ Ebiri, “Will Terrence Malick Ever Really Finish *The Tree of Life*?”

⁵¹⁹ Ebiri, “Thirty-Three Years of Principal Filming,” *New York Magazine*, March 13, 2011, <http://nymag.com/movies/features/terrence-malick-2011-5/>.

⁵²⁰ I mentioned some of these parallels in the introduction above. Here it is worth noting that “Q” in the initial title stood as a shorthand for *Qasida*, a gesture of homage, perhaps, to Malick’s Persian roots on his father’s side. A technical term in Arabic poetics, *qasida* carries connotations of aiming and

intentionality, i.e., to aim for or toward, to intend. See Edward Hirsch, *A Poet's Glossary* (New York, N.Y.: Harcourt, 2014), 505. This aiming or intending is often directed toward a lost object or absent beloved and serves to solidify the *qasida's* "role as a vehicle for past memories," according to Sephardic scholar Jonathan P. Decter. He further observes that this form of poetic expression "possesses a distinct nostalgic mode" indicative of Arabic literature more broadly where "a set of forms, motifs, and semantic uses...resonate within a deep matrix of longing and loss." See Jonathan P. Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature: Between al-Andalus and Christian Europe* (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 2007), 43. Ibn Qutaybah, a ninth century Islamic thinker widely regarded as a progenitor of the *qasida*, codified its form into a tripartite structure that begins with a nostalgic evocation, typically in the form of a creation myth similar to the cosmogony Malick depicts, and moves through the pain of diaspora where the poet, like Jack O'Brien and perhaps the director himself, ventures an attempt at "rediscovering a place and recalling his lost beloved." Cf. Hirsch, *A Poet's Glossary*, 505. Often viewed as one of the highest forms of poetry in Arabic literature, the *qasida*, like *The Tree of Life*, is typically composed of disparate, impressionistic fragments. Decter argues that by evoking this poetic form and assembling its attendant fragments "the poet is able to create an emotional backdrop that charges the poem and molds the listener's response." Cf. Decter, *Iberian Jewish Literature*, 43. This assemblage of traces often follows a serpentine, non-narrative trajectory that serve to disorient unknowing readers by giving "no visual hint as to where individual subsections end or begin," commemorating an event or period by referring to it through indirect allusion rather than a linear, detailed account. See Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, eds., *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa, Vol. II: Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance* (New York, N.Y.: Brill, 1996), 44. The overall 'message' of the *qasida* lies in its ability to both evoke and induce a certain mood, offering fragmentary memory traces that achieve a form of affective meaning that can only emerge through the juxtaposition of and interaction between seemingly disparate lines and subsections. As Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle suggest, the effect of this composite suggests a "transformation of consciousness" that is often "tantamount to a *movement of ascent*: from sorrow to relief, from grief to consolation, from ignorance to understanding, or from despair to hope." Cf. Cf. Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, eds., *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa, Vol. I: Classic Traditions and Modern Meanings* (New York, N.Y.: Brill, 1996), 66. See also their, *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa, Vol. II: Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance*, 44. Italics mine.

No one knows why Malick opted for the "Q" abbreviation of *Project Qasida* or why he ultimately abandoned that title altogether in favor of the one for which the film is now known. Perhaps the changes in subject matter—showcasing a family drama rather than a prehistoric celestial being—led him to select a more conventional, less esoteric title; or, maybe the new centerpiece of the film, the large, almost primeval-looking oak tree that rises from the O'Briens manicured yard, proved too prepotent to resist. In his screenplay Malick suggests that the tree's "roots reach down into the darkness of the earth, towards its center and source. The branches spread towards the light, toward discovery and utterance; a fountain of life." At other moments it is described as almost possessing agency, a silent witness looking down on the O'Briens with sympathy. Terrence Malick, *The Tree of Life* (screenplay). First Draft. (New York, N.Y.: Writers Guild of America, 2007), 8, 51. In the final pages of the script, Malick sharpens this point even further: "The great oak tree stands like a sentient being — thoughtful, benevolent — looking down on him [Jack]" (126). The parallels and deep resonances between the Arabic poetic form and Malick's film are striking regardless. Both stem from the inner workings of memory and battle against the inevitability of loss and temporal irrevocability, a futile battle perhaps but a noble and necessary one nonetheless. They persist, with and against the passage of time, in an attempt to generate what Jaroslav and Suzanne Stetkevych call "permanent memorability," the nostalgic drive to "guarantee the memory of what which would otherwise be overtaken by oblivion." See Jaroslav Pinckney Stetkevych and Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington, I.N.: Indiana University Press, 2002), 26. This all out resistance against forgetfulness and fading memory pursues "an evocative topography of nostalgia" typified in *The Tree of Life* by (adult) Jack's traversal of a desert landscape that represents the recesses of his consciousness, the rocky encampments of

Malick's producers, rightly observes that "the film can be seen as a requiem to a lost son" and, we could add, to a lost brother, a *re-mark* Malick performs upon his own memory through the moving image⁵²¹. Re-turning to his own past gave Malick good reason to draw upon the cosmogonic images that had occupied his imagination for so long. Many of these images and the themes they evoke emerge from Malick's own personal memory. Richard Taylor II, a special effects designer who worked with Malick on *Project Q* notes that "many of the conceptual ideas were taken from a book Terry had read as a kid" titled *The World We Live In*.⁵²² The introduction to that text extols the natural wonders of the world—what Heidegger would no doubt call its 'worlding'—purporting to "present knowledge born of human curiosity" by translating cutting-edge scientific research into visual form so readers could "*see* the earth as it was in the beginning."⁵²³ Beginnings and origins resurface once again. Malick depicts a series of beginnings by returning to his own beginnings, his own origin story. Near the beginning of *The Tree of Life*, during the montage of infancy and early childhood that sets off the main narrative, we see Jack's mother reading to Jack and his brother from a similar picture book, one that offers up very similar images, images that no doubt make lasting impressions in a child's receptive

the mind that house the memory-traces to which he returns. Each step of the way signifies an attempt to reconstruct his abandoned home, to reclaim or recall his lost past as a means of advancing the working of mourning.

⁵²¹ Maher, *One Big Soul*, 240.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 102.

⁵²³ *LIFE*, November 24, 1952. Italics original. For more on this series, and the magazine at larger, see Dora Jane Hamblin, *That Was the Life* (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1978). The text initially appeared in the pages of *Life* magazine as a 13-installment series and gained even greater popularity as a standalone book published in 1955. Comparable to the magazine's widely influential *History of Western Culture*, *The World We Live In* promised to offer "the greatest series of science stories we have ever produced" and claimed to offer a "unified, understandable picture story of the planet Earth" for the popular reader.

imagination. As with *Badlands* and *Days of Heaven* we see Malick—who at age eight once “surprised his classmates at Lake Waco Elementary School by presenting a 43-page paper on plants”—once again reaching back into his own memory to anchor his cinematic images.⁵²⁴

Finally equipped with a fully human story, a meditation on loss and the passage of time rooted in his own past, Malick knits together an amalgamation of stunning shots set against yet another address. This address comes from the Mother, grieving her lost son, Jack’s brother, but given the images it is set against, the addressee remains as disparate and indeterminate as the universe itself. Is this address heard? Is it received? The questions remain as the address guides Jack further into the annals of cosmic time. Here Malick masterfully assembles a loose narrative of the time before time, drawing on the full arsenal of images captured in the early *Project Q* days as well as those generated and enhanced by Bromm and others. We see, as best a moving image can approximate, the beginning of our universe in its current form, along with the beginnings of our galaxy, the place in space where we live; we see shots depicting the emergence of our solar system, the only real home we have ever known, a small place within the larger universe, the place where everything we have known or will know originated, the place where all human life, all human experience, and all human history are confined; we are subject to imagery that conjures the evolution of primitive ecosystems and the emergence organic life as we know it; we see microscopic images that show life taking on new, more

⁵²⁴ See Eric Benson, “The Not-So-Secret Life of Terrence Malick,” *Texas Monthly*, April 2017, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/the-not-so-secret-life-of-terrence-malick/>.

increasingly complex forms, leading to diversity and difference as well as the seemingly intransigent forces of predation and survival.

As the sequence draws to a close, Malick, using the full range of technological tools available to him, offers us images of an encounter between two prehistoric reptiles. One stronger, more aggressive dinosaur appears to show compassion rather than malevolence toward another injured, more vulnerable creature—perhaps an act of inchoate, incipient mercy. In an early draft of the screenplay Malick suggests that “among the dinosaurs we discover the first signs of maternal love, as the creatures learn to care for one another.”⁵²⁵ Like the archetypal parents, Mr. and Mrs. O’Brien, these creatures exhibit the unresolved tension between the way of nature and the way of grace. When a young Jack finds his “dinosaur bone” what sort of clandestine connection with the past does he forge? What inheritance does he take up? Is he, perhaps, taking up a fossilized relic of this tension, a further iteration of the inner tension revealed in his almost prayerful address to himself (“always you wrestle inside me, always you will”)? How, still, to make this tension productive? The benign encounter between two primal creatures is sharply contrasted with images showing more brute and Darwinian expressions of life in all its ambivalence, indifference, and contradiction—a school of hammerhead sharks slowly circling their prey, for instance. From beginning to end, the images in this sequence depict the fullness of the cosmos, the very space within which the world’s various pluralities and singularities emerge, evolve, flourish, and wither away. They evoke a strange type of *ersatz* nostalgia, of wonder and longing for something never

⁵²⁵ Malick, *The Tree of Life*, 16.

experienced as such, something forever mediated by moving images that continue to move us in their capacity for representation, their ability to re-turn us toward our own history, our own past.

The musical score eventually fades in favor of the droning hums and buzzing whirs of life working with and against itself. Initial accompaniment, however, is provided by Polish composer Zbigniew Preisner's majestic arrangement of "Lacrimosa," a movement in his *Requiem for My Friend*. Preisner composed the work in 1988 as means of mourning the sudden death of his friend and collaborator, the filmmaker Krzysztof Kieślowski. Lacrimosa, of course, connotes weeping in Latin and comes to us from the *Dies irae* sequence of Catholic requiem mass, a rite offered for the rest and repose of those who have departed. It is a doleful piece of music referencing tears, mourning, and the ultimate fate of all finite creatures. This piece is set against a series of truly stunning images depicting the labor of the universe, the gestation of organic life, and the birth travails of its more complex forms. This juxtaposition, like the unmoored, indeterminate address that sets it off, underscores a generative ambiguity that persists throughout the film, a propulsive ambiguity, transparently opaque. That ambiguity often presents itself in the form of nostalgia's own inner contradiction, i.e., the bittersweet, an undecidable word that cannot make up its mind between prefix or suffix. Here that ambiguity surfaces in the title of the piece. Lacrimosa: how are we to localize the tears? To whom do they belong? From where do they flow? Mother as she grieves the loss of her child? Jack as he returns to *re-mark* upon the continued loss of his brother? The universe itself as it works to contain the remains of its children, of each dying star? What are the particular tone and

valence of these tears? Tears of grief and mourning in response to these losses, or tears of unsuspecting joy in light of what once was? Malick, content to leave such questions unresolved, seems to suggest that in moments such as these it is impossible, perhaps even ill-advisable, to discern the difference. How *could* one decide, after all?

Mother's address lamenting R.L. emerges again: "Lord...why? Where were you?" This invocation is set against the immense, protracted backdrop of cosmic evolution and the provenance of time, movement, and temporal passage as we know it. "Did you know," she whispers, "who are we to you?" These lines reverberate against a vision of the Big Bang and resonate with the film's epigraph, a quotation from the book of Job, yet another address: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?...When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"⁵²⁶ Unsatisfied, Mother whispers again, this time with more force and determination: "Answer me." With this, Preisner's music reaches a booming climax as the Milky Way, our home, begins to form. Later, as organic life begins to emerge on our planet she whispers again, "Hear us." The only (non)response here is the roaring, deafening formation of a waterfall, as deadly as it is vivacious. Throughout, both Jack and the viewer are confronted with a type of double-edged awe characteristic of Malick's directorial predilections, a contradictory feeling that treads the same affective terrain as the bittersweetness engendered by nostalgia: marvel at the enormity and majesty of the universe along with a sense of impending dread at its entropic possibilities. How do we

⁵²⁶ Cf. Job 38:4; 7. Recall here that in the early minutes of the film Mother is explicitly situated as a Job-like figure, complete with a group of friends who come to 'comfort' her following R.L.'s death, "He's in God's hands now," says one, "The pain will pass in time, you have the other two," avers another. "What did you gain?," she sobs in response, "I just wanna die and be with him."

contend with the co-existence of realities like loss, death, and tragedy alongside recuperation, life, and unsuspecting fortune? All of this occurs before the bulk of Jack's vision of his childhood. It is this eminently cinematic experience—the juxtaposition of opposites with feelings of trepidation and wonder—that pushes him further along, fully plunging him into a deeply personal series of nostalgic recollections that are both chastened and made more intimate by this cosmic perspective.

Bittersweetness Remains

Jack's visionary journey through the annals of his own memory-scape, his memory of his memory, began with a series of turns and re-turns. At the close of the film, Jack instantiates one final movement of *re-turn*, this time back to the world, the present, his waking life. This final re-turn completes his journey. Here, at the end, screen(ed) nostalgia increases his capacities for propulsive movement and facilitates the unresolved work of mourning that troubles him at the beginning. That work will no doubt continue, but as Jack re-turns one last time he finds himself better positioned to attend to its marks by generating his own *re-marks*. Malick sets the scene for this re-turn back to the present with some of the film's most enigmatic and oblique scenes. Jack, who began his vision by admitting that he had 'wandered' away, wanders yet again, this time upon the rocky, desert terrain that forms the architecture of his vision. The address that has guided him is inscribed at the level of the image here as he is led by a younger version of himself to yet another threshold, another potential crossing, an empty doorway in the middle of the desert of his imagination. This door appears to lead nowhere, but as Malick has shown us throughout the film, things are not always as they seem. Jack crosses. He is then led to a

vast beach where he falls to his knees in awe and wonder as he and other nameless figures are reunited and reconciled with deceased family members. R.L. is there, as a child, *as Jack remembers him*, as are his Mother and Father, who look younger, *as Jack remembers them*. Together the family leads R.L. to yet another doorway one that is curiously similar to that of the childhood home, opening onto an endless, bright landscape. R.L. crosses and makes passage alone; he must depart while Jack remains. Mother, accompanied by figures from her own past, including a younger version of herself, raises her hands to the sky and in a gorgeous shot facing almost overwhelming light she utters the film's final words: "I give him to you—I give you my son." Another address. To whom is it addressed? Still, after all this, we know not. But it must be uttered still, and can only be uttered following Jack's nostalgic journey, his re-turn to and re-collection of his past, a *re-marking* that leads him to this final threshold, to nearly tangible contact with what has been lost, contact that he must both indulge and refuse in order to keep moving—a moving forward by turning back.

At the conclusion, another stark juxtaposition. This one propels Jack out of his nostalgic memory-scape and back into his 'present,' back into a world that still lacks his brother but bears his marks more legibly. Malick begins to cut in and out of the vision, taking both the viewer and Jack back to the urban landscape in which the film began and back *again* to the beach, to the shores of Jack's recollection. The shots vacillate back and forth between a vision of *ascendancy* featuring Mother and R.L. and a reality of *descension* where Jack, an elevator passenger once again, is led to the threshold of another crossing, another passage or re-turn to his day-to-day. The vision itself has ended,

it seems, but Jack's own vision has shifted, his capacities for movement increased. This contrast *between* ascent and descent *within* the world belies teleological finality and instead instantiates a moment of internal pause for Jack. His world *looks different*. Outside, he whirls around, stunned, his style of movement in the world already beginning to modulate. The skyscrapers no longer dimly reflect only themselves, but are instead shimmering, glimmering with images of the sky, the sun, and surrounding trees, all of which were obscured before. The camera catches a glimpse of Jack's face—almost completely affectless prior to this point—and along with it the beginnings of a muted smirk before quickly cutting away. As Malick puts it in the final page of the screenplay, “the vision is not the journey; the real journey has yet to begin. Will he give himself to this new life? Does he dare? A stranger, smiling. A threshold.”⁵²⁷ Will he cross?

The viewer is not privy to future iterations of Jack's movement and address, only the intensification of a certain awareness, a certain attentiveness, the possibility of crossing yet another threshold, another passage between the many twists, turns, and openings of temporized experience. “The last chord melts into ordinary production sound,” Malick tells us. Jack is re-immersed in his world, propelled by *re-marked* memory traces that screen nostalgia in response to grief. He persists in the wake of his brother's continued absence. The work of mourning is ongoing, to be sure, but perhaps a little less strenuous now, by virtue of the re-turn. The loss subsists and the marks remain, but they no longer feel immobilizing, only bittersweet, opening up the space for increased capaciousness. “All ends in peace, as music does,” Malick writes. “Time has reappeared;

⁵²⁷ Malick, *The Tree of Life*, 126.

resumed its sway.”⁵²⁸ For a brief moment, Jack’s time has been seized, his forfeitures regained through the moving image. As the music fades, the diegetic resonances of his immediate environment return, offering novel, unturned possibilities, an invitation to join in a newfound, yet-to-be-formed sense of movement and propulsion.

Malick has released no less than five original films since *The Tree of Life* hit theaters in May 2011, including one documentary feature that contains additional *Project Q*-inspired footage unused in the original cut. By contrast, it took him nearly 40 years to release his first five films and one of them, *The Thin Red Line*, was an adaptation. It is almost as if finally working through and *re-marking* upon a decades-long passion project, one both personal and abstract, opened up the floodgates, accelerating the pace of his creative output by giving him a new sense movement, propulsion, and direction. Each recent film offers similar insights into temporized experience and its transient, episodic nature but none reach the same levels of ambition and care as *The Tree of Life*. It remains a crowning speculative and cinematic achievement—Malick’s true masterpiece, one that mobilizes and enacts, in a truly novel way, the philosophical ideas that have shaped him. At the height of his powers, the allusive director draws upon his own experiences of nostalgia (his losses, desires, and memories) and wields film’s formal features to show how screen(ed) nostalgia conjures and *re-marks* upon available memory traces. That *re-marking* facilitates the work of mourning and serves to increase subjective capacities for movement and propulsion in the film’s protagonist, its viewers, and perhaps even its creator given his productive output since. Well aware of cinema’s abiding power to

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

manipulate and *re-present* the process of temporization itself, Malick unfolds and amalgamates varying temporalities (what I have called the film's different beginnings) that overlap to form a cinematic whole that is much more than the composite sum of its parts—a profound, introspective meditation on the passage of time that does justice to the contingent, capricious features of experience as it comes. By weaving these different beginnings in time together, Malick inscribes a type of propulsive, even spectral nostalgia in the film's main story, a drama rooted in his own past(s). That same sense of haunting, animating bittersweetness radiates off nearly every carefully composed image, images that in aggregate, highlight, and *re-mark* upon a form of nostalgic desire both intrinsic to and illustrative of the exigencies of temporal experience at its most human.

In a certain sense, none of this is all that new. Ever since Johannes Hofer first coined the word in 1688, nostalgia has evinced a movement problem, the occlusion of movement or, simply, the inability to move in the desired direction, i.e., back home, back to the beginning, the origin, the point of provenance, belonging, and identity. This problem persists despite nostalgia's "semantic drift,"⁵²⁹ its shift from the spatial to the temporal first identified by Kant at the dawn of modernity. The transition from "lost place" to "lost time" only changed the valence, the desire to *re-turn* remains. What is original and fresh about Malick's approach is his remarkable and unrivaled ability to frame such a return in a way that encourages rather than impedes propulsive movement into the future, an effort that ultimately renders nostalgia's generative, animating, and

⁵²⁹ Cf. Krystine Irene Batcho, "Nostalgia: The Bittersweet History of a Psychological Concept," *History of Psychology* 16, no. 3 (August 2013): 165–76. See also Immanuel Kant, *Kant: Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Richard B. Loudon (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2006), §31-32.

propulsive effects more legible. Like Heidegger, Malick understands the significance of human restlessness in the search for some access to authentic Being within the world—but he does not stop there. Like Derrida, he does not take full presence to be indicative of our longed-for connections with ourselves, the world, and one another; he knows the type of desire at work in that longing contains traces of the past that were never fully present yet continue to haunt nonetheless—but he does not stop there either. He creates, assembles, and sets to animating rhythm exceedingly arresting and transportive images that enact and *re-mark* upon these ideas in compelling ways that leave conventional, speculative abstraction wanting. Heidegger and Derrida offer very different approaches to speculative thought, but they both share a common desire to arrive at new forms of articulation more adequate to temporal experience than the traditional philosophical lexicon. Malick began his career in that same discursive space only to forsake it due to personal and intellectual frustrations. Whatever else those reasons and frustrations may have involved, the ensuing abandonment allowed him to accomplish, through film, what philosophy has sought to do for so very long—to formulate a mode of creative expression commensurate to the experiences that demand such expression in the first place. He seizes upon cinema's unique capacities for temporal representation and for a full 139 minutes delivers back to us, without closure or finality, that to which every nostalgic experience lays claim: passed and passing time.

The parting shot at the end of *The Tree of Life* drives these points home as emphatically as any of its images. Notably, it does not feature Jack O'Brien. It instead beckons to the viewer by raising the question of where future iterations of movement and

address might lead. We see an image of the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge connecting Brooklyn and Staten Island. In a contemplative, almost prayerful fashion, the camera lingers upon the maritime ‘gateway’ to New York, a city of eminent movement and ceaseless propulsion, surrounded by waters equal to its energy, a flowing river and the open sea. Malick has often suggested that he would like his films to move like water, a that flow is, time after time, compared to the passage of time itself. *The Tree of Life* certainly does just that and here, finally, Malick gives us one final figure of crossing, a lasting image of movement and traversal that connects the shores of time, past and future, beginning and end, origin and destination. The suspension bridge. The riverbanks. The faint sound of seagulls in the distance as the Hudson empties into the vast Atlantic. What will become of this threshold and the bittersweetness implies? Can its address be heard and re-turned? Toward what does it call? “I muse on this and that,” says the narrator of Eduard Mörike’s *Im Fruhling*. “I yearn and yet for what I cannot say: it is half pleasure, half mourning. Tell me, ‘O heart, what memories do you weave in the twilight of the golden green branches? Old time that I dare not talk about.’”⁵³⁰

⁵³⁰ Quoted in S. Werman, “Normal and Pathological Nostalgia,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 25 (1977), 393. Translation modified.

Concluding Remarks

Nostalgia is probably inevitable—and it’s a nostalgia that I like, and that also makes me write: you work *on nostalgia*, you work at it and it can make you work.⁵³¹
 - Jacques Derrida

I muse on this, I muse on that,
 I yearn, and yet for what I cannot say:
 It is half pleasure, half mourning;
 Tell me, ‘O heart,
 What memories do you weave
 In the twilight of the golden green branches?
 Old time that I dare not talk about.⁵³²

- Eduard Mörike

Nothing distinguishes memories from ordinary moments. Only afterwards do they claim remembrance, on account of their scars.⁵³³
 - Chris Marker

Ich sehne mich und weiss nicht recht nach was: Halb ist es Lust, halb ist es

Klage: “I yearn and yet for what I cannot say: it is half pleasure, half mourning.” Half pleasure, half mourning, what does he mean? Is it that he is unable to distinguish between the two—pleasure in mourning, mourning in pleasure—or is it that, together, the two signal something that is somehow both? That is to say, both, simultaneously, not in order of sequence or rank but felt together, at once, a formal expression of irreducible coincidence that broaches the nostalgic condition. Mörike withholds the proper name

⁵³¹ Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 63.

⁵³² Quoted in S. Werman, “Normal and Pathological Nostalgia,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 25 (1977), 393. Translation modified. For a fuller version of the entire poem see Eduard Mörike *Im Frühling* (1828), <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/song/1566> (accessed August 16, 2020).

⁵³³ This is taken from Marker’s 1962 science fiction short *La Jetée* and is quoted in one of the many epigraphs contained in Brian Dillon’s moving meditation on bereavement *In the Dark Room*. See Brian Dillon, *In the Dark Room* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2019), 95.

here but pinpoints the experience nonetheless. The most productively ambivalent and fruitfully ambiguous of all emotions, nostalgia evinces a feeling that thrives upon its own failure, its own structural impossibility, its ongoing, kinetic insatiability. Is it any wonder, given these contrarities and antagonisms, that nostalgia is almost always divided against itself—half pleasure, half mourning—and commonly associated with the bittersweet, a word that admits no real synonym? Half pleasure, half mourning: a feeling in search of representation, a sensation fumbling for expression. What does it feel like to taste the bittersweet? And to taste it without the placating chaser one might hope would follow? Bittersweet nostalgia: an abiding attentiveness to the mutable variations of temporization, attunement accomplished through dis-attunement, more time for (passing) time, the animating, propulsive experience of experience from the inside. The chaser, we find, is an apparition, a phantom. Its panacea is as mercurial as the bittersweetness itself. The desire cannot be sated, yet it still moves and is moving, offering *re-marks* as propulsive and animating as they are unsettled and unsettling.

“I yearn, and yet for what I cannot say.” This hybrid, compound feeling, half pleasure, half mourning, gives rise to a form of desire that still, after all this, remains errant, unsure of its own ends but moves and is moving nonetheless. Nostalgia’s hazy valences and murky, dissonant tonalities belie neat distinctions between pleasure and displeasure, joy and grief, mourning and morning. In Mörike’s *Im Frühling* (“In Spring”) these bittersweet feelings facilitate an increased sense of awareness, attention, and receptivity. The title itself conjures the daybreak of vernal tide and time, the dawn of a new season. Inhabiting feelings of pleasure and mourning simultaneously—and allowing

that bittersweetness to remain as unresolved as the experiences that gave rise to it— enables his narrator to turn to back the world and its changing rhythms with a newfound sense of openness. It propels him to more fully notice and engage the thicket of things, the minute details and tiny particulars that have come into sharper focus for Malick's Jack O'Brien by the time we leave him at the end of *The Tree of Life*.

Was webst du für Erinnerung?: What memories do you weave? *Erinnerung* and *webst* (or *tissu*)—memory-trace and weave or web—are both operative terms in the deconstructive and psychoanalytic lexicon as we have seen and act as watchwords of nostalgic experience as I have characterized it via film. In “In Spring” Mörike's “new spring” mobilizes this weave to offer a propulsive *re-mark* upon the traces of previous seasons, perhaps a little worse for wear but no less potent and necessary. The new season weaves these traces together to form a tapestry that becomes legible through a composite feeling, half pleasure, half mourning, pleasure-mourning, another name for the form of desire nostalgia engenders—mixed, mingled, and interfused. As I have maintained throughout, the experience of nostalgia retains multiple valences such as these, but many of them do not show up as such due to nostalgia's history and transmission as a form of pathology. Those vectors time and time again register as errant or spurious under a diagnostic frame of reference but can, when made more legible, offer new, unturned and animating possibilities for movement in time.

This project has argued in favor of those more propulsive and animating features of nostalgic experience. It has sought to make them readable in new ways that position the feeling as a generative form of desire that intervenes in temporal awareness to rework

memory and complicate what we expect the experience of time to yield for us. Although buried alive in the history of nostalgia's construction and reception, these features remain both potent and operative. The texts I have closely unfolded go a long way toward decentering nostalgia's pathological residue and clarifying its conceptual contours, but its uses and demands come into much sharper focus in cinema. In its most rudimentary form, cinema is the art of recording, inscribing, or writing movement—etching on the celluloid surface, for example. This movement occurs in and across time, and cinema furnishes a means of inscribing time by 're-presenting' or 're-animating' the structure of temporized experience, offering it back up for further reflection and *re-marking*. The formal qualities specific to film catch life in the act, constructing moving images that move much in the same manner that time and experience move. These moving images do not cast the particularities of the transient objects they re-present in stable, fixed amber—they are *moving*, after all—but they do attend to the gaps and intervals left behind by passing time in a manner commensurate with experience as it unfolds. Nostalgia often emerges when those lacunae are especially noticeable and while film often mobilizes feelings like nostalgia by focusing attention on the weave of individual and collective traces that shape us, the parallel runs much deeper than that. Johannes Hofer was the first to point out, in 1688, that nostalgia also relies upon images and re-presentation to excite desire and galvanize movement. He may have taken both the desire and the form of movement it impels to be problematic, but he was right to draw a connection between longing, memory, and the image. The filmic readings undertaken above draw this connection out

further by showing how cinema is in an especially unique position to ‘screen’ nostalgia’s more propulsive and animating effects.

One of the main claims, advanced throughout and discussed at length in chapters three and five, is that nostalgia operates according to a belated, retroactive temporality, what Freud first called *Nachträglichkeit* and his Francophone heirs *après-coup*. While not categorically opposed to linear time—how could it be, after all—this theory of timing de-centers it by drawing attention to the ways in which memory forces time, *at times*, back on itself, like an ouroboros constantly in motion.⁵³⁴ When dislodged from its initial diagnostic frame, this sense of timing helps clarify how nostalgic desire generates animating, propulsive movement by continually subjecting passed time and past experience to further re-working, what I have called *re-marking* throughout with reference to Derrida. Malick’s work illustrates this dynamic better than most cinematic offerings and achieves new, compelling significance in *The Tree of Life*. He depicts a scene of grief and loss *re-marked* by a form nostalgic desire that facilitates the work of mourning in time and, by the film’s end, places its protagonist, Jack O’Brien, in a better position to attend to his own experience, to turn more openly toward the world and respond more fully to its exigence. In the space that remains I want to highlight a similar scene as a means of supplementing the foregoing and tracing where future work on

⁵³⁴ Søren Kierkegaard is often credited with having said “life is lived forward and understood backward.” The precise quote, which orbits the same terrain this project has sought to *re-mark*, reads as follows: “It is quite true what philosophy says, that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other principle, that it must be lived forward. Which principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with temporal life never being able to be properly understood, precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest to adopt the position: backward.” See Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 179.

nostalgia and temporality might cast its horizons. This final scene is offered by Saint Augustine, whose notion of *distentio animi*—the stretching out of the soul by time—opened this project and advances a means of putting the aporias and paradoxes of life to generative, animating use. Like Malick’s Jack O’Brien and the narrator in *Im Frühling*, Augustine’s reflections on temporal experience are motivated by nostalgic recollection and serve to enhance our ability to remain open and receptive to the world as it is given.

Mörike begins to set the stage through the image winter cold turning to new spring and the dynamics of movement that turning entails. The new season contains a weave of memory traces, a tapestry of past days so secret and so intimate that they cannot be confronted directly, only *re-marked* upon at a remove, with temporal distance. Mörike writes beautifully of a yearning (*sehnd*) and an expanding, stretching, or distending (*sich dehnend*) that are together emblematic of the form of movement characteristic of nostalgic experience—a desire that cannot be stilled and continues to animate. Like Johannes Hofer, Nietzsche, of all people, felt that this sentiment actually prohibited movement, at least the form of movement so often associated with speculative thought. He has “no thoughts at all” because he is “haunted in mind,” Nietzsche writes of Mörike in 1875.⁵³⁵ Mörike’s haunting of the mind is only legible to Nietzsche because it reads as a weakness or malaise, an obstacle to movement rather than its catalyst. This is the same sort of diagnostic posture that informs Hofer’s initial construction of nostalgia as an affliction of the imagination (*imaginationes laesae*), one that engenders errant forms of

⁵³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Digital critical edition of the complete works and letters*, ed. Paolo D’Iorio (New York, N.Y.: de Gruyter 1967) edited by Paolo D’Iorio. [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1875.8\[2\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1875.8[2]). Accessed July 14, 2020.

desire by impelling spurious forms of movement, upending the normal course of thought and memory.

Nietzsche had similar, even more contemptuous things to say of Augustine who he takes to be the harbinger of a “vulgarized Platonism,” unnecessarily torn asunder by conflicting thoughts and desires.⁵³⁶ Augustine, like Mörike, feels and gives voice to the restless, affective reverberations of stretched-out, temporized experience, engendering sensations—like pleasure-mourning, bittersweetness, and nostalgia itself—that often seem at fundamental odds with one another. Nietzsche adopts a position similar to other incredulous critics discussed throughout this project and takes issue with both the sentimentality expressed as well as its exigence. To his credit, this move makes sense on a certain level. It is consistent with his larger interest in overturning supposed weak-minded slavishness in favor of the more noble will to power typified by the *Übermensch* (a posture that stems, I think, from the same underlying attitude as the distrust of feeling, the suspicion of images, and the valorization of authenticity discussed in chapters two and four). In the case of Augustine, Nietzsche’s remarks are part and parcel of his well-known critique of religion and Christian morality. Nevertheless, it is curious how quickly the eminent thinker of eternal return and the Dionysian affirmation of life dismisses the persistence of life at play here. Mörike and Augustine not only intimate the antagonistic, seemingly contradictory mode of feeling often associated with nostalgia—bittersweetness—they both attend to the temporal structure of restive life lived at speed,

⁵³⁶ Cf. Nietzsche’s letter to Franz Overbeck, a friend and Augustine expert, dated March 31, 1885 in *Selected Letters of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Christopher Middleton (Indianapolis, I.N.: Hackett Publishing, 1969), 238-239. For more context on this see Thomas H. Brobjer, *Nietzsche’s Philosophical Context: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago, I.L.: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 99ff.

in time, ceaseless and interminable. When Mörike couples distention (*dehnend*) with yearning (*sehrend*) in “In Spring” he calls to mind Augustine’s own name for temporized experience: *distentio animi*, the distention of the soul by time, the stretching out of life’s animating force in opposite directions. In the case of both Mörike and Augustine, this coupling—yearning and distending, distending and yearning—works to turn the subject from interior introspection back out toward the world with a broader sense of attunement and a greater ability to notice, interact, and engage. For Mörike, tarrying with nostalgic experience and giving it full range of expression, mourning and pleasure in equal measure, enables him to receive the dawn of a new season signaled in his title with increased attention and receptivity. Likewise, with Augustine. His detour into the inner workings of memory and the distinctions between time and eternity in Books X-XI of the *Confessions* set the stage for, and perhaps even prompt, the broader reflections on creation, matter, and change contained in Books XII-XIII.

As I mentioned in the preface above, Augustine’s *distentio animi* designation marks one of the first attempts to formally thematize not only temporized experience, but how that experience is felt, how it affects one’s attention, memory, and motivations. He raises a perennial question—‘What, then, is time? Provided no one asks me, I know; if I want to explain it, I do not know.’—and instead of offering a definitive answer he chooses instead to frame this line of inquiry from a radically different vantage point. He offers a phenomenological account of temporal experience, a reflection on what time feels like, what it induces, and how we respond to it. He focuses on how what time does to us in the wake of concrete experiences rather than how it subsists in the abstract, i.e.,

how it issues from this or that metaphysical system. It would be easy to cast Augustine as a subjective constructivist or even a proto-solipsist here, construing his consideration so it anticipates Kant's famous definition of time as an element of the transcendental aesthetic, a form of pure sensibility and inner sense, a type of *a priori* that constitute the conditions of possibility for sense and experience in general.⁵³⁷ But this familiar move occludes the texture of Augustine's inscription, brushing to the side its form, context, and internal logic. In this respect, Books X-XI (on memory and time) signal an abrupt change in direction, a digression or detour that interrupts the itinerary of autobiographical reminiscence that governs the text. As the preface that set off this project indicated, these elements—

⁵³⁷ Bertrand Russell famously critiques Augustine on precisely these grounds. "St. Augustine, whose absorption in the sense of sin led him to excessive subjectivity, was content to substitute subjective time for the rest of history and physics. Memory, perception, and expectation, according to him, made up all that there is of time. But obviously this won't do. All his memories and all his expectation occurred at about the time of the fall of Rome, whereas mine occur at about the time of the fall of industrial civilization, which formed no part of the Bishop of Hippo's expectations. Subjective time might suffice for a solipsist moment, but not for a man who believes in a real past and future, even if only his own. My momentary experience contains a space of perception, which is not the space of physics, and a time of perception and recollection, which is not the time of physics and history. My past, as it occurred, cannot be identified with my recollections of it, and my objective history, which was in objective time, differs from the subjective history of my present recollections, which, objectively, is all now." See his *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (New York, N.Y.: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 187-188. As others have pointed out, this critique presumes that Augustine sets out to solve the problem of time rather than make its tension more intelligible, that he attempts to offer a define of what time is rather than provide a phenomenological account of what time does when we interact with it. But, as we saw in the preface above with the help of figures like Paul Ricoeur, this is precisely *not* what Augustine sets out to accomplish. He is interested in how we respond to time and how it affects us in light of present circumstances that mobilize traces of our past and orient us toward future horizon. For more on this dispute with Russell, see Robert Jordan, "Time and Contingency in St. Augustine," *The Review of Metaphysics* 8, no. 3 (1955): 394-417; James Wetzel, "Time after Augustine," *Religious Studies* 31, no. 3 (1995): 341-57; Roland J. Teske, *Paradoxes of Time in Saint Augustine* (Milwaukee, W.I.: Marquette University Press, 1996); and Thomas L. Humphries Jr., "Distentio Animi: Praesens Temporis, Imago Aeternitatis," *Augustinian Studies* 40, no. 1 (2009): 75-101. For more on Augustine's consideration of temporality and its implications generally see Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 1993); Michael Mendelson, "Venter Animi/Distentio Animi: Memory and Temporality in Augustine's Confessions," *Augustinian Studies* 31, no. 2 (2000): 137-63; M. Burcht Pranger, "Time and Narrative in Augustine's" Confessions," *The Journal of Religion* 81, no. 3 (2001): 377-93; and Virginia Burrus, Mark D. Jordan, and Karmen MacKendrick, *Seducing Augustine: Bodies, Desires, Confessions* (New York, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2010).

memory refracted through time and vice versa—constitute an a nearly intractable aporia for Augustine. He raises a seemingly impossible question (what, then, is time?), notes that the answer may seem easy or even immediately given until that givenness and the problems it conceals are approached directly, at which point the question itself seems to dissipate and fall apart. Instead of definitely answering the question Augustine offers a strategy for coping with it that internalizes its tension rather than alleviating it—*distentio animi*: the constitutive tensivity and animating stretchedness of life by time. To paraphrase Paul Ricoeur’s language once again, Augustine confronts this aporia, takes it in, and makes it work by putting the kinetic energy it generates to productive use. That positing is no doubt impelled by the narrative of autobiographical reminiscence and nostalgic recollection that comes before in the first nine books of his *Confessions*.

Like many ancient and medieval texts of the same type, St. Anselm’s *Proslogion*, for example, Augustine’s meditations in the *Confessions* are structured as an extended, contemplative invocation. The primary direction of his address is not to his readers, but to his God. As biographer Peter Brown puts it, “Augustine’s back is turned to us throughout the *Confessions*. His attention is elsewhere.” The reader has “stumbled, unawares on the most intimate of all scenes,” a prayerful incantation meant to elicit and sustain a certain type of propulsive, mystical experience. This is why the pronoun *tu* (“You,” “Thou”) appears in 381 of the 453 paragraphs of the text.⁵³⁸ Augustine is in the midst of an incredibly vulnerable and revealing address that he has taken great care and deliberation

⁵³⁸ St. Augustine and Peter Brown, *Confessions (Second Edition)*, ed. Michael P. Foley, trans. F. J. Sheed (Hackett Publishing, 2007), xviii.

to *inscribe* (“And now I confess to you, O Lord, *in writing [in litteris]*”).⁵³⁹ The meditation enacts the Neoplatonic dynamics of *exitus-reditus*, a scattering, sending out, or emanation that culminates in return, gathering, and repose within the One (“You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”).⁵⁴⁰ This dynamic begins, in Book I, with Augustine’s ruminations on his inaccessible infancy and the miseries of his boyhood. Book II goes on to discuss the stirrings of sexual desire and defiance that accompanied his adolescence, including an infamous recounting of petty pear larceny which he forever regretted. Books III-V outline his years as a student, his dabbling with Manicheanism, and his travels to Rome and Milan, while Books VI-VII discuss his exploration of Neoplatonism. The work reaches a full-fledged climax in Book VIII, which details Augustine’s experience of temptation and his eventual conversion—the seeds of which were planted long before by his mother—following a mystical experience in a garden in Milan (“Pick up and read, pick up and read”).⁵⁴¹

This climax, however, is interrupted by Book IX. The euphoria of his conversion experience is overshadowed by the increasing ailment of Augustine’s mother, Monica, and is immediately followed by the somber occasion of her untimely death. Augustine is careful to mark this event in time with precise detail: “On the ninth day of her illness, when she was aged 56, and I was 33, this religious and devout soul was released from the

⁵³⁹ St. Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan, (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1960), IX.12.33.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I.1.1.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.12.29.

body.”⁵⁴² The specificity of these date markers indicate the extent to which the event itself continues to mark Augustine’s experience, constituting a void or piercing blackhole around which the remainder of his *re-marks* orbit. “An overwhelming grief welled up in my heart,”⁵⁴³ Augustine tells us, “my soul was wounded, and my life as it were torn to pieces.”⁵⁴⁴ He struggles, in agony, to reconcile this torrent of sadness with the assurance afforded by his faith, a faith that Monica’s soul is finally free. Why, given this assurance, “did I suffer sharp pains of inward grief?” he asks.⁵⁴⁵ No answer. Instead, he bathes, a sacred, cleansing, and incredibly cathartic ritual for anyone seeking to privately shed the uncontrollable tears that often constitute the work of mourning and the labor of grief. He spends the remainder of the book eulogizing Monica and offering prayers for her memory, while also wondering why his God seems to have failed him: “I asked you...to heal my pain. You did not do so.”⁵⁴⁶

This is the *re-marked* scene of sorrow and lamentation that *immediately precedes* the discussion of memory and time in Books X-XI. The more philosophical examinations that follow are thus situated within a larger context of mourning, longing, and thoughtful remembrance, forming an affective crux that closely orbits the same propulsive, animating features of nostalgic experience this project has mapped out. Book X, the longest of the text by far, deals with memory. It contains some of the best known and most quoted lines of the entire work (e.g., “What do I love when I love my God?”⁵⁴⁷ and

⁵⁴² Ibid., IX.6.28.

⁵⁴³ Ibid., IX.7.29.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., IX.7.30.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., IX.7.30.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., IX.7.32.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., X.7.11.

“Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you.”),⁵⁴⁸ but it opens simply and succinctly: “May I know you, who know me.”⁵⁴⁹ This address is as indeterminate and multidirectional as the one that guides Jack O’Brien in Malick’s *The Tree of Life*. And, like that film, Augustine’s experience and textual practice are marked by a series of turns—to himself, his God, and his losses—turns that snake back upon themselves and fold in on one another, ultimately propelling him back out into the world. “May I know you, who know me,” a petition immediately preceded by an obituary. To whom is Augustine’s supplication addressed? His (absent) God? His (dead) mother? His (unsettled) self? In this context grief and mourning initiate the stirrings of memory, the propulsive possibility of a new mourning in the wake of loss and discontinuity. Like Mörike’s hybrid feeling—half pleasure, half grief—Augustine’s tears are those mourning and morning. They are drawn from the wellspring of nostalgic desire, a desire for return, and a desire to assimilate a loss in the face of which nearly all available means of assimilation appear inoperative.

Augustine is affected by the loss of his mother and this affectedness impels his examination of memory, time, and temporization. He wants to know or discover how, exactly, he may continue to know or maintain a relation with what haunts him, with what is no longer immediately present yet still active in the weave of available memory-traces. This, I think, is the governing motif of the *Confessions* and the impetus for Augustine’s famous formulation of *distentio animi*, a notion that Mörike gestures toward for similar

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., X.27.38.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., X.1.1.

reasons in *Im Frühling*, a yearning (*sehrend*) that is also a distending (*dehnend*). For Augustine, *distentio animi* refers to the spasm, open tension, and endless distention of the temporized self stretched out in opposite directions, the elongated extension of the animating force that is the soul within and across the time. Augustine finds himself situated in the thickness of the present, propelled toward the imminent horizon of the future, and ceaselessly haunted by traces of the past that remain opaque but not illegible. To the extent that his text is a written, meditative confession it stands as a patient and focused effort to make those traces more legible by mobilizing the propulsive effects of nostalgic experience, an experience that is also the experience of time's limits and fecundity.

When Augustine famously observes that he knows time on an intuitive, everyday level but fails adequately explicate it, it is because he rightly senses that temporality is lived and *felt* before it can be subject to the determinations of abstraction and speculative thinking. He feels the flow of time and is deeply affected by its flux. In the wake of a profound loss, he contends with the fleeting, ephemeral character of experience as the nested structure of his text indicates. Books X-XI, on time and memory, take place inside a narrative of grief and mourning that itself takes place inside a larger work of remembrance and autobiographical introspection—an attempt, in other words, to *re-mark* upon the traces and specters that constitute a stretched-out self, running both ahead and behind. In this respect the *Confessions* elaborate, in exquisite granularity, what Marc

Wittmann calls “the feeling of life as time,”⁵⁵⁰ and what I might call *the feeling of time as nostalgia*, an anticipatory and spectral type of nostalgia that takes the protracted feeling of temporization as irreducible. As both St. Augustine and Malick’s Jack O’Brien demonstrate, this form of nostalgia acts as a necessary resource for both the bounded conditions and the yet-to-be-determined capaciousness of human existence—an open and ongoing receptivity, both precarious and propulsive.

Distentio animi—the distended soul, life’s animating force stretched out in variance, anchored in the moving present. Time moves on, full steam ahead, without hesitation or delay. Our capacities for remembrance, feeling, and temporal awareness do not, however. They run ahead, sometimes lag behind, and are, at times, forced sideways, always moving in multiple directions. They capture a great deal but fail to secure anything with permanence or stability. The mind remembers, then forgets, then forgets it ever forgot. People, things, and our former selves pass away. They are missed and longed for, except when they are not. *C’est la vie*. That is life—or, better, that is what life *will have been*. For now, time stages a ceaseless war between memory and forgetfulness. Sometimes, if the conditions are right, nostalgia appears between skirmishes, rushing on the scene to triage and assess the losses. And, sometimes, if the conditions are especially right, that bittersweet feeling—half pleasure, half mourning—may generate animating, propulsive returns. But those returns cannot always assure contentment or even pure painlessness. They are too late, after all. They best they can do is to muster a belated *re-*

⁵⁵⁰ Marc Wittmann, *Felt Time: The Psychology of How We Perceive Time*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 83.

mark. That *re-mark* may open old wounds in order to dress the new ones, bringing back a familiar ache but with a new, unturned sense of how that ache might move us. The new dressing forms a new scar, a new mark from which to read the outworking of our accretive experience, a reminder of our finitude and fragility, a temporal index of our movement in the world. Maybe, then, Chris Marker is right in the epigraph quoted above, that there is nothing to distinguish ordinary moments from memories except the belated presence of marks and scars. If he is, then perhaps there is nothing to distinguish the marks of memory from the work of nostalgia—except the abundances of life. And time. Always time.

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CURRICULUM VITAE







