
RESTORATIVE NOSTALGIA: CONSPIRACIES AND RETURN TO ORIGINS

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

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

To understand restorative nostalgia it is important to distinguish between the habits of the past and the habits of the restoration of the past. Eric Hobsbawm differentiates between age-old "customs" and nineteenth-century "invented traditions." Customs by which so-called traditional societies operated were not invariable or inherently conservative: "Custom in traditional societies has a double function of motor and fly wheel. . . . Custom cannot afford to be invariant because even in the traditional societies life is not so."¹¹

On the other hand, restored or invented tradition refers to a "set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past."¹² The new traditions are characterized by a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization than the actual peasant customs and conventions after which they were patterned. Here are two paradoxes. First, the more rapid and sweeping the pace and scale of modernization, the more conservative and unchangeable the new traditions tend to be. Second, the stronger the rhetoric of continuity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is presented. The novelty of invented tradition is "no less novel for being able to dress up easily as antiquity."¹³

Invented tradition does not mean a creation *ex nihilo* or a pure act of social constructivism; rather, it builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing. There is a perception that as a result of society's industrialization and secularization in the nineteenth century, a certain void of social and spiritual meaning had opened up. What was needed was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning.¹⁴ Yet this transformation can take different turns. It may increase the emancipatory possibilities and individual choices, offering multiple imagined communities and ways of belonging that are not exclusively based on ethnic or national principles. It can also be politically manipulated through newly recreated practices of national commemoration with the aim of reestablishing social cohesion, a sense of security and an obedient relationship to authority.

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

also a discrepancy and tension between the two.¹⁵ It is very important to distinguish between political nationalism and cultural intimacy, which, after all, is based on common social context, not on national or ethnic homogeneity.

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

To conspire means literally to breathe together—but usually this collective breath doesn't smell very good. Conspiracy is used pejoratively, to designate a subversive kinship of others, an imagined community based on exclusion more than affection, a union of those who are not with us, but against us. Home is not made of individual memories but of collective projections and "rational delusions."¹⁶ Paranoid reconstruction of home is predicated on the fantasy of persecution. This is not simply "forgetting of reality" but a psychotic substitution of actual experiences with a dark conspiratorial vision: the creation of a delusional homeland. Tradition in this way is to be restored with a nearly apocalyptic vengeance. The mechanism of this kind of conspiracy theory is based on the inversion of cause and effect and personal pronouns. "We" (the conspiracy theorists) for whatever reason feel insecure in the modern world and find a scapegoat for our misfortunes, somebody different from us whom we don't like. We project our dislike on them and begin to believe that they dislike us and wish to persecute us. "They" conspire against "our" homecoming, hence "we" have to conspire against "them" in order to restore "our" imagined community. This way, conspiracy theory can come to substitute for the conspiracy itself. Indeed, much of twentieth-century violence, from pogroms to Nazi and Stalinist terror to McCarthy's Red scare, operated in response to conspiracy theories in the name of a restored homeland.

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

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

The end of the second millennium has witnessed a rebirth of conspiracy theories.⁶ Conspiracy theories are as international as the supposed conspiracies they are fighting against: they spread from post-Communist Russia to the United States, from Japan to Argentina and all around the globe. Usually there is a secret, sacred or conspiratorial text—*The Book of Illuminati*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or, for that matter, the *Turner Diaries*, which functions like a Bible among the American militia movement.⁷ Russian ultranationalists used to claim, for instance, that a truly sacred book, not the Bible but *The Book of Vlas*, had been long concealed from the Russian people. This book supposedly dates back to about 1000 B.C. and contains the true gospel and protocols of pre-Christian pagan Slavic priests. Were the book to be recovered, the primordial Slavic homeland could be recovered as well, were it not for the evil “Jewish Massons” intent on distorting Russian history.⁸ It is not surprising that many former Soviet Communist ideologues have embraced a nationalist worldview, becoming “red-and-browns,” or Communist-nationalists. Their version of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism was revealed to have the same totalizing authoritarian structure as the new nationalism. Nostalgia is an ache of temporal distance and displacement. Restorative nostalgia takes care of both of these symptoms. Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. Never mind if it’s not your home; by the time you reach it, you will have already forgotten the difference. What drives restorative nostalgia is not the sentiment of distance and longing but rather the anxiety about

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

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

The Sistine Chapel: Restoration of the Sacred

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5

REFLECTIVE NOSTALGIA: VIRTUAL REALITY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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

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

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

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

Reflective nostalgia does not pretend to rebuild the mythical place called home; it is "enamored of distance, not of the referent itself."⁵ This type of nostalgic narrative is ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary. Nostalgics of the second type are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance; the home is in ruins or, on the contrary, has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition. This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future. Through such longing these nostalgics discover that the past is not merely that which doesn't exist anymore, but, to quote Henri Bergson, the past "might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows the vitality."⁶ The past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding of some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historic development. We don't need a computer to get access to the virtualities of our imagination: reflective nostalgia has a capacity to awaken multiple planes of consciousness.⁵

The virtual reality of consciousness, as defined by Henri Bergson, is a modern concept, yet it does not rely on technology; on the contrary, it is about human freedom and creativity. According to Bergson, the human creativity, *élan vital*, that resists mechanical repetition and predictability, allows us to explore the virtual realities of consciousness. For Marcel Proust, remembrance is an unpredictable adventure in syncretic perception where words and tactile sensations overlap. Place names open up mental maps and space folds into time. "The memory of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment; and houses, roads, avenues are as fugitive, alas, as the years," writes Proust at the end of *Swann's Way*.⁷ What matters, then, is this memorable literary fugue, not the actual return home.

The modern nostalgic realizes that "the goal of the odyssey is a rendez-vous with oneself."⁸ For Jorge Luis Borges, for instance, Ulysses returns home only to look back at his journey. In the alcove of his fair queen he becomes nostalgic for his nomadic self: "Where is that man who in the days and nights of exile erred around the world like a dog and said that Nobody was his name?"⁹ Homecoming does not signify a recovery of identity; it does not end the journey in the virtual space of imagination. A modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once.

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

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

Standing by the window, I see the shattered glass of Yugobank. I could stand like this for hours. A blue, glassed-in facade. One floor above the window I am looking from, a professor of aesthetics comes out onto his balcony; running his fingers through his beard, he adjusts his glasses. I see his reflection in the blue facade of Yugobank, in the shattered glass that turns the scene into a live cubist painting on a sunny day.¹⁰

Bar Nostaligija: Reflecting on Everyday Memories

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

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

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

"Nostaligija' is a bad word. It is associated with the former Yugoslavia. Nostaligija is 'Yugo-nostaligija.'"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

mourning. Freud made a distinction between mourning and melancholia. Mourning is connected to the loss of a loved one or the loss of some abstraction, such as a homeland, liberty or an ideal. Mourning passes with the elapsing of time needed for the "work of grief." In mourning "deference to reality gains the day," even if its "bestest cannot be at once obeyed." In melancholia the loss is not clearly defined and is more unconscious. Melancholia doesn't pass with the labor of grief and has less connection to the outside world. It can lead to self-knowledge or to continuous narcissistic self-flagellation. "The complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound, draining the ego until it is utterly depleted."¹⁸ Reflective nostalgia has elements of both mourning and melancholia. While its loss is never completely recalled, it has some connection to the loss of collective frameworks of memory. Reflective nostalgia is a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future.

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