

Chapter Title: Time Will Bury in Oblivion An Introduction to Trauma and Nostalgia

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Book Title: Trauma and Nostalgia

Book Subtitle: Practices in Memory and Identity

Book Editor(s): Lucien van Liere, Srdjan Sremac

Published by: Amsterdam University Press. (2024)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.11930990.5>

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1 Time Will Bury in Oblivion

An Introduction to Trauma and Nostalgia

Srdjan Sremac and Lucien van Liere

Feelings unspoken are unforgettable.

Andrei Gorchakov in *Nostalgia* (1983, Andrei Tarkovsky)

Abstract

This chapter introduces the intertwined concepts of trauma and nostalgia, and their relationship with memory. Nostalgia encompasses individual and collective memory, longing for the past, reflections on the present, and political restoration efforts. Trauma is depicted as an enduring wound. The chapter argues that in societies, collective traumas and nostalgic memories can be invoked to bolster the identity of ethnic, racial, and religious groups. The way atrocities are remembered, whether as traumatic or not, depends on the dominant narrative shaped by sociocultural representations. Therefore, the chapter also discusses portrayals of trauma and nostalgia in film, media, and material objects, setting the stage for the volume's contributions and suggesting future research directions.

Keywords: memory; material culture; narratives; representation; film

Introduction

The past few decades have seen the emergence of the research fields of both *trauma* and *nostalgia*. This volume explores the implications of bringing the two together. If we acknowledge the important developments in studying the disruptive power of traumatic experiences, a profound reflection on the meaning of nostalgic longing and world-making for collective and individual identity is indispensable. To understand processes through

Van Liere, L. & Sremac, S. (eds), *Trauma and Nostalgia: Practices in Memory and Identity*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2024

DOI: 10.5117/9789048559220_CH01

which *trauma* and *nostalgia* become intertwined, how they are constructed and transfigured in this process and shape individual as well as collective identities, it is necessary to focus on the experiences, interests, and needs of the different actors involved. An interdisciplinary approach to *trauma* and *nostalgia* allows for both a wide and precise interpretation and provides an opportunity for a better understanding of the integration of trauma in nostalgic sentiments and its impact on the construction of identities, intergenerational transmissions of the past, practices of memorialization, the cultural politics of memory construction, and spiritualities. In this volume, we understand “interdisciplinarity” with Laura Evis as “integrated inputs from multiple, distinct disciplines to seek a resolution to, or an understanding of, one key issue” (2021, 121). These disciplines in this volume include media studies, anthropology, philosophy, religion studies, and social sciences. They are recognized in their distinctive methods, traditions, and philosophies as they contribute to reflections on the integration of trauma into nostalgic memories, with keen attention to their interaction in public spaces, patriotic symbolisms and rituals, popular cultures, and cinematography. Modern technologies of mass culture play an important role in circulating images and narratives about traumatic and nostalgic pasts. In these processes, the linguistic/discursive and the physical/spatial/aesthetic dimensions of cultural, political, and religious narratives are inextricably intertwined. Therefore, this demands an approach in which the relationship between trauma and nostalgia is considered from different angles. Politics, the culture industry, schoolbooks, religious symbolisms, and media can all, as will be shown by the authors in this volume, be important entry points for studying the “blending” of trauma representations and nostalgic ways of remembering. The contributors of this volume show how certain social (cultural, political, religious) modes of trauma are mediated by nostalgic ways of remembering. Thus, the volume has a wide methodological range, while the focus remains sharply on the often intense blends of trauma and nostalgia.

Relations between trauma and nostalgia are all but straightforward and clear for many theorists. Therefore, we will explore in this introduction pathways to understand how nostalgic longing and imaginaries relate to the idea of trauma, defined as the remembrance of an irrecoverable past (Thorpe 2015). We take a first step in encouraging further research and bringing scholars who theorize trauma and nostalgia closer together by examining how both subjects are entangled. The leading questions in this effort are: How do nostalgia and trauma influence the fallibility and subjectivity of individual and collective memories? How do nostalgic

imaginaries and representations idealize or romanticize traumatic past experiences? In what ways can traumatic and nostalgic memories serve as coping mechanisms for remembering the past? How do these memories impact, shape, and integrate present events into individual and cultural memories and identities?

The Intersection between Trauma and Nostalgia

The emphasis of this volume is on understanding the *interplay* between trauma and nostalgia. This introduction explores where we can situate this interplay and how we can study it. How can (fragments of) traumatic memory become a part of nostalgia and how can nostalgia affect the memory and representation of traumatic events? Traumatic archives and nostalgic practices can be seen as both positive (for example, in the sense of post-traumatic growth or reflection) and negative representations of the past and thus as positive and negative contributors to the cultural production of (individual or collective) world-making. Escaping from the horror and suffering of the past into nostalgic sentiments becomes visible, for example, in post-conflict or postcolonial contexts where many nostalgic fabrications are present in traumatic memories of war, despair, terror, and oppression, followed by a mediating redemptive narrative of hope for a just and better society (Hamber 2012, 279). Nostalgic longing is also recognized in post-totalitarian or rapidly changing societies where the present uncertainties are contrasted with the clear structures and relative happiness of days gone by (Sztompka 2004, 180–81; Bartmanski 2011). However, an equally important and related question for us here is how the political nostalgic filtering of the traumatic past can erode and transform this past that is then contrasted with the unsatisfactory or disappointing present. Can nostalgia construct what Michael Kammen (1991) calls a “history without guilt,” in which the broader society becomes unable to deny or critically reflect on the collective memory of an unresolved trauma, notably through its normalization and denial? This question ties in well with the idea of the normalization or sterilization of a traumatic event. A violent past may then start to function as an episode of a collective past and may become articulated as an ongoing process that still contributes to the social realm, to how social relations need to be understood, and to how social responsibilities should precisely be articulated. In such contexts, this traumatic layer can also be mobilized if the past is represented as a past in the present. Nostalgic sentiments can be activated around current cultural and political representations of what once

was, presenting that past as a recurrent trauma that should be dealt with in the present. This comes close to what Jeffrey Alexander calls a “cultural trauma,” that is: “a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution” (2012, 16). In Alexander’s view, all trauma is cultural and depends on social processes of meaning-making. As a result, cultural traumas point to how people look at what goes on in the present by referring to a past. Nostalgia then may function as a negative or positive way of bonding with that past, a material or discursive fusion of what is with what once was and what, in a sense, never really ended.

This process can deeply affect *individual* experiences of past violence. Jenny Edkins (2003) has pointed to processes in which private grief over loss is transformed into ritualized and material structures of national mourning. Traumatic events are, for example, streamlined according to what serves the construction of national identities. As such, collective trauma as a sociopolitical construction may modify or even imprison survivors’ narratives in the socially encouraged and accepted discourse and symbolism through which the state celebrates its victories and nostalgically remembers its fallen heroes. At the same time, as several contributors in this volume point out, not only the state but also countercultures gaining more influence through the internet and social media articulate nostalgic pathways to a modified past with denials or trivializations of victimhood and re-articulations of heroism and strong leadership. In these trajectories, nostalgia plays a significant role in the making of the present. In such contexts, trauma and nostalgia are intimately linked, and a past violence may implode in the discursive representations of present issues. This way, a nostalgic iconizing of the past may unite people in vicarious mourning and shape political agendas.

As we will show, nostalgia can refer to a yearning for a different time that is shared among social groups and reenforces the social cohesion of these groups. It can, on the other hand, also refer to a feeling of loss and dissatisfaction opposite mainstream representations in the present. Defined by its etymological roots in the pain (*algos*) of longing for home (*nostos*), nostalgia carries with it an idea of a “sentimental longing for the past” (Wildschut et al. 2010, 573) caused by current changes in social structures. The term was first used in 1688 by Johannes Hofer, a student of medicine who diagnosed the anxieties of Swiss mercenaries who were fighting away from home with “nostalgia” as a translation of the German *Heimweh* (from *Heim*, home, and *Weh*, pain) (Fuentenebro de Diego and Ots 2014). Since the

term was first used in medicine and later in psychiatry, it contributed to the emergence of a diagnostic language and medical epistemology. The lack of available research on the topic of trauma *and* nostalgia that we see today is in part due to this history of the term; it referred to a medical disease that was sometimes considered life-threatening and often even required hospitalization (Nikelly 2004, 183). However, the twentieth century saw a broader evolution of the term as a yearning for a lost past, a yearning for persons, places, spheres, and symbols. In film and literary analysis, nostalgia became an instrument to analyze a longing for a past that is no more, a time before the violent event, before the crisis, when everything was still uncluttered, a time represented in words, colors, forms, and localities (for example, see “titostalgia” in Velikonja 2017 or “Ostalgie” in Bartmanski 2011). Fred Davis (1979) saw nostalgia functioning this way when he wrote in *Yearning for Yesterday* about the “nostalgic sentiment” that drives on the idea of the superiority of what was over what is. In his opinion, this sentiment is a response to disruptive events and episodes of anxiety. The nostalgic sentiment, he writes, partakes in the great dialectical process that produces culture and marks the ceaseless and unruly tension between change and stability, innovation and reaffirmation, new and old, utopia and the golden age. In this way, Davis recognizes nostalgia as a key to understanding how people individually and collectively construct their “identities” (Davis 1979). Susannah Radstone, among many others, understands nostalgia as a response to identity threats that are posed by rapid social changes (Radstone 2007, 113). Many approaches to nostalgia centralize a longing for clearness and oversight, a longing that is triggered by current circumstances and crises. This means that nostalgia has a strong imaginary dimension that involves aspects of the present projected into a past. In a similar vein, David Lowenthal understands the appeal of nostalgia as related to the “longing for an ordered clarity contrasting with the chaos or imprecision of our own times” (Lowenthal 1989, 30). Nostalgia reveals something (discontent, fear, unease) about the present in which it appears. The Russian war on Ukraine, for example, has been understood by some analysts as a response to Russia’s uncertain status as a great power that began under Boris Yeltsin’s administration. Being a great power (*derzhavnost*) is part of Russia’s narrative and symbolic official traditions and rituals. It is communicated with strong nostalgic overtones and—according to E. Wayne Merry in 2016—has lately been raised “almost to the level of a secular religion” (Merry 2016, 29; see also Nikolayenko 2008; Privalov 2022). The “special operation” against the “Nazis” in Ukraine also tries to evoke the nostalgic sentiments surrounding the Soviet Union as a nation defeating

the Nazis and saving Europe, a cultural-historic trajectory that has been reactivated many times in propaganda, movies, and the arts.

This time-related binary of what was and is is also a perspective on nostalgia found in Svetlana Boym's influential book *The Future of Nostalgia*, quoted by almost all authors in this volume. Boym understands nostalgia as a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship, she contends. Distance also resounds in cinematic images of nostalgia. These nostalgic images have a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images—of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface (Boym 2001, xiii–xiv). Nostalgia, thus understood, relates discontent to absence and to an imaginary presence in the past. Such perspectives describe nostalgia in terms of deficit and wantage. On the other hand, however, nostalgia is acknowledged as a constructive social force that brings group attitudes into unison and has a stimulating influence on feelings of cohesion. Nostalgia then encourages positive attitudes within social groups. Rehabilitating nostalgia from its negative connotations, Tim Wildschut and his colleagues (2014) argue, using the results of several quantitative studies, that sharing nostalgic narratives about a common event contributes to group solidarity and positive feelings among group members. In their research, they focus on what they call “collective nostalgia,” which they define as “nostalgic reverie ... that is contingent upon thinking of oneself in terms of a particular social identity or as a member of a particular group” (845). In their view, nostalgia should not be defined in terms of loss, but if understood in the context of social groups, it serves as an important reflection that precipitates positive evaluations among group members. Collective nostalgia is an important group-level emotion that is crucial for understanding the dynamics and cohesion of social groups. This acknowledgment is important not only for taking nostalgia seriously as more than a yearning for what is gone but also for understanding nostalgia as an important instrument for analyzing social emotions, the re-narration of shared and socially accepted stories, the ritualization of the memory of past events, and the construction of a shared focus on the (imagined) past. Nostalgia fosters social connectedness and togetherness, which in turn heightens self-continuity and strengthens meaning-making processes that are relevant for communities to develop and flourish (Van Tilburg et al., 2019). Furthermore, Delisle adds that a certain politics of nostalgia is crucial for the formation of identities; it is how we integrate our past, present, and

future selves, “it helps us salvage a self from the chaos of raw unmediated experience” (2006, 392). To understand one’s place within a community, relate to others, share memories, or make plans all requires a sense of nostalgic longing that binds imaginary pasts and futures to a place in a shared present. Because of this, nostalgia can also create political identities, pit certain identities against others, create bold interpretations of a glorified past, or emphasize the role of current groups as the true heirs of a heroic struggle. Nostalgia is at play where groups understand themselves as special. It influenced the Brexit discussions in the UK (Campanella and Dassù 2019) and played a role in the rise of Donald Trump in the US (Bonikowski and Stuhler 2022). However, the impact of nostalgic repertoires during elections should also not be overestimated and requires careful study and contextual explanation, as demonstrated by Gabriella Szabó and Balázs Kiss (2022) in their analysis of Facebook posts and responses during the 2019 European Parliament election involving Hungarian politicians.

Thus, nostalgia as a yearning for a past is complex and multilayered and includes political, social, and personal modes and linkages. Although nostalgia often appears in literature as related to social dynamics, it does of course also have a strong personal component. In the writings of Caroline O’Donoghue (Thorpe 2015, 65), nostalgia is understood more individually as a constructive way to deal with a difficult past, and it even takes on a liturgical character. Here nostalgia is related to a process of mourning. She describes a journey into an inner landscape of emptiness as both terrifying and humanizing, where a special kind of happiness or joy is mixed with pain. The nostalgic world-making in this liturgical sense is a sacred silence linked with a traumatic past, where pilgrims gain access to the past in the present. But it is “sacred,” which means for her that it is never fixed, cannot be grasped, and is always in motion (Thorpe 2015, 66). Martijn Meeter (2016, 344) similarly points out that people who suffer trauma rarely have a choice to live a life where the trauma is simply denied and forgotten and thus argues that for many people, nostalgia is a means of giving trauma a meaningful place in their life narrative (see also Edkins 2003, above). Meeter also raises the question of whether our interpretation or way of making sense of that past narrative needs to be truthful. Or should we encourage fabricated narratives as long as traumatic events are given a place? A nostalgic register in this sense gains existential meaning or value, and even more so when nostalgia is shared collectively by a community. In this context, giving a place to traumatic events depends on whether the discourses and symbolisms of communities are allowed to “narrate” and thus acknowledge these events. Jennifer Delisle (2006, 294) notes that nostalgia is not only a means to affirm

the survival of a past trauma but also a means to cope with the present. We would postulate that survivors of trauma, especially of prolonged periods of trauma, create sensible structures and frameworks of meaning that normalize that period of their lives, and thus the post-traumatic experience can in a very real sense become a newly modeled trauma to navigate where these former structures and sensibilities no longer hold true. The idealized past then can be seen as a utopia or phantasm to be longed for. Nostalgia, as we have made clear, is by no means only negative. Nor is it only positive. It is there as an essential part of how we (re)construct our memories and how we look at how and who we are now, both as a collectivity and as individuals (people who might influence, affirm, or contradict one another).

Addressing trauma and nostalgia as we do in this volume raises the question how the memory of trauma steers nostalgia and becomes even a part of it, but also the other way around: how nostalgia can become part of trauma, impact traumatic memories, and co-construct traumatic identities. Therefore, we are interested in nostalgia as a complex representation of, and desire for, an imagined and (re)constructed *traumatic* past that is discursively, materially, ritually, and socially located in the present where it plays an important role in the construction of meaning. As Daniela Agostinho, Elisa Antz, and Cátia Ferreira argue, “nostalgic representations of the past have become one of the most significant mechanisms for dealing with problematic legacies, the contingent demands of the present and the challenges of an uncertain future” (2012, 3). In this volume, we confine ourselves mostly to nostalgic modifications of larger sociopolitical and cultural traumas, as these offer the best documented insights into the entanglement of trauma and nostalgia.

Nostalgic Repertoires, Memories, and Traumas

In most literature, trauma is related to representations of a past violence that reshuffles the present. Violence and trauma shatter our cognitive assumptions about the self and the world; trauma hits and pierces our entire horizon of meaning, giving “a shock which dissolves the link between truth and meaning, a truth so traumatic that it resists being integrated into the universe of meaning” (Žižek and Gunjević 2012, 155). Nostalgic epistemic orders in turn might help to counter this meaning-devouring “truth” by privileging the positive aspects of the past, by not allowing the trauma to overshadow the present—the nostalgic in this sense refuses victimhood (Delisle 2006, 393) or remodels victimhood. The epistemes of nostalgic repertoires can be broadly categorized into two sub-categories,

namely that of *reflective* and *restorative* nostalgias (see Boym 2001, 41–59). We use Boym’s distinction as a fruitful perspective, although the lines between the two may sometimes become vague, as some chapters in this volume show. Boym understands *restorative* nostalgia as being at the core of national and religious revivals. It is a form of “theological” nostalgia that often embraces symbols and restores rituals. It wants to “return” and is open to conspiracies. *Reflective* nostalgia, on the other hand, does not follow a single truth or idea but is about grasping the multiple dimensions of an always fleeing presence. The distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia allows Boym to distinguish between “national memory,” which embraces and constantly ritually reproduces a single version of national or collective identity, and “social memory,” which relates to active, collective frameworks that do not define but only “mark” the individual’s memory (Boym 2001, xviii). According to Derek Hook (2012, 227), interpreting Boym, *restorative* nostalgia emphasizes a transhistorical reconstruction of the past and projects the truth, while *reflective* nostalgia, which emphasizes the longing itself, embraces contradiction and calls truth into doubt. In a way, reflective nostalgia can destabilize restorative nostalgia. However, without reflective nostalgia, the longing itself, restorative nostalgia would not be able to “reconstruct” anything in a meaningful manner.

It is this interaction between reflective and restorative nostalgia that interests us most, accepting the complex trajectories in and through which different modalities of nostalgia interact. Reflective nostalgia is of special interest in that it cherishes shattered fragments of memory and nostalgic fabrications. Nostalgia then can, in a sense, become like a compass, a means of direction amid the uncertainties and predicaments of the present and future (Hook 2012, 228), a means of recovering (fabricated, imagined) narratives to give meaning to the here and now. As noted above, the nostalgic memory is always only a partial recollection of a past, as nostalgia makes connections, revises fragmented memories, and construes a growing set of links between past and present. Hook (2012, 228) refers to this as the reinvention and the fashioning of new, rather than received or recovered, meanings. The traumatic past in this sense becomes a static utopia, irretrievably lost. Rooted in perspectives on the present, nostalgia can encourage positive memories and practices of a traumatic period whilst mitigating or even neglecting the painful and destructive experiences of that selfsame period. A possible way to counter this is by continuously moving between reflective and restorative nostalgia to give memories a meaningful context. An example from the history of apartheid is to counter the reflective nostalgia and master narrative of black dispossession with a more restorative one that

nuances apartheid as a “world of moral ambivalence and ambiguity in which people can be both resisters and collaborators at the same time” (Hook 2012, 229), and by so doing reveal the multiple ethnic, gender, and class divisions within black communities. Lived subjectivities, however, continuously show that the latter does not fit within the prevailing post-apartheid sensibilities.

Does *fetishism* help to superimpose a positive narrative over the traumatic past and make it more palatable? Hook (2012, 231) argues that nostalgia is indeed a kind of fetishism, a love relation to a version of the past that is often recalled and takes on a cherished status and a protective function. Nelson Mandela and the struggle narrative here serve as an example. The complexities of the struggle run the risk of being reduced to the triumph of one man’s moral will. It is a narrative that makes the past trauma more agreeable. These forms of nostalgic glorification and fabrication are superimposed and permit identity to be maintained. This narrative functions to manage anxiety and sometimes even a type of longing to return to the past. This can become very powerful and operates against the obligation to remember our traumatic historical narratives fittingly.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (2012) offers an important insight when arguing that this kind of nostalgic longing belongs not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators. She argues that perpetrators employ a defense mechanism in a different way, demonstrating a kind of nostalgic idealization of the good elements of the traumatic period, which allows perpetrators to disassociate themselves from their complicity. The movie *The Act of Killing* by Joshua Oppenheimer about the Indonesian mass slaughters of communists and communist sympathizers (1965–66) is a case in point. Oppenheimer interviews perpetrators of the mass killings. In the interviews, these perpetrators brag about what they did together and use nostalgic memories to bring back the “good old days” of killing. Although Oppenheimer’s movie is not unproblematic, he succeeds in showcasing nostalgic ways of longing for an extremely violent period that raise feelings of unease among the viewers. The nostalgia shown in *The Act of Killing* seems to be the result of the acknowledgment and heroization of the perpetrators’ anti-communist purges by the Indonesian government after the mass killings. Interestingly, being heralded by a dominant politicized culture of remembering and feared by people in the neighborhood created nostalgic heroes out of perpetrators of extreme violence. Eventually the individual memory of one of the killers breaks through the thick narrative and symbolic layers of the nation and recalls the killings, but this time as a traumatic event, as if this event took place in another time outside the nation’s timeline. The man runs out of words and cannot help but to vomit (Van Liere 2018). David Anderson gives

yet another example of perpetrator nostalgia when he uses nostalgia as a phenomenon that fortifies identity as an instrument to study the American post–Civil War construction of the so-called “Lost Cause” and shows how people built a “meaningful space for southern white males in the aftermath of defeat.” Anderson shows how nostalgia functioned as an instrument to restore honor and manhood among confederate veterans (Anderson 2013).

Nostalgia draws the impossible return to current representations of an idealized or traumatic/traumatized past. It can have its (vague) focus on the restoration of a sense of continuity, community, and identity, ultimately with the aim to integrate our past, present, and future selves (Gobodo-Madikizela 2012, 255; Sedikides et al. 2008). Returning to nostalgia in the liturgical sense, these traumatic memories open up the present not as a frozen image of the past but rather as living images in the present; the past and present become contemporaries (Thorpe 2015). Our nostalgic reflections and means of mourning become our continual present, thus the basis for present meaning-making. Related to this, nostalgic glorifications of the past are also an important way of envisioning the future—a continual reflection and awareness of the past, a meticulous way of the “working through of the past” toward the future. Nostalgic idealizations and imaginaries can then also be adopted as a counter-narrative in the present, which then provides language, imagery, symbolism, and rituals to challenge present and even future narratives and contribute to a shared feeling of unity. Returning to its original root and to the medical context in which the term first appeared, nostalgia can be read as a critical term to analyze people’s affective relations toward their present and to the smaller and larger groups they belong to. Nostalgia is indeed about the present and forms the cracks and bumps of the present through a sense of longing.

Screening Trauma and Nostalgia

Visual media are a crucial resource for understanding how societies approach traumatic pasts. Films and series are especially powerful in encouraging nostalgic ways of collective remembering. The fact that filmmaking is also an aspect of the entertainment industry makes it even more interesting to analyze how violent pasts are represented as glorified or mourned and how nostalgia reflects current relations projected to these pasts. In *Screening the Past*, Pam Cook (2005) understands nostalgia not only as an important force for filmmaking but also as a major impulse of viewing films (see also Dika 2003; Davis 1979, 82). Nostalgia is both a way to make and to watch movies.

Streaming services like Netflix and Disney use nostalgia as one of the main features to sell new films and series. Kathryn Pallister writes that Netflix as creator and distributor of media texts “takes great advantage of a wide variety of audience nostalgic responses, banking on attracting audiences who seek out nostalgic content that takes them back in time, as well as new audiences who discover ‘old’ and reimagined content” (Pallister 2019, 3). But what kind of nostalgia is this? Can nostalgia deliberately be evoked by filters, colors, forms, and stories? And does this form of visual nostalgia that is used to make films and series “successful” assume a “real” event to which the audience can relate, a historical focal point for sharing nostalgic feelings? Or are the feelings without specific pasts? Are these nostalgic feelings just feelings without a past? Is it possible to assume that representations of trauma in films and series intensify feelings of nostalgia by creating lost imaginary pasts of social bonds in tense times? Today, Giulia Taurino contends, nostalgia is not so much about memory as it is about media and the media industry (Taurino 2019, 10). Visualities and filters in filmmaking create sensations and experiences of loss and longing that are related to cultural sources and shared representations. Nostalgic ways of screening the past suggest that this past is dialectically in relation to the present (the site of *algia*). Nostalgia in this way signifies complex entanglements between traumatic pasts, politics of remembrance and forgetting, and sensations of form, sound, and color. “Music and sound, in more general terms, are both powerful cinematic devices to express traumatic events or to re-invoke traumatic episodes,” write Michael Baumgartner and Ewelina Boczkowska (2020). Like Taurino, Nick Hodgin (2011) also comments, while writing about nostalgia and cinema, that nostalgia differs from memory in that nostalgia has no focal point in history. It is thus always inaccurate, vague, undefined, unfocused. Filmic nostalgia is not about memory but suggests memory, and even creates it. It can build imaginary homes in the past and evoke longing for what never really was. Films can thus prompt nostalgia even among those who have no clear picture of the events to which the visuals refer. A longing for a past that never was, or a longing for deep and clear national, political, or religious communal relations that are projected on both the past and a possible future, is at the core of nostalgic visual narratives. This complicates the relationship between nostalgia and trauma, since violent events portrayed in films occupy current memory, often shared by generations that have no direct relationship to the event itself and are mainly interested in identifying themes like bravery, suffering, vengeance, survival, or endurance, to name just a few elements that contribute to the popularity of films and series. Nostalgia then functions as a decor for visual

micro-narratives. While nostalgia in films and series prompts a look back in history and promises to take the viewer back to some past, active stereotypes and dominant forms of remembering dominate in filmic representations and their emphases. Since the relationships and entanglements between trauma and nostalgia in cinematic representations like images, sounds, and forms are complex, the cinematic past is always the present of filmmaking.

Alexander (2012) writes about cultural traumas as primarily social constructs that do not depend on the seriousness of the violent event itself but on the way in which people in networks and groups fail to link the suffering and death of victims to the meaning they attach to it. Meaning-making is in this sense only an attempt: diffuse, disputed, and incomplete. As a result, representations of trauma become part of the collective self-positioning of groups and might become, according to Alexander, a recipe for conflict (117). In this context, nostalgias may allow for social self-understanding of contemporary groups, who can reinvent the past as disturbingly traumatic and revel in the idea of being the cultural or political heirs of those who perished. In this sense, nostalgia in popular film can contribute to cultural, political, or religious self-constructions by drawing contrasts between, for example, perpetrators and victims, cowards and heroes, and aggressors and martyrs, thus suggesting clear patterns of identification. As such, nostalgia and trauma become dialectic partners. Violent past events such as wars and conflicts, whether expressed or implied through nostalgia, are often presented in a selective manner that shapes their reconstruction and remembrance. Restorative nostalgia in visual culture can be a way of fitting some past into the present, reinscribing the present in the past, and plays an important role in articulating the (re)invented past as part of a collectively experienced trauma or glory. On the other hand, however, as also becomes clear in this volume, films may also suggest alternative routes to a difficult past, away from dominant and popular interpretations of trauma and glory, and represent the past in a way that allows viewers to come home in their own histories, even when that is not necessarily comfortable or convenient (Van den Berg and Grimell, this volume). These visual representations do not escape the critical remarks on nostalgia and memory we made above. However, such films and series could be seen as allowing reflective nostalgia (see Boym 2008, 78, 79) to enter, embracing longing itself with no hope of restoring some past. What is left is contradiction, unease, discomfort, and a heterogeneous account of unstable fragments of history, devoid of any restoration, let alone glory (see Peters, this volume). The past is “there” in color, form, voice, and music but not reified, reinvented, remembered, or glorified. It is not the present projected onto a past but the past mirrored in

a multifaceted present, serving as a question mark to what we have become. Reflective nostalgia puts the longing itself at the center but provides no clear trajectories for understanding this longing—only questions.

Nostalgic Matters

In memory studies, anthropology, and religious studies, materiality plays a significant role in analyzing social constructions of bonding and meaning-making. These developments encourage us to include a material perspective on trauma and nostalgia. How do things relate to trauma and nostalgia? When examined closely, Laurel Ulrich et al. (2015, 164) contend, a thing can be a link between the past and the present and has the “potential to convey information—and in some cases, they even convey viewers to another world or state of being.” Indeed, things as linking objects can bring the past to the present and arouse narratives and (collective) memories. Things are, in a sense, per definition bridges between what was and is, between hands that have touched and that touch, eyes that have seen and that see, between attention that was given and that is given. Things mark relationships and as such can also be at the center of dispute, conflict, and rivalry. Some things are “set apart” to specifically bind certain mnemonic communities (social, national, religious) together around special narrative understandings of the past and present. In museums things can be exhibited to construct nostalgic ways of (national) identity-making, sometimes inviting visitors to come near traumatic pasts that are part of the nation. Elizabeth Jelin and Susana Kaufman describe “monuments, museums, and memorials” as “materiality with a political, collective, public meaning” and as a “physical reminder of a collective political past” (qtd. in Alexander 2004, 8). Through ritual performances, materialities can also function as memory stones to bond communities and strengthen links with transcendence (see, for example, Van Liere 2020; Morgan, 2021; Van Liere and Meinema 2022). This happens not only in religious communities, where linking objects refer to concentrated narratives of social religious memory, but also around monuments that represent narrative and ideological pasts in the present. Nostalgic pathways can be opened through things that link current ideas and feelings back to certain pasts that are evoked through scripted and ritualized ways of remembering. Through ritualization of memory around consecrated things, groups can relate to actors in the past and see themselves as heirs of a traumatized community or of a victorious community. Ritualizations around monuments and (other) “sacred things” allow for arousing feelings

of nostalgia by directing shared sensations into trajectories of the past. Special sites can also evoke and streamline memories of past violence against categorized communities and create a strong sense of bonding among the attendees, who can identify with the victims. In this way, things are not only linking objects for group bonding but also located memory that can refer to a shared past, a shared history, and, as a result, a shared present. As Eviatar Zerubavel argues, people “build different types of bridges—physical, iconic, discursive—in an effort to connect the past and the present.” As a result of this bridging, materiality may become iconized, and icons may be further materialized as monuments, relics, and souvenirs, allowing communities to experience the past as a continuity (Zerubavel 2003, 7). In a similar vein, Dominik Bartmanski sees “icons as quotes of the past life-world that link it to the present everyday life” (Bartmanski 2011, 217). Clearly, materiality plays an important role in recreating and imagining the past in the present. Thus, “things” cannot be forgotten when studying how people create nostalgic links between what is present and the imagery of what once was.

Nostalgia and Memory

In *Memory, Trauma, and Identity*, Ron Eyerman complains that “sociologists seldom speak about memory, except perhaps disparagingly as nostalgia” (2019, 24). Be that as it may, memory is all but sociologically tedious, and in cultural studies and historiography, memory in relation to violence and the construction of social and political identities represents a well-studied field of inquiry (for example: Miguez Macho 2016; Nikro and Hegasy 2017; Zucker and Simon 2020). Case studies on violent conflict, for example, often include memory as a driving force in current representations of friends and foes. Max Bergholz’s detailed study on the multiethnic community in the Kulen Vakuf region of Bosnia shows, for example, how political silencing moved memory to the private space after the atrocities in 1941 (2016, 264, 286, 290). Bergholz shows how memory depends on social transmitters, including political power and imageries of belonging. How and what is remembered depends on the symbolic context that characterizes a current community through discourse, visibility, and materiality. In a similar vein, case studies on the Indonesian democide of 1965–66 also show the social impact of a government that legitimizes its power by allowing just one narrative to be told after the mass slaughter of political adversaries (Robinson 2018, 264–313). The winners often determine the culture of remembrance. In this sense, memory, power, and the formation or affirmation of social identities should

be studied together. The memory of past atrocities is therefore primarily shaped by the ideological, political, and religious narratives that give symbolic significance to the violence. Alexander (2012) highlights this question by comparing Shoah (he writes “Holocaust”) representations in the US and Israel to the approach taken toward the atrocities in Nanking (1937) in China and Japan. While in the US (and in many European countries) the Shoah has become part of a dark universalism showing what humans are capable of, and in Israel the Shoah has become part of a particularized identity (Alexander 2012, 31–118; see also Arav, this volume), the atrocities in Nanking could not be part of any political or cultural narrative and are therefore “forgotten” (118–36). This means that transgenerational collective remembering and forgetting do not depend on the atrocities that are remembered or forgotten but rather on dominant narratives, visual media culture, and material objects like museums or monuments that are able to integrate these atrocities into a larger set of meanings. Cultural traumas depend on these narratives. Parallel to this, personal traumatic memories may become private and silenced (see Edkins 2003, 4, 104, 169), sometimes ridiculed, or they may become articulated and even heroized, depending on the symbolic function ascribed to trauma within the larger cultural and political narrative (see O’Donohoe, this volume). In this context, nostalgia plays an interesting role in co-constructing a narrative of belonging that includes trajectories of collective memory. Nostalgia is thus not free from politicized sets of meaning. Nostalgia in the sense described above, as a longing for an imagined or “real” past, has been used to “restore” collective imageries of home, beyond the individual’s private traumatic memories of a violent past, as the contributions by Panico and O’Donohoe show in this volume in their discussions of discursive and material commemoration cultures in Italy and Spain, respectively. These imageries can be presented as true memories, as is sometimes the case in tense contexts of regulation or bureaucratization. In such contexts, nostalgic imageries are produced and embraced by populist parties and protest groups as representations of a past that was not yet so complex and rapidly moving. In such contexts, restorative nostalgia pops up as a longing for an (imagined) past of local autonomy with less governmental interference, as we see, for example, in the Netherlands, where nostalgic longing for rural autonomy converge with dissatisfaction about national policies on migration.

In post-conflict societies, collective traumas and nostalgic memories can be invoked to reinforce the identity of ethnic, racial, and religious (sub) groups. Monuments and memorials are potential material flashpoints for re-invoking clear lines between perpetrators and victims and between their

current heirs (see, for example, Perica 2002, 237–38). However, cultural and national memories, identities, and practices do not flow simply from one generation to the next; they move paradoxically in both directions (Landsberg 2004). Unhealed collective traumas of frozen conflicts can be transmitted and perpetuated into future generations—or into what Marianne Hirsch (2012) calls “the generation of postmemory”—evoking intolerance and extremism. This received memory of trauma (mostly evoked by imaginative projection such as narratives, images, monuments, etc.) can form collective nostalgic memories that structure the identity of “imagined communities” (Anderson 1991) with their “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). From this perspective, ethnic-religious violence can be seen as a dramatic expression of nostalgia, grief, and unmet needs. The narratives of the nostalgic past can thus function as narrowing devices for repeated violence in the future. Indeed, bringing trauma and nostalgia together sharpens our focus on modes of memory-making and representations of conflict.

In this volume, several authors deal with the question of how nostalgia and memory are intermingled. Within cultural studies, neither memory nor nostalgia are clear concepts, so there are many ways in which nostalgia and memory relate to one another. As we have argued above, how an atrocity is remembered as a traumatic past (or not remembered at all), privately or collectively, depends on the narrative that becomes dominant after the atrocity, on the sociocultural representations of perpetrators and victims as well as winners and losers, and on the material and visual culture. Indeed, memory and nostalgia are both about the present: the presence of objects and narratives, situations and politics that can trigger, evoke, affirm, deny, or silence atrocities as traumatic pasts.

Trauma and Nostalgia between Belonging and Longing

How does nostalgia intermingle with individual and collective memories? How do nostalgic sentiments romanticize traumatic pasts for present purposes? How does longing for imagined pasts reveal current social structures of belonging? And how does nostalgia affect, shape, and integrate individual and cultural identities?

The chapters in this volume move between restorative and reflective nostalgia. They include governmental policies of remembering but also forms of social memory, and they study how nostalgia fuses with different representations, practices, narratives, and rituals that denote a traumatic/

traumatized past. The authors agree that nostalgia interprets and reflects present relations rather than bringing some past back to life. What is interesting, however, is that nostalgia links the present to imageries of a past in such ways that the past becomes part of a politics of the future, a longing for future worlds or an assessment of moral relations that projects imageries of the past into present contestations. In the chapters that follow, nostalgia is enforced by imagined or real tensions between social groups, the changing of sociocultural contexts, and the disorder of political representations. These efforts articulate and evoke living spirits that soar in the memories of the past. In this sense, both trauma and nostalgia relate to the question of agency, of who we are with the other, how we are rooted in our histories, and how we have become. The chapters combine the general perspectives we discussed above.

In the first chapter, Dan Arav studies how media plays a central role in the analysis of television productions of the First Gulf War (1991) in Israel. By analyzing various television programs and how they uniquely reflect on wartime occurrences, Arav shows how trauma and nostalgia become, under the auspices of the television experience, adjacent forms that correspond frequently. Arav points out how television speeds up the transformation of traumatic memory into a type of melancholic nostalgia. The Gulf War becomes a strange episode evoking discourses on a sequence of wars befalling Israel and acts as a catalyst for evoking memories of the Shoah. During the Gulf War, television incorporated trauma within everyday life. Arav shows how nostalgia in this context is not so much about the longing for a particular good in the past but about a focus on how wartime memory is preserved or represented through television. The Gulf War had a dual nature: while it was experienced on the home front through television, the war itself took place elsewhere. It was, Arav writes, “tangible and virtual” at the same time. The feelings of anxiety, stress, and closure contradict with war as a global, virtual, and technological event. Israeli television constructed war as self-evident and, because of its mediated dual character, as a realm of nostalgia in which entertainment, humor, and bitter memories could reside. Arav raises interesting questions on how trauma is defined and reenacted and how humor as a form of stress relief and criticism shapes nostalgic trajectories.

Mario Panico studies nostalgia as a form of cultural filtering. The positioning of nostalgia as a filter places it within the realm of reflective nostalgia, where it is asserted that nostalgia “reinvents” trauma within the social boundaries of the present. The key focus in the article is on how cultural representations of trauma are affected by nostalgia. According to Panico,

nostalgia can be understood as a form of filtering or of sifting the past in the present. This can erode the traumatic elements of the past. In other words, filtered nostalgia looks back at the past, but only recalling the positive aspects of that selfsame period and using this as a comparative measure for problems in the present. How historical narratives are represented has symbolic and semantic characteristics with specific communicative intentions, Panico shows. Nostalgia can function as a medium to re-invoke the past by means of repetition. This is, however, often also a filtering of the traumatic past into a more desirable or even romanticized past. Panico illustrates this in a thorough study of representations in post-Mussolini Italy. Interestingly, in this context he raises the idea of “communication risk,” which is inherent to this kind of nostalgia. The filtering serves a particular communicative purpose. In the example of post-Mussolini commemoration, the risk or even danger is that the traumatic and unjust nature of the past can become completely overlooked and even normalized as being not so bad, or even romanticized. This is what Panico calls “nostalgic glorification.” Toward the end of the chapter, he pays attention to irony and satire as a means of countering and subverting this nostalgic glorification. He shows how irony has the means of transforming the semantic field of reference not by destroying the phrase or image but by relegating it to the background and letting it lose its power or by changing its expressiveness in public discourse.

Paula O’Donohoe addresses the construction of nostalgia in the context of cross-generational traumas in Spain. She shows how feelings of a nostalgic past are idealized or romanticized, particularly when compared with present circumstances. An interesting dissonance between representing the periods of the (Second Spanish) Republic (1931–1939) and the time of Francoist rule (1939–1975) becomes visible, and different generations develop nostalgic trajectories to relate to this difficult Spanish past. O’Donohoe raises the issue of “time-delayed and negotiated recollection.” By studying how temporal distance affects transgenerational ways of remembrance, she shows how memories are reconstructed, put in the time frame of the present, and still activate political change. She points to the consequences when histories and memories are denounced, neglected, or reframed. O’Donohoe explores this theme among different generations, showing how memories are regulated by their transmission in the family home. Interestingly, she argues that conflict memory in the family home is often reduced to their material presence, such as photographs of missing family members. These memories are almost devoid of context, which leads the next generations with a vague material inheritance and nostalgic allusions. However, some traumatic trajectories also gain a public presence, for example in the exhumations of victims of the

Franco regime. At the same time, however, public performances of younger generations take place showing strong ritualized nostalgic references to the Franco period. A tension appears between those mourning at the mass graves and those who mourn the death of Franco. These public performances negotiate the Spanish past as a nostalgic presence for some while still a painful memory for others. By addressing a lack of attention to the civil war in the Spanish educational curriculum, O'Donohoe points out that dialogue about this period is lacking among the generations, allowing for different narratives to occupy different social spaces. Those in power leave the questions of the violent past generally unanswered, which results in a memory vacuum and in diverse groups creating their own sacred spaces for nostalgic reflection. As a result, people "remember" in narrative bubbles or groups that reinforce their own nostalgic idealization.

In their chapter on wartime films, Mariecke van den Berg and Jan Grimell relate trauma and nostalgia to redemption by focusing on the experiences of veterans with moral injury or PTSD and developing a critical reflection on the homecoming film as a genre that perpetuates and challenges notions of nostalgia. The chapter explores nostalgia and moral injury and raises the idea of a spiritual dimension of post-traumatic growth, recovery, wellbeing, and health. The authors show how reflective and counter-nostalgia are reproduced in particular popular films. In homecoming films, nostalgic routes are explored that can be critical of the reasons for a particular conflict while at the same time upholding patriotic sentiments, such as images of the American flag as a material representation of national identity. The chapter introduces an intriguing reflection on how media has transformed traumatic events on the field and back home, creating a shared reality but also a major dissonance in the actual lived experience of veterans. The reflections on redemption as explored by the authors are provisional, unfinished, and incomplete, which goes against the image of the hegemonic hero.

Bram Verhagen and Srdjan Sremac trace the recent history of the Afghanistan National Museum in Kabul as an effort to inscribe Afghan history into Western nostalgic perspectives on progression and development. They understand the museum as a nostalgic memory site that mirrors US-led reconstruction efforts of the war-ravaged country. Since their beginnings in the nineteenth century, museums have contributed to the construction of national identities by emphasizing nostalgic trajectories of national identity-making, and the Afghanistan National Museum was constructed primarily in this image by Western museologists and policymakers. Verhagen and Sremac argue that these reconstruction efforts, based on ideas of development and identity construction, failed to build a new Afghan

identity accessible to all Afghans. Instead, the museum catered primarily the desires of Western aid workers and a Kabul-centered elite. They conclude that the process of nostalgic production through material culture entails a form of imagining statehood that filters the traumatic past of political violence through a more desirable, even romanticized, past. This process streamlines traumatic events through nostalgic material representations, shaping favorable modes of nationhood.

The final two articles trace nostalgia in television series that foreground national traumatic events. In his article "Fighting against the Dying of the Present," Mathijs Peters reflects critically on Hartmut Rosa's concept of resonance and how this concept is critically related to acceleration and forgetting in modernity. Resonance is strongly connected to relationships and ideas that make one feel "at home" in the world. Peters offers a fascinating contribution to the discussion of nostalgia by introducing this theme. Resonance contains nostalgic elements, but also an idea of "Heimat." Peters shows that resonance in Rosa's work is both normative and descriptive, as it not only describes what we long for but also prescribes what we should long for. Resonant relationships can be seen as an ideal or normative yardstick for embeddedness but are not automatically reflective. Using Boym's assessment of nostalgia, Peters distinguishes between reflective and restorative resonance to preserve resonance as a critical concept. Peters sharpens his analysis through a reflection on the film series *Heimat* (dir. Edgar Reitz, first series released in 1984, covering German history between 1919 and 1982 from the perspective of a village). The film series is built around memories of experiences and contains strong nostalgic dimensions that in turn create resonance among its viewers, who recall their own fragmented memories of the very same history. Resonance is uniquely idealized in that viewers and scenes are connected through a shared history. This is, Peters argues, a historical resonance that plays a key role in the social construction of desire and longing.

In his chapter on the American series *Mad Men* (dir. Matthew Weiner, released between 2010 and 2015, covering American history between 1960 and 1970), Joshua Hollmann elaborates on four types of nostalgia as presented in the series: utopic, collective, reflective, and reconciliatory. Incisively analyzing scenes of *Mad Men* in parallel to American society, Hollmann identifies authenticity and affluence as elements of the American dream as played out by the protagonist Don Draper in the series. Nostalgia is expressed as a longing for a moment in time where one belongs, regardless of how fleeting this may seem. In this sense, the series is a quest for moments to remain, a search for meaning and belonging. However, the series also

shows a reflection on unrealized possibilities and demonstrates that the idealized past is itself not ideal, which points to the recognition that we cannot ignore past traumas/injustices through idealization in such a way that it mitigates the injustices of the present. In the concluding section of his chapter, Hollmann explores the concept of reconciliatory nostalgia, highlighting that traumatic memory encompasses both the past and the present. The focus lies on the perpetual awareness of seeking purpose and connection, with the belief that this nostalgic awareness holds the potential for present healing.

Through case studies, reflections on theoretical frameworks, and perspectives from different disciplines, the chapters in this volume delve into the fascinating interplay between trauma and nostalgia, shedding light on their complex expressions in social and political contexts. The perspectives explored in this volume show how this interplay is always current and shapes our social and political present. Feelings of social unity around narrative identities are often shaped by nostalgic pasts and traumatic memories. This past is always filtered and imagined and can result in a politics of forgetting (see the contributions by Panico and O'Donohoe), but it can also function as a way to deal with the present (see the contributions by Arav, Hollmann, and Peters). These processes of filtering and imagination significantly influence the creation of cultural productions that depict traumatic pasts while also providing guidance on how a group or nation should engage with these historical events. This volume therefore also examines filmic portrayals of nostalgia, for example in homecoming movies, which depict a disconnect between the nostalgic notions of "home" that war veterans yearn for and the realities of their PTSD-induced suffering (as explored in the contribution by Van den Berg and Grimell). In the series *Heimat* and *Mad Men*, German and US histories, respectively, resonate at the local levels of a community and a biography (see the contributions by Peters and Hollmann). Trauma as the remembrance of a painful irrevocable past scatters in different modalities of culture, politics, and religion and contributes to new forms of longing and belonging. In this process, nostalgia is a powerful vehicle to (re)present painful pasts in the present while mobilizing hybrid forms of identity and counter-identity.

There are still lingering unanswered questions. For instance, how does nostalgia manifest on social media platforms where users post memes that humorously ridicule the past? Arav and Panico both point to humor as a way to deal with the present past. How does this kind of humor relate to power balances between specific groups in modern societies, raise tensions

and social discontent, but also promote feelings of unity and cohesion? And what impact do narrative traumas have on strategic identifications of others that are excluded from traumatic narratives and nostalgic longing? Finally, as these contributions focus on nostalgic representations in the exchange between social actors in the public realm or in the production of culture, it is equally important to understand how political leaders use (collective) trauma and nostalgia to justify certain politics.

These questions encourage further examination of the intricate intertwining of trauma and nostalgia. What becomes evident in this volume is the profound connection between trauma and nostalgia within the realm of memory, emphasizing the necessity of considering nostalgia seriously when addressing trauma. It highlights that nostalgia is an inherent component of memory and underscores the importance of exploring different perspectives on trauma and nostalgia to comprehend how longing and belonging play pivotal roles in the construction of social and national identities.

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