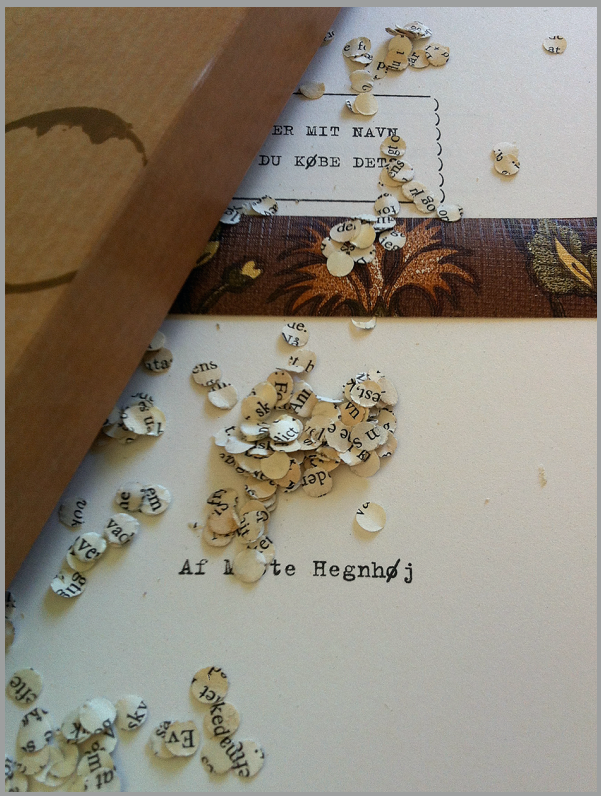

Exploring Text, Media, and Memory

Edited by Lars Sætre, Patrizia Lombardo, and Sara Tanderup Linkis

Aarhus University Press

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Exploring Text, Media, and Memory
Acta Jutlandica. Humanities Series 2017/1
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Cover design: Jørgen Sparre
Cover illustration: Cover for the Danish book *Ella er mit navn vil du købe det?* by Mette Hegnhøj. Published by Jensen & Dalgaard, 2014. Reproduced with the permission of Jensen & Dalgaard.
Publishing editor: Henrik Jensen

Ebook Production: Narayana Press, Gylling

ISSN 0065-1354 (Acta Jutlandica)
ISSN 0901-0556 (Humanities Series 1)
ISBN 978 87 7184 590 7

Aarhus University Press
Finlandsgade 29
DK-8200 Aarhus N
Denmark
www.unipress.dk

International distributors:
Oxbow Books Ltd.
The Old Music Hall
106-108 Cowley Road
OX41JE
United Kingdom

ISD
70 Enterprise Drive, Suite 2
Bristol, CT 06010
USA
www.isdistribution.com

Published with the financial support of the University of Bergen, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies at the University of Bergen, Aarhus University and the School of Communication and Culture at Aarhus University, the Aarhus University Research Foundation, the Centre Universitaire de Norvège à Paris, the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, La Maison Suger, and La Maison de Norvège in Paris.

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Text, Media, and Memory

Lars Sætre, UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN;
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Sara Tanderup Linkis, AARHUS UNIVERSITY

The present volume is the third publication stemming from the project "Text, Action and Space".[1] It aspires to confirm the belief that texts in the general and inclusive sense of the term are rich objects. They comprise in themselves the possibility of exploring questions that are essential for the attempt to understand contemporary endeavors which have huge impacts on human life and culture. In our epoch media are everywhere, more and more powerfully provoking the acceleration of time, the shrinking of geographical distances, and questions about human memory. The haunting problem of the philosophy of media is whether or not advanced technology improves the human capability to remember, and thus to help form a communal life. To many thinkers of a pessimistic disposition it appears that the more media can

1 The first two volumes are *Exploring Textual Action* (2010) and *Exploring Text and Emotions* (2014), also published by Aarhus University Press.

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accumulate data and store so-called information, the less human beings can recollect their historical and personal past, while jubilations also abound on the extension of the human capacity to unite across cultures via enhanced mediated exchange. How can the study of the complexity of texts also contribute to a more complex view of the relation between media and memory beyond the bifurcated pattern of skepticism and celebration?

In line with seminal segments of recent research, the aim of this anthology is to approach that question by blending the study of media and that of memory articulation by way of analyses of and examples from literature, historiography, photography, film, and social media, in some instances *per se* and in others in their actively operative intermedial exchange. How do media represent or suggest the workings of memory? How can various forms of representation deal with the consequences of the excess of information we receive today? How is our intellectual and emotional capacity to remember affected by the plethora of media? What are the consequences on both a personal level and from a collective perspective? Can we really alledge that the impact of media dramatically changes the balance between remembering and forgetting?

The book's contributors are obviously concerned with problems of temporality – past, present, and future, and superimposed – as these are conveyed by concrete representations in various media and by different fields of textual research on memory and media. Theory and specific cases feed and challenge each other: a purely theoretical explanation of the intertwining of media and memory is impossible and also not desirable without being firmly rooted in the concrete reality of texts and cultures. In any event, after years of belief in more or less totalizing deductive research, criticism has become more and more oriented towards the

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interplay of theoretical and textual elements, establishing by its own practice yet another jolt of intermediality in the field of literary and artistic analyses. The essays in this anthology navigate between close scrutiny of verbal and visual texts and their entanglement with theoretical issues posed by classical and contemporary studies in memory or in media.

Memory has been and is an object of study within several disciplines, in the social sciences, the humanities, and the sciences. It is not a single object, but manifests itself in a variety of forms and can be studied as the process of rescuing the past or as the faculty of acquiring knowledge, as well as a transformative act in the present in view of the future. Being a process, it is evident that memory as remembrance is embedded in processing through various media, both ancient and contemporary. For instance, although historical research necessarily tries to retrieve recollections of past facts, events, and ways of thinking and feeling, historiography by itself is a powerful written medium of recollection and, as such, it changes our view of the present and its future potentials. Moreover, historians continue to draw on various media: archival documents, chronicles, monuments, oral traditions, digital sources, visual media, and cultural artefacts – practical and artistic. Literature, journalism, theater, film, documentaries, videos, social and other digital media exploiting a crossover of narrative, as well as lyrical and other genres, hybrid genres included, have in parallel and overlapping mediation articulated the same temporal complexity in individual and collective processes of memory.

The notion of collective memory marked a shift in historical and sociological research, also as regards notions of the unconscious: the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, inspired by Émile Durkheim, posed the problem of the relationship between memory and society in 1925 with his book

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Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire,[2] showing the importance of collective inputs even in individual memory by underlining the intersubjective nature of remembrance. A contemporary of the first impact of Freudian psychoanalysis, which is also placed within the framework of intersubjectivity, Halbwachs put forward a vision of memory that nevertheless differs from Freud's: for the latter, memory implies repetition; for Halbwachs, precisely because memory depends on societal structures that are inevitably changing, repetition is not possible, and recollections are continually revised.[3] Drawing a parallel between dreams and recollections, he stressed the importance of our daytime experiences as they are elaborated in our dreams – daily life inevitably being social. As in dreaming, in memory the social aspect matters.

Halbwachs' theory demonstrates that a split exists between memory and history, one having to do with time, the other with space. History cannot but be conceived in a temporal line, while memory is embodied in objects. In his posthumous *Mémoire Collective* (1950) Halbwachs argues that urban space is a tangible territory where collective memories are rooted. The city is in incessant transformation, yet paradoxically social groups perceive it as stable in spite of the fact that memories vary from one generation to the other and from one social group to the other. The seven volumes of *Lieux de mémoire* (1984-1992)[4] edited by Pierre Nora in the framework of New Historicism constitute a monumental work in line with Halbwachs' assumptions. Collective memories reside in space: topographical, symbolic, and functional places constitute the circumstances for collective and personal recollection. In approaches adopting the standpoint of New Historicist

2 Halbwachs 1975.
3 See Hutton 1994.
4 Pierre Nora, ed. *Lieux de mémoire* 1-7. Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1992.

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research, archives – a powerful medium for documenting past data – are interesting not just for what they show but also and especially for the way in which they have been read and interpreted across generations.

In the humanities and social sciences, the emergent field of memory studies draws to a large extent on types of objects, images, texts, and perspectives promoted by New Historicism. This approach transforms the classical mode of historical research that deals with events we remember or seek to remember into the anthropological and psychological question of "how" we remember in the actual process of remembrance, focusing therefore on trauma narratives, commemorations, and place as sites of memory. Memory studies investigate problems of personal identity and collective feeling of belonging, emphasizing how the study of historical catastrophes on both global and local levels may charge the present of both the victims and their larger communities with a shareable historical awareness.[5]

Literature and memory

A brief survey of some questions posed by the vast literature on memory which has been developing for centuries shows that in philosophical and scientific research, too, the investigation of memory becomes increasingly important. Classical and recent psychology has dealt and is dealing with explanations and classifications of memory's multiple types and functions.

Defining the characteristics of memory was already a concern for ancient philosophy. In the *Theaetetus* Plato described

5 See e.g. Peter Gray and Kendrick Oliver, eds. *The Memory of Catastrophe*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004; Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen, eds. *Geography and Memory. Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012.

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memory as a wax tablet in our minds. Everything we perceive and think is engraved in our minds like images in the wax. We remember as long as the image lasts on the wax, but we often transfer wrong images onto it, images that are not the true imprint of our impressions when we felt them. Hence Plato considered memory as a passive and defective faculty, conveying illusions. In his *On Memory and Recollection* Aristotle used the Platonic allegory of the wax tablet, but gave it a positive value. The interpretation of his book on memory and of the meanings of the various Greek terms used in it is still puzzling for scholars. Like many contemporary philosophers and psychologists, Aristotle distinguished between short-term and long-term memory. His reflections also paved the way for some contemporary distinctions between what is today called "procedural memory" (remembering *how* – to ride a bicycle for instance) and "propositional memory" (remembering *that* – Napoleon was defeated in Waterloo). Some scholars believe that Aristotle sharply divided the ability to remember (dispositional memory) from the activity of remembering past events; others are convinced that the two overlap.[6] In any event, for Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, memory is not passive; by referring to the past, the imagination deals with the present and opens up intuitions projecting us into the future. Aristotle is aware that, thanks to imagination, we can make conjectures about other people or about situations that differ from our own. In the same way, today's researchers are assessing whether it is the same activity of the mind that allows us to recollect the past and to imagine the future. The link between memory and imagination proves to be important

6 See David Bloch. *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection: Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism*. Leiden: Brill, 2007. 53-117.

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for reflection on media and memory, as will be shown in the next few paragraphs.

The renewal of interest in the philosophy of mind led some philosophers to revise traditional interpretations of Descartes' conceptions of memory. Although sometimes expressing concern about the reliability of memory in the process of knowledge, he was convinced of the positive value of memory as the ability to remember if not the premises, at least the conclusions of our reasoning. He also believed that weak memory could be mediated by methods such as taking notes.[7] In the last twenty years, with the development of cognitivist approaches to the study of emotions, Amélie Rorty and John Lyons have stressed the connection Descartes established between memory and imagination.[8] Giving an active role to remembering and linking it to the faculty of imagining, he anticipated contemporary conceptions of the mind. These analytical philosophers claim that Descartes is not, as has often been believed, an opponent of the imagination. In spite of some hesitations, Descartes considered it an essential faculty of the intellect; he argued that memory and imagination combined allow for the elaboration, synthesis, and understanding of the data offered by sensorial perception.

Recent works of psychology and neuroscience demonstrate that memory and imagination cannot be separated. It is given as a fact that there is no specific place in the brain where memory is located. There is no single molecular transformation that can be called memory; memory is divided into several systems, each differing one from the other. In the words of the experimental psychologist and neuroscientist Endel

7 See Harry G. Frankfurt. "Memory and the Cartesian Circle". *Philosophical Review* 71.4 (1962): 504-511. 12 December 2016 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2183463>.

8 John D. Lyons. "Descartes and Modern Imagination." *Philosophy and Literature* 23 (1999): 302-312.

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Tulving, "[m]emory is a biological abstraction".[9] Neuroscientists talk about memory processes and neural mechanisms; it is clear today that the encoding, storage, and retrieval of memories occur in different areas of the brain according to the nature of the input, but there is no consensus on the structures or systems implied in those activities, nor on the type of input that is treated by the various brain regions (such as the limbic system, the hippocampus, and the frontal lobes). Technology today allows for close observation of living brains during cognitive tasks, but it is still difficult to identify which areas are involved in these tasks. The experimental research of Daniel L. Schacter recently revealed that a common brain network underlies both memory and imagination. Similar regions are activated when we think about the past and when we imagine and simulate the future. From the point of view of mediation it is thus clear that the particular mediation carried out by the body makes it a core medium for processes of remembrance,[10] a point also made by Freud and later highlighted by phenomenology.

It is worth noticing that ongoing experimental inquiries focus on the question that fascinated writers and artists across Europe in the nineteenth century: the interdependence between memory and imagination. It would be enough among many possible examples to quote some lines by Charles Baudelaire, who in his *Salon de 1846* summarized the intuitions of E.T.A. Hoffmann:

9 Endel Tulving. "Introduction [to the section on Memory]". Michael S. Gazzaniga, ed. *The Cognitive Neurosciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995. 751.

10 Daniel L. Schacter *et al.* "The Future of Memory: Remembering, Imagining, and the Brain". *Neuron* 76.4 (2012). 26 December 2016 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3815616>.

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True memory, considered from a philosophical point of view, consists, I think, in nothing else but a very lively and easily-roused imagination, which is consequently given to reinforcing each of its sensations by evoking scenes from the past, and endowing them, as if by magic, with the life and character which are proper to each of them […]. (Baudelaire 1981: 94)[11]

Mediation and memory

Romantic authors explored the nature of human memory and identified the repercussions of remembrances in themselves, in people's lives, and in artistic creations. The obsession with individual memories and the past of a person and of an epoch culminated with Marcel Proust's *œuvre* and the many readings of his perception of time and the past. For Proust, besides being the faculty of retrieving the past, memory constitutes the material from which writers draw their inspiration. Actually literature in general has always been concerned with memory. Past tenses, which are the most usual in narrations, inevitably hint at bygone events or people: they carry in themselves the halo of remembrance. Fictional characters often recall their actions and feelings and sometimes also stress the bond between narrating and remembering.

11 Charles Baudelaire [Baudelaire Dufaÿs]. "The Salon of 1846". *Art in Paris 1845-1862: Salons and Other Exhibitons*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, [1965] 1981. 94. – "La véritable mémoire, considerée sous un point de vue philosophique, ne consiste, je pense, que dans une imagination très vive, facile à émouvoir, et par conséquent susceptible d'évoquer à l'appui de chaque sensation les scènes du passé, en les douant, comme par enchantement, de la vie et du caractère propres à chacune d'elles […]. – Hoffmann." Baudelaire Dufaÿs [Charles Baudelaire]. "XI. De M. Horace Vernet." *Salon de 1846*. Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, Libraires-Éditeurs, 1846. 86 (la note (2) en bas de page).

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At the dawn of Western culture, in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus, quitting the sorceress Calypso, arrives at the Phaecians' island; when, at the court of King Alcinous, he hears the poet singing the Trojan War, he sheds tears and then he tells the story of that war – which he knew all too well. Poetry is the medium prompting Odysseus' emotions in its forms and verbal expression, and his account starts with the avowal that remembering his past renews his sorrow and makes it an active part of his present. Poetry is rooted in memory and memory is not neutral; it revives the feelings and sufferings one went through – either as a first-person experience or through imaginative participation in other people's experiences via the figurative power of the poetic medium.

Eastern and Western ancient literary works offer narrations of the past – historical, mythical, and individual. In the old Chinese tradition, Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (started around 150-140 BCE by his father Sima Tan, Grand Astrologer to the imperial court, and completed by him in 94 BCE), is a complex story referring to the attempted murder on King Jing Ke in 227 BCE. At first it is told by the unnamed hero to King Jing Ke; yet immediately after, the King tells his own hypothetical version, unjustly accusing the nameless hero of trying to kill him. Film translates a written medium into a visual one, and, like so many stories about the past across the globe, the King Jing Ke story was adapted by Zhang Yimou in his spectacular 2002 movie *Hero* (classified as a *wuxia* film, a Chinese genre of films about martial heroes). In the cycle of media and memory, oral traditions can be mediated into written ones, and then into visual ones. This common phenomenon of multiple and interconnected adaptations belongs to what we today call intermediality, indicating the back and forth or the continuous exchange or communication among and through various media. In the era of advanced technical reproduction, the different media

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are interdependent and yet interact as parts of a cultural environment in complex processes of mediation.

Through innumerable metamorphoses and radical changes, the legacy of the bond between literature, memory, and a medium can be found in today's artistic and literary productions. Over the last few years we have become more and more aware of the fact that our connection to history is essentially mediated by photography, press, television, film, and the internet. As already suggested, the text is a medium inscribed in the contemporary media world, sometimes an agent directly involved in the media process as the lines of actors or in texting, and sometimes reflexively representing it, as in novels and films that have the mediated reality as their theme.

Several essays in this anthology consider verbal, audible, tactile, and visual texts of various genres as configurations of remembrance; the focus is on modern and contemporary works since they express more or less acutely the consciousness of the double bind between memory and media. Contributors have investigated works in different media by Marcel Proust, Leonard Woolf, Virginia Woolf, Roland Barthes, Djuna Barnes, André Brink, Renate Dorrestein, Daniel Eisenberg, John Akomfrah, Abdellatif Kechiche, Anne Carson, Mattis Øybø, and others. Literary and documentary works by these authors have often been vividly touched by the problem of remembering, oscillating between the weight of the unforgettable and the anxiety of forgetting in the attempt to bring out the depth of personal experiences, or what has been silenced by official reports. A whole literature has been developing since the 1980s in which apocalypse is already the archeology of the future, the frozen memory of destruction in action and to come, as in the novels of the Norwegian Johan Harstad. Sometimes the texts which are interpreted here present reflections on the medium through which reminiscence emerges; when they do not, an effort has been made by contributors

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to make explicit the connection between concrete formats and the workings of memory.

This anthology shows that literature and the arts can carry out the work of sociology, history, and cultural studies – precisely those disciplines that cannot but analyze the impact of new media. Since the 1960s the proliferation of new media has fostered the research field of media studies, reconfiguring the traditional disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences.

The interrogation of the power of media emerged as early as the eighteenth century when writers ventured into periodical publications, with *The Spectator* (1711-1712) as the most important historical point of reference. The link between literature and journalism became so strong that the great majority of creative writers since the expansion of the press were also practising journalism in the political, ethical, and aesthetic spheres. The figure and the work of the journalist became the object of heated comments; the acknowledgement of the new instrument of discourse was sometimes expressed with enthusiasm, sometimes with mistrust. Samuel Johnson, who founded two periodicals, *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, warned against the dangers of the new business, which he saw as immediately related to history. As he wrote on April 8, 1758 in John Payne's journal *The Universal Chronicle, or, Weekly Gazette* (in which Johnson published his *Idler* pieces):

> A Journalist is an Historian, not indeed of the highest Class, nor of the number of those whose works bestow immortality upon others or themselves; yet, like other Historians, he distributes for a time Reputation or Infamy, regulates the opinion of the week, raises hopes and terrors, inflames or allays the violence of the people. He ought therefore to consider himself as subject at least to the first law of History, the Obligation to tell Truth. (Johnson 8 April 1758; and Johnson 2003: 532)

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The concern about the professional character of the journalist was accompanied by the awareness of the readers' role as an integral part of the medium's transmission.[12]

A vast quantity of historical research has been done in recent decades on the impact of magazines, reviews, and journals in various countries in terms of production, readership, and popular culture, and more recently also embracing digital platforms. The aim of this anthology is to open research on media to textual analysis. Elements of history, literary history, sociology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy are used in close readings in order to explore and disentangle what can be called textual density or thickness. All the contributors are convinced that texts in various media have a performative character which critics need to bring out according to the primary question leading their investigation. As suggested in the opening of this introduction, texts are rich: in texts one can find philosophy, ethics, politics, aesthetics, theories of emotions, and, as this anthology proposes, reflections on or suggestions of theories concerning memory and media.

Some touchstones in the investigation of media deserve to be mentioned: for instance, the extraordinary intuition of Orson Welles who, in 1941, after a career in theater and broadcasting, posed the problem of media in political, existential, and formal terms. In his first film, *Citizen Kane*, the power of journalism and television is embodied in the fragmentation of the story and in the multiplication of points of view. From the beginning of the movie, viewers are informed that an investiga-

12 As expressed by Johnson in one of the first issues of *The Rambler* (13 October 1750). See Samuel Johnson. *The Essays of Samuel Johnson. Selected from* The Rambler*, 1750-1752;* The Adventurer*, 1753; and* The Idler*, 1758-1760*. Biogr. introd. and notes Stuart J. Reid. London: Walter Scott, Ltd., 189? [sic]. 12 December 2016 <https://archive.org/stream/essaysselectedfroojohnuoft/essaysselectedfroojohnuoft_djvu.txt>.

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tion is being launched by journalists in order to reconstruct the life of the protagonist, the press tycoon Charles Foster Kane. Documentary and fiction blend; interpretations and facts collide in the recollections of the people who had been close to Kane when he was alive. *The New York Inquirer*, a library, personal journals, newsreels, photographs, interviews, and confessions elicited by the investigating journalist are all englobed by the new medium of film that Welles himself is displaying with acute awareness of both its filiation among the cohort of media and its specificity as an audiovisual medium.

Practices and theories share the effort to understand the media phenomenon. A movie is a document and an intellectual experiment, in line with a book on philosophy and sociology or a novel. The 1960s mark a turning point for research on media. While before the 1960s different media were studied separately, Marshall McLuhan, in *Understanding Media* (1964), pioneered an investigation focused on several media at the same time, offering a comparative evaluation of their social and psychological effects. His surprising thesis was that, in all the new means of discursivity, the important message was not their content but the medium itself. Raymond Williams replied to McLuhan in his 1974 book *Television*, positing that the social investigation should be emphasized over the technological one. He insisted, in his materialist approach, on the idea that a true Marxist history of technology should include the history of its institutionalization, distribution, and effects on users. Williams, similar to Walter Benjamin in the 1930s, had both negative and positive opinions about photography's and film's effects. On one hand he felt that the expansion of media expressed the supremacy of capitalism and its power to manipulate people's minds; on the other he envisaged that technology could have liberating consequences and pave the way for community participation and new forms of democracy.

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The long revolution caused by the changes in and the development of media since the nineteenth century, with the popular press and the expansion of the reading public, might have a positive outcome. Williams observed the overwhelming reification and fragmentation of human life since the industrialization at the end of the eighteenth century, but was not keen to adopt a totally somber, pessimistic vision concerning the transformations in human life induced by high technology. This debate – which was seminal for the creation of the field of Cultural Studies in the UK and beyond – went on in several issues of *New Left Review*[13] in the early 1960s, and produced an innovative slant on Marxist theory in politics and culture, influenced by the research of the Frankfurt School. The thoughts of Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer were crucial for Williams and the directors of the *Review*, Stuart Hall and Perry Anderson. After more than half a century, Cultural Studies and their ramifications not only constitute an important field of research in various countries, but confirm the need to conduct investigations within the humanities, where politics and aesthetics cannot be separated and must be productively re-contextualized in new fashions in the contemporary world.

In the 1960s, the most pessimistic vision of the modern condition of existence, everyday life, and feeling of time was probably developed by Guy Débord who, in his *La Société du spectacle* (1967),[14] contrasted traditional societies and their relationship to reality with the present-day technological society, where reality is substituted by its representations. The proliferation of media in the era of digital media has contin-

13 *New Left Review* was created in January 1960 as the merger of two important journals, *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review*. Stuart Hall was the first editor-in-chief, followed in 1962 by Perry Anderson.

14 Guy Débord. *La Société du spectacle*. Paris: Gallimard, 1967.

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ued this discussion of power and freedom, opportunities and inequalities, with new dimensions in the globalization of communication, trade, and economy and the intensified cultural exchange of beliefs, values, and negotiations of memories.

Freezing the moment

Human beings have struggled to preserve the memory of past events and cherished the hope of grasping the fleeting present in new ways thanks to the invention of technical supports: via innumerable cunning strategies they have tried to capture what is lost or could be lost. Perhaps the puzzling connection between media and memory takes place already in the very tiny discrepancy between an event and its recording, even when the latter, as in much contemporary technology, is simultaneous with the event: the switching on of a device or the touching of a personal digital assistant might be the thin temporal jump separating reality and its re-presentation. This phenomenon is possibly not temporal but figurative, deeply anchored in media's power to represent, to give images, and to express in texts. Walter Benjamin never ceased to examine the relationships between media, memory, and history. In his 1935 article "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit", he initiated an investigation in which history, sociology, philosophy, literature and the arts are deeply interrelated, with the role of the media at the center of his cultural criticism. He anticipated a great change in human life because of the growth of more and more differentiated technological means, the consequences of which were not simply material and social yet also spiritual, resulting in different modes of artistic creation and a different understanding of the notions of art and beauty.

In one of his sophisticated reflections in his posthumously

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edited notebooks *Das Passagenwerk*,[15] Benjamin suggested that images, whether visual or verbal, were not just indicative of an epoch but particularly of its historical readability. Correcting the idea that the past can clarify the present, and vice-versa, he saw the "image" as the place where "once" and "now" meet and shape "a constellation" which is dialectical and not based solely on historical reference. To signify that constellation Benjamin uses a cinematic term: the image offers a "freeze" of the dialectical process. While the relationship between past and present is merely temporal, that connection between "once" and "now" is figurative, combining the visual and the linguistic orders. The relationship between memory and media, or history and media, consists of this 'freeze'.

Now, almost half a century after the early burning debates on culture, technology, and society, the essays in this volume aim to continue in a new media landscape the exploration of how media affect the essential human faculty of remembering, an exploration that questions how literary, historical, and artistic productions respond to and interpret the way our entangled individual and collective lives are being shaped today – to 'freeze' the essential components of mediation and remembrance.

Acknowledgements

Our acknowledgements and thanks go to the institutions and persons that have kindly supported our work and granted us the necessary funding for the present publication, our workshops in Paris, and our editorial group meetings, all part of a project that otherwise has been conducted as networking between senior, junior, postdoc, and PhD scholars

15 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

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as well as MA students: the University of Bergen, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Linguistic, Literary and Aesthetic Studies at the University of Bergen, Aarhus University and its School of Communication and Culture as well as the Aarhus University Research Foundation, and in Paris: the Centre Universitaire de Norvège à Paris (CUNP), the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH), La Maison Suger, and La Maison de Norvège. We also wish to thank the TAS participants for their personal contributions to covering travel costs.

Particular thanks go to colleagues and administrative staff in Bergen, Aarhus, and Paris: Johan Myking, Tor Bastiansen, Anne Beate Maurseth, Siri Fredrikson, Liv Mørch, Håvard Peersen, and Steinar Sælebakke (UiB); Niels Lehmann and Per Stounbjerg (AU); Bjarne Rogan, Johs. Hjellbrekke, and Kirstin Skjelstad (CUNP); Jean-Luc Lory and Nadia Cheniour (Maison Suger); and Svein Hullstein (Maison de Norvège).

For their valuable scholarly input and co-operation as guests during our workshops we also express our warm gratitude to Lis Møller (AU) and Martine Beugnet (Paris VII-Diderot), and to our participating candidates: Sofie Marhaug (Bergen), Teresa Carbayo López de Pablo (Zaragoza/Sorbonne), and Gui Xuejiao (China/Geneva).

Our appreciation is deep-felt for the Endorsement of the TAS project by Academia Europaea, Section for Literary and Theatrical Studies, London, conferred in August 2014.

As editors we extend our warmest thanks for their invaluable work to the members of our project's extended editorial group, our TAS colleagues Svend Erik Larsen (AU), Ragnhild Evang Reinton (UiO), and Anders M. Gullestad (UiB). For their friendly assistance with logistics, housing, and practical services during our workshops and editorial group meetings we nourish appreciative thanks to the staff at Hôtel de Senlis and not least to CUNP's senior executive officer, Kirstin

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Skjelstad, whose efficient and cheerful support has been an invaluable asset.

Finally, we are sincerely grateful for the productive co-operation and the sustained scholarly inputs rendered by our TAS colleagues in Bergen, Geneva, Aarhus, Copenhagen, Oslo, Tromsø, Leuven, Zaragoza, and Ann Arbor.

Bergen/Geneva/Aarhus, March 2017
Lars Sætre, Patrizia Lombardo, Sara Tanderup Linkis

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PART I: MEDIATION

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Bits of Books in Boxes: Remembering the Book in Anne Carson's *Nox* and Mette Hegnhøj's *Ella is my name do you want to buy it?*

Sara Tanderup Linkis, AARHUS UNIVERSITY

Ella is my name do you want to buy it? (2014, *Ella er mit navn vil du købe det?*; hereafter *Ella*) is an experimental literary work by the Danish author Mette Hegnhøj. It comes in a box, made out of brown cardboard, with what appears to be coffee stains on the top and the title typed on an imitated sticker. The box is kept together with a rubber band on which is inscribed a handwritten warning in black pen: "Be careful! Contains poetry snow" (Hegnhøj 2014: n.p.).[1] The box contains 138 loose, numbered pages, neatly kept together by a band of flowered paper. And there is the 'poetry snow': lots of small dots of paper of the kind produced by a hole-

1 "Forsigtig! Indeholder poetsne".

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puncher, all of them with bits of text on them as if they were cut from books. They are everywhere, in the box and between the pages. The warning makes sense as the dots easily spill out of the work when reading it (see Fig. 1).

Thus we notice a loss without even having considered the actual textual 'content' of the work. Certainly, Hegnhøj's book is about loss; it is about the loss of a cat, the loss of a father – and, I argue, it is about the loss of the book itself. It is about remembering this loss, writing it and "working it through" by working through the book as a physical object: ruining it, mutilating it with a hole-puncher, and breaking down the conventional shape of it, but also keeping it neatly together with bands of rubber and flowered paper; somehow it is still a book.

Fig. 1. Mette Hegnhøj's Ella is my name do you want to buy it?. *Reprinted by permission of Jensen & Dalgaard.*

In this article, I analyze *Ella* together with Anne Carson's *Nox* (2009), a similar experimental book object, also preoccupied with issues of memory and loss. *Nox* is a replica of a scrapbook that Carson made in memory of her brother after his death. Both *Nox* and *Ella* thus appear as examples of a category of recent experimental works that combine a

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thematic pre-occupation with memory and loss with an attention towards the visual and material aspects of literature. Works in this category include Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) and *Tree of Codes* (2010), W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001) and *Die Ausgewanderten* (1992), Susan Howe's *The Midnight* (2003), Umberto Eco's *La misteriosa fiamma della regina Loana* (2004), Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), Chris Ware's *Building Stories* (2012), and J.J. Abrams and Doug Dorst's *S.* (2013). These works include images such as film stills, photographs, or drawings in the written text, or they experiment with the typography, with the visual space of the page, and with the physical format of the book – all in order to reflect upon issues of memory, trauma, and loss.

My primary interest is the relation between the thematic preoccupation with memory in these recent works and their intermedial strategies. I investigate this relation as it is expressed in the works of Carson and Hegnhøj; that is, as a relation understood not only in terms of representation – the experimental strategies as means to represent memory or the traumatic absence of memory – but as a connection that works both ways, reflecting both "media memory" (remembering the book and literary tradition) and "mediated memories" (remembering in literature), a reciprocity which ultimately suggests how media and materiality matter in these works with a forceful impact on their memory 'content'.

This reading is inspired by new materialist approaches to literature as well as by the concept of memory that has been promoted by cultural memory studies. These two perspectives are presented in the first part of the article. Broadly speaking, both new materialism and cultural memory studies offer tools to describe and analyze what is currently happening to literature, as well as to the perception and performance of memory. Both perspectives thus address a contemporary

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cultural situation, which is, if not determined, then at least deeply affected by the ongoing media development.

I read the works by Carson and Hegnhøj as examples of two different reactions to this evolving situation. Although they do not explicitly bring up the new media but rather seem to escape into the 'old-fashioned' aesthetics of print and paper, they may indeed be read as reflections of the present media situation. I argue that they reflect more or less resistant reactions to the arrival of new media while also exploring the possibilities that these media imply. Their experimental strategies evoke a tradition of avant-garde literature, which is traditionally seen to be looking forward. However, I point to a tension within each of the works and between them: they appear to be celebrating the past, 'remembering' the old medium of the book and the literary tradition associated with it, while also pointing experimentally towards the future of literature – and of memory.

Material memory matters

Carson and Hegnhøj's works both draw significantly on the traditions of twentieth-century experimental literature, on the genres of artist's books and scrapbooks, and avant-garde and neo avant-garde montages as well as on modernist and post-modernist experimental fiction, photo-novels, altered books, and book objects. Notably, these earlier experiments, like the notion of experiment itself, were primarily focused on ideas of the "new", on progress and future – even when it comes to the representation of memory.

This fact is demonstrated by an important predecessor for the works by Hegnhøj and Carson: B.S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969), which is also a "book in a box" and also primarily concerned with representing memory and loss. *The Unfortunates* tells the story of a man who arrives in a city

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in order to report on a football match. Here, he begins to remember a friend from that city who had died from cancer a few years earlier. According to Johnson's preface, the book's experimental form is supposed to reflect this memory process. The work comes in a box with the pages assembled in loose sections that may be arranged by the reader in a random order. In his preface, Johnson states that he wanted to depict the "randomness, the lack of structure in the way we remember things", but this randomness, he had come to realize, was "directly in conflict with the technological fact of the bound book, for the bound book imposes an order, a fixed page order, on the material" (Johnson 1999: xi). This statement reflects a postmodern understanding of memory, emphasizing phenomena like free association, fragmentation, and randomness. The book, on the contrary, is understood as an old-fashioned totalitarian structure that controls its content.[2] Accordingly, the experimental form of the book-in-a-box is meant to 'free' the memory content of the work from the conventional form of the book, leaving the work radically open to the reader's associations and interventions.[3]

Although employing similar experimental strategies, the new works by Carson and Hegnhøj appear to have a different agenda. Indeed, while experimental literature in general – and Johnson's work in particular – may be related to ideas of disruption, of breaking down literary conventions and destabilizing traditions, the new intermedial works seem

2 This idea of the book as a totalitarian structure may be connected to a deconstructivist perspective that was influential in the 1960s, when Johnson wrote his book. Derrida, in his *de la grammatologie* (1967), for instance, describes the book as a totalitarian form that was to be associated with the logic of logo-centrism.

3 The work was, however, most radical in theory. To frame the story, Johnson marked what should be read as the first and the last section – so it did eventually function as a story with a beginning and an end.

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to celebrate the book and the culture defined by it, presenting memory in terms of continuity and material stability. This difference in comparison to the earlier experiments may be related to the different challenges that literature faces now, as summed up by cartoonist Chris Ware in commenting on his graphic novel-in-a-box, *Building Stories* (2012): "With the increasing electronic incorporeality of existence, it is reassuring – maybe even necessary – to have something to hold on to" (Ware 2012: n.p.). In Ware's work, and in several of the other new intermedial works, this "something to hold on to" is the book itself – the book, indeed, as some "thing", as a material object of memory rather than merely a medium for representing the past.

The new memory works seem to be in tune with the recent turn towards materiality in contemporary culture as described by e.g. Bill Brown and N. Katherine Hayles. In a literary context, this "new materialism", or what Brown calls "textual materialism" (2010), primarily signifies a shift in criticism away from "theory", and from New Criticism's emphasis on the immaterial autonomous "text", towards a mode of reading that pays attention to the significance of "things" in literary texts, and to the material and medial aspects of the works themselves.[4] However, the material turn may also

4 This materialist approach to literature has earlier been promoted within the field of book history, e.g. by Jerome McGann who in *The Textual Condition* (1991) called for a "materialist hermeneutics" in literary criticism. More recently, N. Katherine Hayles has presented a materialist mode of reading that she calls "media specific analysis (MSA), which "explores how media specific possibilities and constraints shape texts. Understanding literature as the interplay between form, content and medium, MSA insists that texts must always be embodied to exist in the world" (Hayles 2002: 31). Especially with regards to books, Hayles argues that "the physical form of the literary artifact always affects what the words (and other semiotic components) mean" (ib.: 25).

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be related to a tendency in literature itself to highlight the material qualities of literature through experimental strategies in order to resist (or explore) the impact of new media on literature. Jessica Pressman traces a proclivity for what she calls the "aesthetics of bookishness" in contemporary experimental novels, suggesting that "[t]hese novels exploit the power of the print page in ways that draw attention to the book as a multimedia format, one informed by and connected to digital technologies" (Pressman 2009: n.p.). The same works have been described by N. Katherine Hayles as reflections of the "traumatizing" influence of new media on literature:

> [T]he novel itself as a form is undergoing the traumatic experience of having its traditional territory taken over by the colonizing incursions of other media. These books respond to this trauma by bursts of anxious creativity, thereby changing what it means to be a novel in print. (Hayles 2007: 85)

Describing the book as "traumatized" and "anxious", Hayles connects the new literary experiments to the broader cultural and human consequences of media development. The printed book is associated with a bodily aspect of literature, with the idea of physical or material presence that is positioned in opposition to the assumed virtuality and "immateriality" of the new media – to Ware's "electronic incorporeality of existence".[5] According to Hayles, the experimental strategies of these texts express an anxiety about the new media, which

5 The idea of the "immateriality" of the new media is expressed by Derrida, who describes "writing with ink (on skin, wood or paper)" as "less ethereal or liquid, less wavering in its characters, and also less labile than electronic writing" (Derrida 2005: 60). Hayles opposes "the fixity of print" to the "flickering signifiers" that characterize text read on screen (qtd in Panko 2011: 280) – while

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may be related to a general cultural anxiety about a "posthuman condition" in which the human and bodily aspects of life are replaced by new media technologies.[6] In contrast, the book is celebrated as an old medium or 'thing' that supports human identity and embodied memory.[7]

This discourse may appear nostalgic. It tends to idealize the book as an auratic object, as a "thing of the past" and as a privileged medium for representing memory. Below, I investigate how this discourse is expressed and challenged in the works of Carson and Hegnhøj, implying that they not merely celebrate the book for what it once was; they also force it to change itself. In the quotation above, Hayles emphasizes that the emergence of new media releases attempts not only to preserve the book, but also to reinvent it, "changing what it means to be a novel in print". In this way, she stresses a dynamic interaction between old and new media.

This emphasis on reinvention and interaction rather than

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maintaining that the digital media and electronic text are not themselves immaterial. Notably, her argument concerns the *experience* of reading on screen.

6 As pointed out by Paul Duguid, the nostalgic tendency is contradicted by a tendency towards celebrating new media in terms of freedom and possibility. Duguid criticizes both the "gloomy bibliophiles" and the "triumphant technophiles", and concludes that "both of these positions too easily separate the past from the future, the simple from the complex, technology from society and information from technology" (505).

7 This ideology of the book as connected to the human body at first glance contrasts with a traditional understanding of writing and books as media of exteriorization – hence Plato's criticism of writing leading to the loss of memory. However, once the book was integrated in Western culture, it became a widespread metaphor of memory and of the human body, as argued by e.g. Allison Muri: "Our pages and our bodies have long converged in metaphor," she writes. "A material surface with boundaries, edges and margins, for centuries the page has been made of skin, and bound in skin. And for centuries, the body has been metaphorized as a book" (Muri 2004: 235).

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static preservation may be related to the concept of memory that has been promoted in cultural memory studies. Indeed, in order to speak of memory at a medium level, and to connect the metaphor of books that "remember" the book to the representation of actual memory processes in these books, I rely on the notion of cultural memory that has been promoted by e.g. Jan and Aleida Assmann, Astrid Erll, and Ann Rigney. According to this tradition, the concept of cultural memory implies a metaphorical understanding, focusing on the cultural production and communication of memories rather than on memory as a psychological process that takes place within the individual brain. This idea of memory marks a shift away from a traditional notion of memory as an archive where the past is preserved, since memory is "as much a matter of acting out a relationship to the past from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of preserving and retrieving earlier stories" (Erll and Rigney 2010: 2).[8] Cultural memory thus describes a dynamic process that is "performative rather than reproductive" (ib.) and which takes place in the present between texts, media, and people.

This notion of memory is useful in relation to the works by Carson and Hegnhøj, both of which appear as "memory performances": Framed as personal scrapbooks or notebooks, they reflect creative processes of shaping the individual experience of the past and communicating it into the present, to the public. As noted by Astrid Erll, media become crucial in the context of cultural memory since mediation is necessary

8 Thus, the notion of cultural memory also marks a shift away from the metaphor of memory as a book, or as inscribed in the "book of the mind"– famously represented in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who swears to keep the memory of his father "within the book and volume of my brain" (I, V, 104). Andrew Hoskins has argued that memory today may be described by the metaphor of a network – what he calls "digital network memory" (92).

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in order to construct a shared understanding of the past (Erll 2010: 389).[9] Thus, underlying the notion of cultural memory is an understanding of media as,

> more than merely passive and transparent conveyors of information. [Media] play an active role in shaping our understanding of the past, in "mediating" between us (as readers, viewers, listeners) and past experiences, and hence in setting the agenda for future acts of remembrance within society. (Erll and Rigney 2010: 4)

Media matter, not only as channels or containers of memory, but also in the sense that they shape what we remember and how we remember. Thus, the perspective of cultural memory has in common with New Materialism that memories, like texts, are considered to be essentially mediated and embodied phenomena which gain significance through processes that take place between media, texts, and users.

With the notion of cultural memory, it becomes possible to describe cultural processes such as intertextuality, intermediality, and remediation in terms of memory.[10] Below, I focus first on Carson's *Nox*, exploring this notion of memory in relation the processes of translation and remediation that are presented in this work. I then turn to Hegnhøj's *Ella*,

9 Within memory studies, distinctions are made between e.g. personal, collective, communicative, and cultural memory. My emphasis here is on the concept of cultural memory as an umbrella term, which covers processes of interaction between past and present that take place at a cultural level, again, between media, texts, and people. For further description of the different memory categories see e.g. Erll and Rigney 2010.

10 For more on this use of the concept of cultural memory, see e.g. Renate Lachmann, "Mnemonic and Intertextual Aspects of Literature" or Ann Rigney, "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing". Both appear in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (de Gruyter, 2010).

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examining its bookish aesthetics while also locating attempts to escape the book and enter the world of new media. My hypothesis is that both works are grounded in contemporary media culture, and they reflect in different ways the conditions fostered by this culture for representing memory – and for imagining the future of literature.

The book as an epitaph

Anne Carson's *Nox* comes in a big grey box. Inside the box is a copy of the scrapbook that Carson made for her brother after his death in Copenhagen in 2006. "When my brother died, I made an epitaph for him in the shape of a book" (Carson 2009: n.p.), it says on the back of the box. "This is a replica of it, as close as we could get" (ib.). An epitaph is a commemorative inscription on a monument. And the box with its massive appearance and its grey color, reminiscent of marble, indeed resembles a monument or even a gravestone.

In this way, the work is represented as a material object of memory rather than merely as a text about memory. The published replica is characterized by an ambition of immediacy, of getting "as close as we could get" to the original personal scrapbook. The printed pages mirror the intimate expression and tactile quality of the handmade book. The pages are yellowing and the book is filled with drawings and paintings, old photographs, stamps, and different fragments of texts, letters, and notes. Most of the text is handwritten or typed on pieces of paper that seem to be glued on to the pages. Some of the words even appear to have been scratched into the pages. In the replica, all of these visual details are of course illusions. The scrapbook has been reproduced by scanning and printing; however, the work clearly aims at creating the illusion of the book as an authentic, intimate object of memory.

So, *Nox* resembles a handmade book – only it has been

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printed and published, made available for mass production and circulation. Despite its ambition of immediacy, the work also highlights this fact. While the original scrapbook was a codex (as indicated by reproduced marks of stitches from the sewing in the back), the reproduced replica is published in a leporello-format: it is folded like an accordion (see Fig. 2). Unfolded, it consists of one long piece of paper – 25 meters in total – where the fragments of texts and images are displayed side by side while the other side remains blank. In this way, the work challenges a conventional understanding of the book as a bound codex while also pointing back into the history of the book, to a time before the codex when words were scratched into monuments or written by hand on scrolls or tablets – or in folded books.[11]

Fig. 2. By Anne Carson, from Nox*, copyright © 2010 by Anne Carson. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.*

In this way, *Nox* practises memory at several levels: it represents Carson's personal memories about her brother; yet, it also 'remembers' at a media level, recalling the history of the book from screenfolds and stone tablets to the codex, as well as the history of this particular book, from the codex scrapbook to the published leporello in the monumental

11 For more on the history of the folded book, also called the screenfold, see Wurth 2013: 23.

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box. Finally, *Nox* may also be said to remember at the level of literary history. It is structured around the Roman poet Catullus' poem "number 101", which is also about the loss of a brother. Carson is a professional translator of texts from Antiquity. Throughout the work, the process of translating the poem is described together with the process of mourning the brother. Entries from the Latin dictionary are presented and are subtly invaded by Carson's own writing and memories. Thus, for "et" we read:

> And, and what is more, too, also: and in fact, and indeed, and yes, and quite true! And even, or rather, and on the contrary, rather than; well I for my part and so too; in addition, likewise, also, too, as a matter of fact … (et *nocte)* (you know it was night). (Carson 2009: 1.1)[12]

The words "Nox" and "night" appear in most of the entries, though they do not appear in Catullus' poem, indicating the fact that it is indeed a poetic translation, rewriting and overwriting the original poem with the translator's own thoughts and memories.[13]

The process of memory described at a thematic level in the work is thus connected to the process of translation. The loss of the brother is worked through with the help of the cultural context of the poem; but the poem is also altered by Carson's translation, bearing witness to a process of changing, even distorting the original text. Towards the end of the book, the poem is presented again in the English translation, although now, the text is illegible. The yellowing page looks wet and dissolving and the writing is blurred. Material decay

12 *Nox* is unpaginated. The work is instead divided into sections, to which I refer when quoting the text.

13 The notion of poetic translation was introduced by Walter Benjamin in "The Task of the Translator" (1923). For more on poetic translation in *Nox*, see Wurth 2013: 29.

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thus seems to complicate the process of translating the past into the present. The poem makes evident the passing of time, although this physical decay is again an illusion. Carson has explained that the paper only looks old and yellowing because it was soaked in tea (Teicher; see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Poem from Nox. *By Anne Carson, from* Nox, *copyright © 2010 by Anne Carson. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.*

The work's material expression thus stresses an idea of physical decay and loss which is also evoked in Catullus' poem "number 101". In Carson's translation, it says, "I arrive here at these poor, brother, burials/ so I could give you the last gift owed to death/ and talk (why?) to mute ash" (Carson 2009: 7.2). Carson elaborates on this idea of speaking to the silent material remnants of the past. "History can be at once concrete and indecipherable", she writes in a passage about Herodotus. "Historian can be a storydog that roams around Asia Minor collecting bits of muteness like burrs in its hide" (ib.: 1.3). The fragments of texts, letters, and photographs

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included in the work appear as such material bits of muteness. They communicate a sense of absence that Carson associates with her brother:

> […] I am looking a long time into the muteness of my brother. It resists me. He refuses to be "cooked" (a modern historian might say) in my transactional order. To put this another way, there is something that facts lack. "Overtakelessness" is a word told me by a philosopher once: das Unumgängliche – that which cannot be got round. (Carson 2009: 1.3)

Heidegger's notion of the "Unumgängliche" is evoked here to describe everything that resists understanding or translation, like the poem and the brother. The work's intermedial expression visualizes this resistance, for instance by presenting a letter from the brother that has been cut into fragments. The fragments resemble a puzzle but they are arranged and reproduced on the paper in such a way that it is impossible to assemble them into a whole. Something is missing – the letter too remains "unumgänglich". As noted by Jill Marsden,

> The material structure of Carson's *Nox* compels the reader to question the assumption that there may be a deeper truth to decipher beneath its surfaces. The reader feels compelled to dart backwards between the pages, trying to piece the fragments together, to guess at the meaning of a letter only partly revealed. Yet this is a text, which enacts a kind of essential withholding. (Marsden 2013: 192)

Through its fragmented, tactile appearance the work evokes a desire to decipher it, to piece the different fragments together. However, *Nox* frustrates this desire. Since it is a reproduced object, it is not possible physically to go beneath its surface. Indeed, the work is literally "unumgänglich", "that which cannot be got round"; which cannot "be seen the back of"; since flipping around the screenfold merely confronts you

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with the blankness of the work's back side. Hence, you face the fact that you are not dealing with the authentic scrapbook, only with a two-dimensional image of it, reproduced on the one side.

Nox is thus characterized by a tension between, on the one hand, an emphasis on the idea of material, tangible presence of the original scrapbook and of the things, letters, and pictures represented in it, and, on the other hand, an indication of a sense of absence and loss, including also the loss of meaning that occurs in the process of translation and of remediating the scrapbook into a public, printed text.

The material reproduction of the scrapbook appears as yet another process of translation. In an interview, Carson explains that it was important to find a way to reproduce her scrapbook so that it "would still be as intimate, so that when you read it you still feel that you are just one person reading it, so it doesn't seem like so much a violation because a fiction of privacy is maintained" (interview by Teicher 2010: n.p.). According to Carson, this "fiction of privacy" is reproduced by means of scanning the original scrapbook and then xeroxing the scans. She describes scanning as a "digital method of reproduction, it has no decay in it, it has no time in it, but the Xerox puts in the sense of the possibility of time" (ib.). Again, the aim is to maintain an image of the book as an aged and intimate object, "as close as we could get".

The resulting ambiguity in the work, contrasting the illusion of tactility and authenticity with its glittering surface and with its appearance as an appealing new book object, may be connected to the work's juxtaposition between traditional experimental literature and the commercialized printed book. *Nox* imitates the tactile expression and handmade quality of artists' books or experimental book objects; yet, while these genres traditionally reside in the outskirts of literary culture,

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Carson's work has been mass-produced, widely published, and translated into several languages.

This fact invites us to consider the work as an expression of the aesthetics of bookishness as described by Jessica Pressman (2009). Indeed, *Nox* at once seems to celebrate the old book and the literary tradition associated with it – while also changing it, transforming the book into a "multimedia format". The work is marked by nostalgia, a desire to awaken the brother from the dead, to translate the poem, and render the scrapbook, immediately and authentically. However, it is also marked by a recognition of the impossibility of translating the past into the present, highlighting the processes of mediating, translating, and remediating memory. In this sense, *Nox* may be related to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's notion of hypermediacy: it signals an awareness of the media and of mediation to the extent of turning the old media themselves, book, paper, and print, handwriting and typewriting, into the very objects of memory.[14]

Although it appears to be turned towards the past – indeed, to be almost carved in stone – *Nox* may thus be read as a product of the new media culture. That is, a culture which is characterized by this logic of hypermediacy, reproducing old "things", such as the scrapbook, in order to produce an authentic – immediate – experience of the past. In my conclusion, I return to *Nox* to discuss further the work's representation, and performance, of memory. First, however, I turn to my second example, which also, although in a different way, positions itself as a work of memory by way of a media experiment.

14 The notion of hypermediacy is presented in Bolter and Grusin's seminal work *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (1999). For an extensive reading of *Nox* in relation to the notion of hypermediacy, see Wurth 2013.

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The books of the dead

Mette Hegnhøj's *Ella* resembles *Nox* as an experimental work, an intimate mass-produced "book in a box" about loss and mourning at a personal as well as a medial level. It is about Ella, a young girl who lives with her mother in the back room of their second-hand book shop. She mostly stays inside among the old books, which they buy from the estates of deceased persons – they are the "books of the dead", as Ella says. On her twelfth birthday, her mother is "out" and Ella finds a cat among the books. She keeps it, names it "Kattekismus" (with a pun on the Danish word for 'catechism'), and is happy with it until it disappears. *Ella* is framed as Ella's notes about her nine days with the cat. The work is introduced on the back of the box with a note from the publisher Jensen & Dalgaard: "This is Ella's abandoned notes as we found them in the private quarters behind the book store, in a box beneath Ella's bed" (Hegnhøj 2014: n.p.).[15]

Ella thus resembles *Nox* in the fact that it is in every way presented as an "authentic" work, an intimate, material remnant of the past. As in the case of *Nox*, the impression of authenticity is stressed by the work's material expression, with typewritten pages, handwriting on rubber bands and "poetry snow". Furthermore, the presentation of the work in terms of "abandoned notes" allows us to glimpse already at this early paratextual stage a story that will conclude with Ella's disappearance. Thus, another, more serious story seems to loom behind the childish story about the cat; a story about abandonment, loss, and mourning in the bookshop's back room. This story about a traumatic past subtly emerges between the lines of Ella's writing that at first glance seem firmly

15 "Dette er Ellas efterladte noter, som vi fandt dem i Privaten bag Antikvariatet i en æske under Ellas seng".

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grounded in the child's experience of the immediate present. One of the first pages in the work reads thus:

> This is where I am./ In the back room behind the book store./ At the table in the center./ The table clothed in newspapers./ Here are two chairs (mine and mother's)./ Here is a bed (mine) in one corner./ A bed (mother's) in the second corner./ Marks from a bed in the third corner./ Kitchen in the fourth corner. (Hegnhøj 2014: 5)[16]

Ella begins her story by describing her own presence 'here and now' in her home behind the bookstore. The past is only indicated by the description of remnants, marks from a third bed, indicating the absence of a third person who is, as it is later indicated, Ella's father.

Indeed, Ella's mourning the loss of the cat is connected to her mourning the loss of her father, who is only mentioned in passing in the work but whose absence haunts the story: at a crucial point, Ella leaves the cat and runs out of the shop and into the street because she believes she has seen her father. When she returns the cat has disappeared.

Thus, focusing on the cat rather than on the father, Hegnhøj explores issues of loss and mourning from the child's point of view. Because of this perspective, the work appears less monumental than Carson's massive marble block of a book. Hegnhøj's cardboard box is small and fragile; rather than an epitaph carved in stone, these are the secret notes of a child, written for the child. Actually, *Ella* has been promoted as children's literature; it is to be read by children of the same age as Ella, as well as by adults. The work's experimental

16 "Det er her, jeg er./ I baglokalet bag Antikvariatet./ Ved bordet i midten./ Bordet beklædt med aviser./ Her er to stole (min og mors)./ Her er en seng (min) i det ene hjørne./ En seng (mors) i det andet hjørne./ Mærkerne efter en seng i det tredje hjørne./ Køkken i det fjerde".

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aesthetics may be read in this context. Hegnhøj writes simple poetic sentences on almost blank pages and sentences that resemble concrete poetry where the typewritten letters form the shape of a cat, a birthday cake, or a zero. In this way, she explores the relation between the visual and the verbal, word and image, as is the tradition within children's literature – and yet again: *Ella* appears as fundamentally different from traditional children's picture books because of the fact that, in an explicitly self-reflexive mode, it draws attention to the book as a medium, to paper and typewriting, in a time when literature – and especially children's literature – increasingly takes place in other media.

Accordingly, *Ella* could be read like *Nox*; as a nostalgic celebration of the book as a thing of the past, remembering handwriting, typewriting, and notebooks, and being a child among boxes of old books rather than in front of an iPad. Like *Nox*, it seems to combine an emphasis on intimate memory – associated with the notebook-format – with nostalgia for the book and for the literary culture defined by it. This impression is stressed by the work's aesthetic expression, the poetry snow, handwriting on rubber bands, and flowered paper bands keeping the text together, suggesting nostalgia for a girlish little world.

However, that impression only lasts until you consider the actual textual content of the work. Just as a more serious loss looms behind the story about the cat, the apparent bookish nostalgia on the aesthetic surface of the work is undermined by its more sinister descriptions of the actual books that surround Ella. *Ella* certainly relates to the book and traditional literary culture in a more ambiguous way than does *Nox*. The books in the shop "smell of slow death" (Hegnhøj 2014: 9). They are presented as "dead people's books" (ib.: 63), as dusty dead things that keep Ella away from life. In this way, Hegnhøj seems not so far from Johnson's depiction of the

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book as a totalitarian structure that imposes a repressive order on the material; that is on Ella's life. According to Ella, she is allergic to the books; she believes that they cause her asthma, while her mother thinks it is the cat (ib.: 66).

When she finds out that her mother sold the cat, Ella finally revolts against her by mutilating all the books with a hole puncher before she leaves the bookshop. She states:

> With a hole puncher you can go invisibly/ crazy/ You can destroy a whole book shop/ without it showing on the outside./ If you start by A, you can make/ invisible destruction in alphabetic order/ Go crazy alphabetically. (ib.: 81)[17]

The idea of going "alphabetically" crazy points towards the ambiguity of both Ella's and Hegnhøj's projects: they seem to insist on an order, the order of the alphabet, in the midst of destruction. This ambiguity also characterizes the work itself, as indicated by the fact that the loose pages are numbered and held together with rubber bands and flowered paper, seemingly attempting to keep the work in order as a book and covering up the fact of the fragmented, resistant, and traumatized text. In this sense, the work may be compared to the mutilated books that it describes: they remain whole on the outside but are hollow inside, pierced by the hole-puncher and thus poetically capturing Ella's loss.

The impulse to keep the work in order is also transferred to the readers when we are encouraged by the inscription on the rubber band to be careful not to lose the poetry snow. The idea of the "book in a box" emphasizes this impulse, sug-

17 "Med en hullemaskine kan man gå usynligt/ amok./ Man kan ødelægge et helt antikvariat./ Uden at det ses udenpå./ Hvis man starter ved A, kan man lave/ usynlig ødelæggelse i alfabetisk orden./ Gå alfabetisk amok".

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gesting an attempt to put the bits and pieces of past in order, neatly assembled within a box. Yet, they inevitably escape the box. At least that is what happened in my reading of *Ella*, as the "poetry snow", despite my attempt to be careful, spilled out of the box and blew away or fell to the ground at the café where I first read the work. And now, here in my office, I have "poetry snow" all over my desk.

Thus, although *Ella* might appear nostalgic on the surface, it also presents an escape from the old media, out of the box and away from the world of books. Bits of text escape the box, just like Ella finally escapes the bookstore. She leaves, the work ending with her name posed as a question, presumably by her mother: "ELLA?" (138). An escape from the traditional aesthetics of books may also be traced at a formal level as the many typographical images in the work may be associated – especially by young readers at Ella's age – with the aesthetics of new media; with SMS-signs and symbols of digital culture, smileys etc. Certainly, these textual images indicate a process of going "crazy alphabetically", removing the words from their traditional bookish meaning and turning them into images.

Ella may thus be read as a reinvention of the book as we know it, responding to trauma, as Hayles puts it, by "changing what it means to be a novel in print". Only in this case, the trauma seems to be connected to the books themselves rather than to the "colonizing incursions" of other media. The work is an attempt to escape the box and the bookstore's traumatic back room, confronting the literary text with other media, cutting it into bits and pieces while also keeping it neatly together with bands of rubber and flowered paper. Below, I further investigate this ambiguity as I conclude my analyses by considering the works by Hegnhøj and Carson as reflections of new modes of understanding and representing memory.

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Recently, I received a small envelope in my mailbox with my name and address on it, written neatly by hand with a black pen. I was excited just by the sight of it, since receiving a handwritten letter is in itself something special these days. However, this was not a traditional letter. It was merely an envelope filled with "poetry snow". And I remembered: reviewing *Ella* in a Danish literary magazine, I had expressed my regrets about losing the "poetry snow" while reading the work. This envelope, making up for my loss, appeared as an almost intimate response to my review, which notably took place in the public space of literary culture, hence blending the spheres of the personal and the public, my mailbox and the literary magazine.

My experience of receiving this envelope may be compared to the experience of reading the experimental texts considered above. Both are concerned with representing personal memories and experiences through the scrapbook and the notebook. Like the handwritten letter, both formats are associated with the past, with notions of authenticity, "aura" and intimacy. However, both works also project this aura of intimacy into a broader public space and into the present. These works of Hegnhøj and Carson are examples of how remembrance can be performed by blending borders between past and present, private and public, in a mode that characterise them as works that, albeit ambiguously, emerge out of a new media culture.

The envelope in my mailbox with the handwriting and the "poetry snow" excited me because it appeared as an intimate approach: a personal letter, in real handwriting. Like both works considered above, it speaks to a desire for authenticity, to go "as close as we could get". Although both works circle around absence and loss, the idea of an immediate render-

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ing of the past as a present reality is marked by the material presence of the works as 'things' rather than merely as texts, offering memories kept within boxes or shrines.

The whole idea of the "book in a box" presents a notion of memory as something to be preserved in a material object, that is, as an intimate thing that might be hidden under a bed, as is literally the case with Ella's notes, and which may only accidentally be exposed to the present and to the public. José van Dijck considers the box as a metaphor of material memory objects, discussing what she calls the "shoebox" collections of our personal memories (2007: 1). Referring to Walter Benjamin, van Dijck notes the importance of material objects to evoke memories; however, relying on the constructivist notion of "cultural memory" introduced above, she insists that it is precisely what we do with these objects that (per)form our memories:

> Clearly, the inscription and invocation of personal memory are often contingent on technologies and objects; however, in line with social-constructivist theory, I would locate memory not in the matter of items per se, but rather in their agency, in the way human agency interacts with material objects. (van Dijck 2007: 36)

Memory is created by our interaction with the things, not by the things themselves. In *Ella*, the old books themselves are presented as useless, dead and dusty things that contain no memory of the dead people to whom they once belonged. The books only come to perform memory, to express Ella's loss, when they are interacted with by being turned into "poetry snow". Van Dijck points out that while memory objects are often associated with material stability, it is actually the material instability of these objects that makes them valuable to us as memorials: "In fact, it is exactly this material transformation – decay or decomposition – that becomes part of a

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mutating memory: the growing imperfect state of these items connotes a continuity between past and present" (ib.: 37).

This observation applies to the works of Hegnhøj and Carson. While at first they seem to idealize the book as an agent of stability and continuity against the assumed instability and immateriality of the new media, they actually present the book as an object in decay, filled with holes and yellowing pages. Indeed, as noted by Julia Panko, the book becomes important in contemporary culture exactly because it is materially unstable – as opposed to electronic texts, it can be physically changed and interacted with:

> The materiality of the book is important not in the vein of glib arguments about the readers being unable to take their Kindles into the bath, but because it can be the means of another kind of record-making, created from the physical traces a reader's body leaves in the process of handling a book, rather than from the reduction of a human being to a data set or literary description. (Panko 2011: 295)

These new experimental works highlight this physicality and transformability of the book. They do not merely *preserve* memories in boxes, nor do they simply aim at preserving the book as we know it; rather they change it, remembering the book by exposing it as a material object marked by time, bearing witness to processes of intervention and interaction, mutilation even, as indicated by the wet yellowing pages in *Nox* and the poetry snow in *Ella*.

Not only do works like *Nox* and *Ella* represent memory in terms of physical interaction, their experimental aesthetics also encourage the empirical reader to interact with the text herself. Carson's work, because of its size, the monumentality of the box and the length of the scroll, is physically difficult to handle. As noted by Liedeke Plate, *Nox* encourages readers to interact with the book in new ways; she analyzes different

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kinds of reader interactions, different practices of physically arranging the box and the scroll, displayed on photographs online (2015). Similarly, with Hegnhøj's work, we are directly encouraged to handle the book carefully. It demands that we take care of it and keep it together, generating also an experience of failure when we finally lose parts of it as the "poetry snow" drops out of the box. This was at least my experience. Another (more orderly) reader may have a different experience of handling this work, and this difference is precisely the point. Although both works are mass produced and widely circulated, they aim at producing an experience of intimacy and material presence that is achieved through the individual handling of the text.

These experimental intermedial memory works encourage participation, pointing to memory as something that is being performed in the present, through intimate interaction between author, text, and readers. At the same time, both works are also essentially mediated products of a contemporary media culture. In that sense, they may be related to what Andreas Huyssen describes as the modern memory culture. Huyssen investigates the impact of media development on modern culture, arguing that the new media have fundamentally destabilized our relation to the past. The past is always virtually present in the new media culture; it is "only a click away", while it is also always absent, always mediated. We see this ambiguity especially in *Nox*, which presents itself as a replica, a copy of the original scrapbook. Hence, it introduces a sense of mediated distance in relation to the past that it presents. *Nox* may thus be described as what Huyssen calls an "original remake". "'Original remakes' are in", he suggests. "[W]e are obsessed with the re-presentation, repetition, replication, and the culture of the copy, with or without the original" (Huyssen 2003: 21).

According to Huyssen, this celebration of the "original

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remake" is symptomatic of a culture that is obsessed with the past on the conditions of the new media culture – it is all about virtually reproducing the old look and authentic "feeling"; about manufacturing aura. Thus, the modern memory culture is characterized by nostalgia. It may be connected to the material turn described above, which is similarly characterized by a nostalgic longing for the material things of the past. Like the turn towards materiality, the modern memory culture may accordingly be explained as a reflection of cultural resistance against media development, and against what Ware calls the "increasing electronic incorporeality of existence".

Both works reflect the modern media culture and its consequences for literature and memory, but they do so in fundamentally different ways. *Nox* is the "original remake", melancholically reflecting upon itself as a mediated object and mourning the loss of the 'authentic' past. *Ella*, on the contrary, seems less melancholic. Centering on the child, it seems more directed toward the future. It insists on authenticity. Here, the handwriting is 'real' – in the sense that someone has actually written, by hand, on all of the rubber bands of all copies of the work. My envelope was real. Importantly, authenticity in this work is not bound to the idea of the book as an agent of stability or as an archive of the past. On the contrary, memory is only performed here by mutilating the books and by moving out of the bookstore's back room. Thus, the bookish nostalgia is counterposed by a critical attitude towards the "books of the dead", ultimately resulting in a work that goes 'alphabetically crazy', confronting us with a past that is dissolved into bits of old books, potentially escaping the box and dispersed everywhere.

Huyssen ends his essay "Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia" by encouraging a move away from the dominant discourse of memory: "Perhaps it is time to remember the fu-

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ture, rather than simply to worry about the future of memory" (Huyssen 2003: 29). Hegnhøj's work may present a similar movement when it moves, with Ella, out of the box and out of the bookstore, towards the future.

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Memory and the Tape Recorder: *Krapp's Last Tape*

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C'est tuant, les souvenirs.
Beckett, "L'Expulsé"

Memory has been a constant object of interest within Western culture from Antiquity to the present day, but the notion itself and the way we consider the phenomenon have undergone historical changes. As the literary critic Richard Terdiman puts it, "even memory has a history" (Terdiman 1993: 3). Every culture remembers its past, but how a culture performs and sustains this recollection is distinctive, and with the rise of modernity, the changes in the ways Western cultures interact with the past have become so radical that we may talk about a *memory crisis*, he claims (ib.).

After the French Revolution of 1789 and throughout the nineteenth century, a new sense of time came to the fore; it is clear that the relation to the past has been altered. A feeling of loss is expressed in literature and philosophy (ib.: 5), and the past starts looking like a foreign country: "a sense that the past had somehow evaded memory, that recollection had

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ceased to integrate with consciousness" occurred, and "the very coherence of time and subjectivity seemed disarticulated" (ib.: 3-4), Terdiman says. When the oral tradition and premodern forms of remembrance are disrupted and substituted by what he calls archival memory, a gap between the present and the past arises, making the past appear as a lost continent. Industrialization, mass production and consumption, leading to a new life rhythm, and the rapid changes in the organization of politics, sociality, demography, urban environment, and family structures contribute to this feeling of loss. In literature from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the memory crisis is also treated on an individual level, as characters lose contact with their personal past, and recollection is scrutinized in philosophy and psychology (Bergson, Benjamin, Freud). Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1927), and his distinction between *la mémoire volontaire* and *la mémoire involontaire*, inspired by writers like Chateaubriand, Nerval, and Baudelaire, is a doorway to a theme treated by many writers following in the wake of his monumental novel.

Beckett is, as a perceptive reader of Proust, clearly one of them. Time, remembrance, and oblivion play an important part in his work, as most of his characters relate to the past in some way or another. Normally they wish to get rid of it, but they are nevertheless obsessed by their former lives and keep ruminating on and pondering over their old stories repeatedly. *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) is no exception. This drama mocks the nostalgic feeling of loss and self-alienation, and by means of parody, paradoxes, and absurdities, Beckett seems to dismiss the entire memory crisis, while concurrently repeating and restaging it. I will explore this double gesture of undermining and recirculating the experience of a crisis, but will also consider how the drama both implies a reflection on Proust's aesthetic response to the problem of remembrance and represents a typical Beckettian answer to the crisis.

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The lost past

Krapp's Last Tape was written in 1958, and for the first time since *Murphy* (1938), Beckett wrote in English. He had heard recordings of the Irish actor Patrick Magee on BBC Radio, who was reading from some of Beckett's own novels, *Molloy* and *Malone dies*, and Beckett was struck by Magee's voice, but he was also fascinated by the tape recorder and its dramatic potential. So he wrote a short one-act piece for Magee with the title "The Magee Monologue", which was staged at the Royal Court Theatre in London, and had a tape recorder as a central prop. The action is, as always in Beckett, reduced to a minimum. Krapp is alone on the boards, sitting at a desk in his little den. It is his 69th birthday and he is celebrating the occasion by recording himself and summarizing the past year. However, before he starts recording, he listens to an earlier tape, from his 39th birthday, and this old monologue lasts for almost the whole play. Krapp69 listens to his previous self, Krapp39, spools back and forth, and gets up now and then to eat a banana or go backstage to drink. Clearly, he has done this every year, probably since he was in his twenties, and he possesses a large collection of tapes, which he has carefully registered by number and title in a big ledger. Thus, Krapp appears as a strange version of Marcel Proust, who withdrew from social life to his cork-soundproofed bedroom to plunge into his past and devote himself to literature.

In 1931, long before he had published his first novel, Beckett wrote an essay on *Remembrance of Things Past*. He is obviously more interested in the gloomier aspects of the novel than the enthusiastic triumph of the involuntary memory, i.e. in the time of aging, degeneration, and death. In his eyes, the series of reminiscences that the narrator experiences in the library of the prince of Guermantes at the end of the novel is contradicted by what he sees on entering the parlor: his old

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acquaintances are completely changed by the passing of the years. Falling prey to aging and tottering on the stilts of their eighty years, they now balance on the verge of the grave.

These decrepit figures reappear in Beckett, and Krapp is characteristic: a weak old man waiting for the end. The decay is accentuated by the contrast between the older and younger Krapp. Krapp69 has a "cracked voice" and Krapp39's voice is described in the following way: "Strong voice, rather pompous, clearly Krapp's at a much earlier time" (Beckett 1984: 57)[1]. His voice is vigorous and self-confident, and he claims that he has reached the height of his life and is intellectually on the top: "the crest of the wave – or thereabouts" (57), as he puts it. In addition, the younger Krapp has a superior rhetorical repertoire, alternating between contempt, pathos, and a lyrical tone. Krapp69 is clumsier, his sentences more fragmented, and he is not able to stick to a topic, alternating rapidly between moods and talking in elliptical, snagging lines. Krapp39 also has more to report from his life; he mentions three episodes of the past year: his mother's death, an aesthetic vision, and a scene in a boat where he breaks up with his sweetheart, "Farewell to love". Krapp69 does not have much to tell: "Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool" (62). He is clearly living in the merciless time of aging and death.

However, Krapp is not just an old man approaching the end; his past is also dead to him, as it was for Proust's narrator before the experience of the madeleine cake. Despite the recordings, Krapp is a stranger to himself, despising the way he talks and lacking empathy with his younger self. He is, for instance, obviously irritated by Krapp39's pathos and self-confidence, starting his new recording by saying: "Just

1 In the following, quotations referred to by page numbers only are from Beckett 1984.

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been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that" (62). Even so, he does not understand the words he made use of when he was younger. When hearing Krapp39 pronounce the word *viduity*, he stops the tape, wonders, and looks into a dictionary. Neither does he remember what the boxes contain and is puzzled when reading the titles to himself. Regardless of the heading, "Memorable equinox", Krapp does not recollect what the tape is about, although it includes the account of the most important moment in his life according to his younger self. Moreover, when listening to this significant aesthetic vision, he is not interested, but reels on to another episode. So Krapp69 is not only old and feeble, a reduced version of himself, but he is also excluded from his own past, in spite of the tapes. The memories may be registered and numbered, but they are still cut off from the present – they are not a part of Krapp's life here and now.

Terdiman distinguishes between *reproduction* and *representation* of the past, between "the absolute reproduction of unchanging contents" and "the mobile representation of contents transformed" (Terdiman 1993: 288). Remembering involves an aspect of reproduction at all times, he says; there is always a referent, something that really happened. But when we remember, we do not reproduce the past – we transform it, give it new meanings, and make it part of our present experiences. Memories "are the forms that the real transformed by our work upon it takes in consciousness" (ib.: 60). They do not belong only to the past, but are part of the present and the process of producing new meaning. Krapp, however, seems unable to make sense of his reproduced memories; to him recollection is merely a question of storing and retrieving past events, not representing them. He tries to organize his past by cataloguing the tapes and registering the contents, but instead he is overwhelmed by

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the mass of spools. When the memories are outsourced to a technical device, he seems to lose control over them, and despite the registration of the tapes in the ledger, they appear as a confusing heap of reified memories. In addition, he saps them of meaning and emotional content, as he interrupts his own statements by spooling back and forth or repeats them mechanically when editing the tapes. In this way, he disavows the significance they once had for him. "His whole life was interruption" (Lawley 1994: 90), Beckett says about Krapp. As a result, he is incapable of integrating his memories in an ongoing process of experience and therefore any meaningful perspective. They are dead and unproductive.

Unlike Proust's narrator, he is not able to provide any kind of comfort or state of grace: there is no access to former life through the miracle of *la mémoire involontaire*. In some respects, the tape recorder's mechanical reproduction resembles the involuntary memory and may be seen as a witty version of the reminiscence, as it, like the involuntary memory, disrupts chronological time by tearing a moment out of the temporal continuity and bringing it into the present: Krapp39's voice seems very close, but since it happens through the machine, it is independent of Krapp69's memory work. The Proustian reminiscence depends on an awareness of the traces left on things by the past, and a capacity for creative imagination that Krapp lacks. The past does not talk to him; neither does he experience a sense of deliverance from the time of aging when listening to his younger self. On the contrary, the recording, this sudden appearance of the past in the presence, emphasizes the fact that it is inaccessible. It is similar to Roland Barthes' view of the photograph, which, according to him, indicates that the depicted person has been there, but is now gone forever, "the image [producing] Death while trying to preserve life" (Barthes 1981: 92). So the use of the tape recorder as an external replacement of the reminiscence eliminates the effect

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of *la mémoire involontaire*, and is in fact more like a parody of the reminiscence (Lamon 1976). Hence, the drama rejects the hope for a resurrection of the past through recollection, concentrating instead on the melancholia and self-alienation that Proust's narrator feels prior to the miracles of *la mémoire involontaire*. This is in line with Beckett's interest in the darker aspects of *Remembrance of Things Past* in his essay on Proust.

The burden of the past

The memory crisis does not merely result in the substitution of the traditional memory by the archival form of recollection and the ensuing loss of temporal continuity; it also involves an opposite feeling, namely a sense of being haunted by history and previous life. According to Terdiman, the past is not only a lost continent, but it reappears like a ghost and is present in the practices and institutions of today's social and psychological life. It dwells in language, habits, and the body as a "material but unconscious memory". "The tradition of the dead generations weighs like a nightmare upon the brain of the living", he quotes from Marx (Terdiman 1993: 48-49), and he refers also to Stephen Dedalus' utterance in *Ulysses*: "History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" (50). In the Proust essay, Beckett declares: "There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, or been deformed by us. […] Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, heavy and dangerous" (Beckett 1965: 13). We are burdened by a past we are not able to get rid of. This form of presence enshrining the past is based on a kind of oblivion, as access to the past is at the same time blocked, and so it is impossible wholly to understand what caused the present predicament.

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Krapp is clearly subjected to this kind of temporality. He thinks that he is done with his past stupidities, but in fact repeats the same words and attitudes, and his habits and idiosyncrasies are fundamentally the same. On the tape, Krapp39 talks about his bad habits, which Krapp29 had already tried to get rid of, but they are still part of Krapp69's life – for instance, his drinking habits. Full of disdain, Krapp39 says about Krapp29: "And the resolutions! […] To drink less in particular" (58). Just after Krapp69 heard this line, he stops the tape and goes backstage, and we can hear that he is opening a bottle. Krapp29 also has "[p]lans for a less […] engrossing sexual life" (58), whereas Krapp39 is still preoccupied with sex, and so is Krapp69, although now reduced to some visits to "the bony old ghost of a whore" (62).

Both the younger and the older Krapp are addicted to bananas and suffer from indigestion, and in the introductory pantomime of the play bananas are important props. Krapp69 pats them in a cuddly manner, throws the peel away and eats them slowly or puts them in the pocket of his waistcoat. Immediately afterwards we hear Krapp39 on the tape: "Have just eaten I regret to say three bananas and only with difficulty refrained from a fourth. Fatal things for a man with my condition" (57). It is not only the desires, bad habits, and physical troubles that are constant in Krapp, but his behavior too. Every year he records himself on his birthday, summarizing the events of the year, and each time he starts by listening to a former tape. He always looks back on his life: "Just been listening to an old year, passages at random" (58), Krapp39 says, and "[t]hese old P.M.s are gruesome, but I often find them […] a help before embarking on a new … [*hesitates*]… retrospect" (58). Krapp69 begins his recording exactly the same way, listening to himself at 39. Both Krapps despise their former selves. Krapp39 says about himself at the age of 29: "Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp.

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The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations!" (58). Then he laughs, and Krapp69 laughs with him. But already at the age of 29, Krapp looked back on himself with the same disdain; Krapp 39 says about him: "Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks to God that it's over" (58). And, as an echo of his former selves, Krapp69 joins in, starting his recording, as I mentioned before, by pronouncing: "Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway" (62). So in spite of the distance from his previous selves and lack of temporal continuity in life, Krapp repeats the same gestures, lines, and attitudes, and is inhabited by a kind of embodied and implicit memory. The past is present in his actual life, controlling him mentally and physically, and he is caught in a trap of endless recurrence of sameness.

Thus, Krapp is subjected to two kinds of temporality. On the one hand, he lives in the time of aging and degeneration, but since he has no access to the past, he cannot counterbalance or compensate for the loss through remembrance. And, on the other hand, he is subjected to the eternal return of sameness. He is simply repeating what he has always done, and in the end he is only an echo of his former selves, reduced to 'crap', as his name indicates. This dual time of loss and recurrence is the temporality of melancholy; as the philosopher Espen Hammer puts it: "the melancholic is run over by time, yet nothing really happens. […] Since nothing changes and everything is deadlocked, it is impossible to understand the past in new ways" (Hammer 2004: 96).[2] That is Krapp's predicament in a nutshell.

This approach to the past seems to leave him with only

2 My translation.

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two alternatives. Either he is full of contempt, despising his former selves and having no understanding or empathy with them, or he is sentimental and nostalgic about the past, musing on happy moments. As mentioned above, there are three episodes Krapp39 tells about on the tape: his mother's death, an aesthetic vision, and a "Farewell to love". Krapp69 is not interested in the first two, as he keeps reeling past them to the last one. Here he does more than explain that he broke up with his girl-friend; he also describes a lovely scene with her in a boat, floating on the water – a very beautiful, lyrical, and erotic passage. Krapp69 dwells on the scene, obviously enjoying its sensuality. Throughout the play we see this alternation between contempt and sentimentality, as Krapp constantly wavers between discarding the memories and lingering on them. The very last words recorded by his older version clearly show this ambivalence. For a short moment, he hesitates, expressing a desire to reiterate the past, but immediately cutting it off and not allowing himself to linger with his memories.

> Sometimes wondered in the night if a last effort mightn't – [*Pause.*] Ah finish your booze now and get to your bed. Go on with this drivel in the morning. Or leave it at that. [*Pause.*] Leave it at that. [*Pause.*] Lie propped up in the dark – and wander. Be again in the dingle on a Christmas Eve, gathering holly, the red-berried. [*Pause.*] Be again on the Croghan on a Sunday morning, in the haze, with the bitch, stop and listen to the bells. [*Pause.*] And so on. [*Pause.*] Be again, be again. [Pause.] All that old misery. [*Pause.*] Once wasn't enough for you. (63)

Throughout the play, Krapp is trapped in this dead end, and so his attitude to the past is also repetitious and remains the same: self-contempt and rejection on the one hand, nostalgia and sentimentality on the other. The point is that neither of them is productive or enables him to understand his own

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past or create new meanings, since there is no connection to his present life apart from the tapes and the compulsory repetition.

It is precisely the tape recorder that enables Beckett to ridicule Krapp's mess, as it allows him to overstate the memory crisis and make it perceivable in a striking manner. By way of the mechanical reproduction, the play takes literally Benjamin's assertion that in modernity, and due to the empty temporality of the clock and the ensuing self-alienation, past experiences are externalized and transformed into dead property, *tote Habe* (Benjamin 1991: 681). The mass of spools and boxes in front of Krapp is an absurd materialization of the reification of life, and a parody of the archival form of recollection. The presence of Krapp39's stories and vigorous voice on the tape as contrasted to Krapp69's rusty speech and his scrappy account makes the gap between the present and the past almost tangible, whilst his reeling back and forth presents a past crumbled into fragments, making a meaningful coherence impossible. Since the tape recorder juxtaposes utterances from the younger and the older Krapp, it also reveals his tendency to repeat words, sentences, and attitudes, showing Krapp69 as a reproduction of his younger self. So the tape recorder is a suitable prop for displaying the two kinds of temporality and making a parody of the melancholic way of relating to the past. But then again, *Krapp's Last Tape* may also be considered a comment on the role that mechanical reproduction plays in the historical modifications of memory. As a means of storing, retrieving, and mediating the past, the tape recorder, like film, photography, and other technical devices of reproduction, participates in the enhancing of an archival form of memory and the weakening of the pre-modern memory culture, thereby creating entirely new ways of experiencing past events. Beckett explores how this influences recollection in the subject.

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In Proust the reminiscences are more, however, than an escape from self-alienation and the time of aging; as the involuntary memory is a prerequisite for the narrator to become a writer, they pave the way to literature as well. Although Krapp, on his part, does not experience any miraculous image of the past engendering a great work of art, his younger version had an artistic vision or epiphany. Krapp39 tells about a sudden and decisive insight concerning his literary work, which he experienced on a stormy day at the end of a jetty. The vision is registered under the title "Memorable equinox", and as in *Remembrance of Things Past*, it occurs on the background of a miserable life: "Spiritually a year of profound gloom and indigence until that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind, never to be forgotten, when suddenly I saw the whole thing. The vision at last" (60). Ironically, Krapp69 does not remember this memorable incident, and we never get to know what the vision was about, because he stops listening to it and reels on to the more attractive boat scene. But Krapp39 refers to the incident as a night "with the light of the understanding and the fire" (60), a miracle. Like Proust, he sacrificed love and friendship, concluding at the end of the tape: "perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness. But I wouldn't want them back. Not with the fire in me now. No, I wouldn't want them back" (63). Just as in Proust, this is an unexpected and sudden experience which is supposed to lead to the *opus magnum*, but contrary to Proust, the vision does not have any real consequences.

At the age of 69 Krapp is not interested; the fire, or inspiration, is gone, and he sums up the miserable fate of his work as follows: "Seventeen copies sold, of which eleven at trade price to free circulating libraries beyond the seas" (62). Yet, Krapp69 behaves as if he were an old Proust writing

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the story of his past. Through the recorder he reproduces his earlier reflections and thoughts, and when listening to the tapes he edits a kind of "text" by spooling back and forth and pausing at certain episodes. But he is a failed Proust, incapable of transforming his past into a great work of art. What Krapp39 thought to be a decisive moment in his life as an artist turns out to be worthless, and when Krapp69 hears it on the tape, it is only in order to disrupt it and undermine the significance it once had. As a writer of an "autobiography", Krapp does the opposite of what has been central to the genre since Rousseau, namely to create coherence and meaning in life through memory and self-reflection. Krapp's position is, on the contrary, that of the melancholic exhausting the past of its former significance and transforming it into dead property. His life materializes as an accumulation of failed love stories, relationships, and enterprises. When he was 29, his father died, when he was 39, his mother died, and at both moments he puts an end to a love affair. Accordingly, Beckett's drama also undermines Proust's belief in literature as a way of transfiguring life and conferring on it the beauty and charm it has in the eyes of the child. In Proust, melancholy and poetic creativity go hand in hand; gloominess may be transformed into *novatio*, thanks to *la mémoire involontaire* and the ability of literature to prolong its effect through *le beau style* of poetic language. Hence, *Krapp's Last Tape* refutes the arch modernist connection between melancholy, writing, and aesthetic transcendence.

Moreover, Beckett not only contests Proust's vision, but he also mocks his aesthetics by mimicking his enterprise in a burlesque and carnivalesque manner. The clownish behavior of Krapp and his cuddling of bananas in the opening scene create from the very beginning an ironical distance from his spiritual aspirations, and his whole project is finally transformed into a sexualized parody. When Krapp is recording

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his summary of the year on his birthday, it looks more like an auto-erotic than an intellectual undertaking, and when he is bent over the tape recorder in the posture of the melancholic, brooding his own past, it is literally an embrace of his past self. Once when Beckett was taking part in the staging of the play, he instructed the actor to hug the tape recorder in order to merge as much as possible with it (Abbott 1996: 70). In addition, Krapp repeats "Spoooool" with sensual delight, calling the tapes "little rascal" and "the little scoundrel" as if they were unseemly or immoral. The erotic link between Krapp and the tape recorder is even more obvious in the French title *La dernière bande*, alluding to *bander*, a vulgar word for having an erection. So, the drama is not only about Krapp's last tape, but also about his last erection, and in Beckett's version the endeavor to remember is thus reduced to the masturbation of a self-centered old man. In this way, the drama mocks Proust's idea of an aesthetic escape from the time of aging through literature.

Krapp – a failed Beckett?

In this respect Krapp is not only a failed Proust, but he also appears as a version of Beckett himself. The play has been considered the most autobiographical of Beckett's dramas (Knowlson 1998). As mentioned before, it is the first time he wrote in English since *Murphy*, and there are a few references to an Irish landscape and to places where he grew up: a jetty and a lighthouse are mentioned, and so are the province of Connaught and the Croghan hills, where Beckett used to go for walks with his father and the family's various dogs. Krapp's remark that he could have been happy with "her" up there on the Baltic has been interpreted as a reference to his cousin Peggy Sinclair, whom he had a short relationship with, spending some time with her and her family on the

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Baltic. But Beckett's biographer Knowlson thinks it is another woman who is the source of this line, a woman he had been in love with when he was young and who died just before he wrote *Krapp's Last Tape* (Knowlson 1998: 443). Moreover, Beckett was also enthusiastic about Theodor Fontane's novel *Effie Briest*, mentioned in the play. Krapp69 cries his eyes out when reading it. Although there are some vague references to Beckett's life, the play is, in my view, not an autobiography in a literal or straightforward sense; Krapp is not Beckett. But as they have some points in common, especially the fact that they are both writers, there is a self-reflective component here; comparing the two allows us to shed light on what is going on in *Krapp's Last Tape*, and also in what respect Krapp differs from his author.

Critics have discussed Krapp's vision as an autobiographical element too, since Beckett himself supposedly had a similar aesthetic revelation around 1946. Deirdre Bair claims that he had a sudden insight in his literary work on a walk to a pier in Dublin on a stormy day. According to her, he acknowledged that his novels must consist of inner monologues going on endlessly, while at the same time references to time, place, and environment should be cut down, and life reduced to a series of reminiscences or imaginary stories told by one or several voices (Bair 1976). The point of departure is a gnostic experience of the world as a chaos of darkness, absence, and nothingness, and the artist must not repress this, but face it and explore it (Hammer 2004: 123).

Pascale Casanova interprets the vision in a slightly different way. She also writes that Beckett had some kind of visionary experience around 1946 – in fact the result of a long process, but it helped him out of a difficult predicament and had a great impact on his writing (Casanova 1997: 122). However, Beckett's vision differs radically from Proust's *mémoire involontaire*. In Proust, it is a question of escaping the

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melancholy of the unproductive *mémoire de l'intelligence* and of transforming a futile life – *le temps perdu* – into literature and beauty, whereas the fragments we can hear from Krapp's vision seem to point in the opposite direction. He discovers that it is the darkness that he has always tried to repress that, contrary to what he thought, lights the fire in him: "clear to me at last that the dark I have always struggled to keep under is in reality my most –". Accordingly, Beckett's own project is to penetrate the darkness, not in order to make it clear or intelligible, but to be part of it and inhabit it. In an interview, he compares himself to Joyce, whom he admired, claiming that he nonetheless is a different kind of writer: Joyce is successful and masters his material, whereas he himself works with ignorance and impotence (Mélèse 1966: 137).

Casanova also refers to Beckett's statement about the impossibility of expression formulated in a talk with the critic Georges Duthuit in 1949 ("Three Dialogues"). He praises the painter Tal Coat because he conveys "that there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express" (Beckett 1965: 103). According to Beckett, he admits that being an artist means failing; his topic is defeat. He does not depict objects, but paints the obstacle, that which encumbers him and gets in the way of his painting. Beckett tries to transfer this commitment to defeat to literature, Casanova claims. His project is "le dire de l'échec à dire" (ib.: 139). He does not wish to make successful works of art, but approaches our ignorance and lack of knowledge. And he fails: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (*Worstward Ho*) (Beckett 1996: 89). So, as a figure in an "autobiographic" artist drama, Krapp resembles Beckett.

Furthermore, and apart from the vision, they both also relate to the past in a similar manner. Both of them ruminate and muse on old memories and ideas, wavering between

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wanting to get rid of them and lingering on them. To Krapp this is about his personal past, while Beckett relates to our collective images, and to the memory crisis as it has been expressed in literature. Not unlike his protagonist, he denigrates the memory crisis by depreciating the material he picks up from the literary tradition, exhausting it of the sense and significance it had before. Through parody he tries to dispose of the emotions and existential content linked to the crisis. This applies for instance to the nostalgia caused by the experience of the past as a lost continent, and the concomitant idea of a former happiness. Krapp39 thought he gave up the possibility of happiness when he devoted himself to his *opus magnum*: "Perhaps my best years are gone. When there was a chance of happiness" (63). But the play shows that the chance never existed, there was no hope, because Krapp has always been the same solipsist, repeating the same acts and constantly failing in love and relationships with others. Even the wonderful memory of the woman in the boat, "Farewell to love", is sabotaged in the play, as the happy moment coincides with the end of the love affair. According to Beckett, it would not have been any better if the two in the boat had become a couple: "I thought of writing a play about the situation in reverse: Mrs. Krapp, the girl from the boat, would be prowling around behind him, and his failure, and his solitude would be just the same" (Lyons 1983: 93).

Happy Days (1961) presents this couple after they have been married for years, but here it is the wife who is the main character, and the husband who creeps around in the background. In this play there is also a reference to reeds and a boat, as if Winnie and Willie were the two in the boat. But as Beckett affirms, the solitude would be just the same. Believing in a chance of happiness was only one of Krapp39's delusions, and so it is the very idea of a better past and lost opportunities that is punctured. Hammer claims that *Krapp's*

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Last Tape deals with the painful contrast between present misery and the possibilities that once existed, but now are lost forever (Hammer 2004: 121). To Krapp it looks like that, but the play itself seems to refute the illusion of a past with chances for happiness. In this way Beckett trashes a conception that has been crucial to the topos of nostalgia: the dream of a better past. As a result, he resembles Krapp69; like him he depreciates former mindsets by undermining their meaning and pathos, and with the gaze of the melancholic, he transforms the literary tradition into rubbish and dead property.

Nevertheless, the remnants of the past are not completely wiped out in *Krapp's Last Tape*, as the old words, and the experiences, emotions, and notions inhabiting them, persist in a kind of ghostly afterlife. Even though the drama exhausts the memory crisis and Proust's version of it in particular, fragments of it reappear, distorted and ridiculed, popping up again the moment they are rejected; the parody is itself, as a form of intertextuality, a kind of recollection. The boat scene, for instance, is eroded, but not extinguished. Krapp69 is not able to let go of the past and keeps returning to it, and although he stops his own impulses and inclinations towards sentimentality and remembrance, his last words are: "Lie down across her", whereupon he breaks off the recording of himself and listens to the end of the account of the episode in the boat. Likewise, Beckett, or the drama itself, is not able to dispense with Proust, and the despair and hopes that go along with the memory crisis. As residues from the literary and cultural tradition they live on in the play, deformed and negated as recycled garbage. Both Krapp and Beckett seem to be caught in an inconsistency: wishing to dispose of the past, they nevertheless keep relating to it and cannot help hanging on to it. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, Proust's *mémoire involontaire* and aesthetic vision have lost their original meaning and are

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rendered more or less absurd; still the memory crisis resonates as an echo in the parody, and the play balances between reiteration and dismissal of the past.

Yet, there is a fundamental difference between Krapp as a character and the play as such, between what Krapp is doing and what the play is doing. As mentioned above, Krapp alternates between contemptuously rejecting the past and lingering sentimentally on certain episodes without being able to transform them into new experience. To him recollection is merely reproduction, not a representation that is part of an ongoing process of self-reflection and production of meaning. The drama, however, does not merely reproduce memories, because when re-writing the themes of the literary tradition through parody and intertextuality, it also produces some kind of meaning or insight into the desperate situation of which Krapp himself is not aware. He fails, but the play does not, in spite of Beckett's insistence on failure. By way of the mechanical device, *Krapp's Last Tape* visualizes the reification of memories and, subsequently, the play exhibits the combination of self-alienation and the return of sameness in Krapp's life. The result is that the audience, hearing Krapp talk and watching his manners, while at the same time observing his inconsistent behavior, may acknowledge his misery and hopeless situation. The drama itself is not stuck the way Krapp is: the remainders of the past reappearing in the play allow for the communication of human experience and the cognition of a historical predicament.

Adorno's references to Beckett in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970) may shed light on this aspect of Beckett's work. According to him, Beckett's drama bears witness to the human condition in late capitalism, and to what he calls the totally administered society. Even though Beckett neither represents nor criticizes social conditions, reality trickles into his literary world, Adorno claims: "This shabby, damaged world of images is

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the negative imprint of the administered world. To this extent Beckett is realistic" (Adorno 1997: 31). His absurd depiction of a world completely stripped naked represents reality as mediated by the prevailing instrumental thinking, which is incapable of making experiences, and leaves us with a world without colors, qualities, or differences, where the subject is reduced to a hollow shell, language to vacant signs, and meaning to trash from an abandoned civilization. In Adorno's perspective, Beckett's drama paves the way for an otherwise inaccessible experience or insight. As he puts it:

> At ground zero, however, where Beckett's plays unfold like forces in infinitesimal physics, a second world of images springs forth, both sad and rich, the concentrate of historical experiences that otherwise, in their immediacy, fail to articulate the essential: the evisceration of subject and reality. (Adorno 1997: 31)

So, although Beckett stays right up against the distress and the melancholy of the memory crisis, there is, nevertheless, awareness in his work surpassing the misery, but in a negative form, since it comes across through a deterioration and a move towards silence and non-communication.

Playing with the past

Krapp's Last Tape does not only allow for an acknowledgement of Krapp's situation, but, in my view, it also yields a form of aesthetic experience. Beckett rejects Proust's *mémoire involontaire* and his literary vision, but the play still demonstrates how the archival form of recollection brings about new aesthetic possibilities. Precisely because the cultural and literary themes passed over to Beckett are transformed into lifeless material, he, and the drama as such, may dispose of the dead chattel in new ways and create something that transcends

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Krapp's repetitive and hopeless behavior. There is no redemption in art, no beauty or aesthetic transcendence in *Krapp's Last Tape*, only a digging into matter and the grotesque. However, the digging is playful, and here the tape recorder is also of major importance. The literary critic Abbott points to the way the recorder enables Beckett to create a contrapuntal play between the rasping sound of Krapp69's voice and Krapp39's richer tone. In the latter's discourse, there is also a shift between a narrative, a lyrical, and a contemptuous tenor, and as Krapp69 constantly interrupts the monologue of his younger self, this alternation forms a distinctive rhythm (Abbott 1996: 79). Besides, his habits and compulsory repetition, and the lines of the older Krapp echoing those of the younger one, produce a kind of refrain opposing the two versions of him. Abbott also mentions the lyrical tone of the love scene in the boat, which is repeated three times and contrasts sharply with the otherwise mocking tone the two Krapps make use of. There is also serenity around this recording, as the old Krapp is not impatient or irritated when listening to it, nor does he interrupt it, but sits calmly, paying attention to his own story. Abbott maintains that Beckett's plays should be thought of as musical scores, where notes, vision, sound, and pauses have a specific measure, and this composition engenders a dramatic effect (ib.: 79). It is well known how particular Beckett was with the timing of gestures, words, and movements when he was involved in the staging of his plays. They are imprints of a chaotic and confusing world, but accommodated in a poetic form. In *Krapp's Last Tape*, this happens through Beckett's surrealistic play with the tape recorder, and his exploitation of the possibilities of the mechanical reproduction of sound.

Play and playfulness should never be underestimated in Beckett. Even Adorno, with his focus on the desolation and misery, emphasizes this aspect of his work. In *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno 1997:82), he writes that art is dissipated

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if one eliminates the youthful wonder, hence implying that wonder and expectation are essential to aesthetic experience. But modern abstract art and writers like Beckett run the risk, in his eyes, of completely removing the childlike amazement, since they stick so closely to the lifeless reality of the melancholic gaze. Nevertheless, even in Beckett enchantment and magic occur: "The curtain lifts expectantly even at the beginning of Beckett's *Endgame* […]. The instant the curtain goes up is the expectation of an *apparition*" (ib.: 81).[3] To Adorno, the magic in Beckett is due to his loyalty to corporeal art, to the circus, clowns, theatre costumes, and coulisses.

> If Beckett's plays, as crepuscularly grey as after the sunset and the end of the world, want to exorcise circus colors, they remain true to them in that the plays are indeed performed on stage and it is well known how much their antiheros were inspired by clowns and slapstick cinema. […] Even artworks that incorruptly refuse celebration and consolation do not wipe out radiance, and the greater their success, the more they gain it. To-day this luster devolves precisely upon works that are inconsolable. Their distance from any purpose sympathizes, as from across the abyss of ages, with the superfluous vagrant who will not completely acquiesce to fixed property and settled civilization. (ib.: 81-82)

Beckett's dismal figures are not wholly integrated in rationalized modern society, since they, like the vagrants or wandering poets of the Medieval Age, do not fit in. Precisely because Krapp is old and clownish, and does not take part in the world of action, he may remind us of a chance of escaping.

The philosopher Simon Critchley discusses Adorno's essay on *Endgame* in his book *Very Little … Almost nothing* (1997), claiming among other things that Adorno

3 Adorno's ital.

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underestimates Beckett's humor. Beckett without wit is completely dark, whereas the laughter and the comical, and one could add the playfulness, may create a distance from the misery and also a sense of relief. Critchley argues that the laughter does not vaporize in Beckett, as Adorno maintains, but his humor chases a certain philosophical seriousness. "Humour does not evaporate in Beckett; rather laughter is the sound of language trying to commit suicide but being unable to do so" (Critchley 1997: 157). For that reason, humor is part of the double bind in Beckett's texts: the fact that it is impossible to express together with the obligation to express. Critchley calls it, with reference to Christopher Ricks, "the syntax of weakness" (ib.: 169), i.e. the aporia that we are neither able to stop talking nor keep silent: "you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on". The syntax of weakness is revealed in expressions undermining or denying their own logic. The syntax is not disrupted, but two incompatible thoughts are brought together giving a sense of connection, but the connection cannot be understood: for instance, "Nothing is more real than nothing." Beckett's style is full of oxymorons, paradoxes, antitheses, and reasonable absurdities, and these linguistic contradictions constitute acts of resistance or syntactical rebellion, Critchley writes (ib.: 170), and they represent a resistance or insurrection, not unlike the clownish figures Adorno writes about, who also undercut rationality by performing nonsense in a perfectly logical discourse.[4] Besides, there is the laughter. We laugh at the linguistic acrobatics in Beckett, Critchley declares, and this laughter is connected to the recognition of ourselves as finite and mortal beings. It confronts us with the abyss

4 Critchley's subtle and Blanchot-inspired reading of Beckett differs slightly from Ricks', but since the perspective he refers to is closer to Adorno's, it is, nevertheless, useful to my reading.

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of existence while at the same time depriving it of some philosophical gravity.

As mentioned earlier, Krapp uses the tape recorder to retrieve moments of the past, either to despise his former self or to linger sentimentally on certain episodes. Beckett, however, plays, for his part, with the machine, not to remember the past, but to undermine it and do away with the existential and aesthetic thematic inhabiting it. As Derrida pronounces in a talk with Derek Attridge:

> The composition, the rhetoric, the construction and the rhythm of his works, even the ones that seem the most "decomposed", that's what "remains" finally the most "interesting", that's the work, that's the signature, this remainder which remains when the thematic is exhausted. (Derrida 1992: 61)

Hence *Krapp's Last Tape* nullifies Proust. But even so his aesthetics and memory theme are not totally gone, as remainders both existential desolation and the aesthetic wonder reappear in the recirculation of the leftovers. Beckett once said that the keyword of his dramas is *peut-être*, 'maybe' (Mélèse 1966: 139), and this also applies to *Krapp's Last Tape* and the way the play, through intertextuality and parody, balances dealing with the memory crisis and exhausting it. So, the drama is as such, and in a twisted manner, itself an act of playful recollection and oblivion in the mediated presence of the tape recorder.

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John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* and the Ethics of Memory

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To remember, Susan Sontag writes in her last book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), is to be understood as something intrinsically ethical, an action imbued with "ethical value in and of itself" (Sontag 2003: 115).[1] In this article, I would like to explore the ramifications of Sontag's claim that acts of remembering have or generate ethical value, paying particular attention to the rather tenuous nexus of memory, ethics, and aesthetic practice. This convergence is intriguingly embodied by the British filmmaker and artist John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses* (2010), an experimental documentary or film essay about migratory subjectivity, the afterlife of colonialism, and, most importantly, the creative recuperation of cultural memory. My main argument is that the film's facilitation of new points of connection between different assemblages of images

1 Note that Sontag complicates the value of remembering somewhat by pitting it against that of forgetting. "To make peace," she claims, "is to forget" (ib.).

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and sounds manifests a gesture that is deeply ethical, because ethics entails a probing of the given and a fundamental openness to new ways of seeing. This aesthetics of reconfiguration achieves a destabilization or de-disciplinization of the gaze, which in effect is yet another example of what I elsewhere have termed the ethical imagination.[2] Akomfrah achieves such a destabilization, I argue, through the overlapping aesthetic processes of reappropriation, transtextuality, and opacity.

Over the last few decades memory has emerged as one of the most salient topoi for engaging ethically with artistic and cultural expressions.[3] While memory has evidently been a longstanding subject in the cinema as well as an enduring preoccupation in film studies, the interspersing of memory and ethics is a more recent phenomenon. Undoubtedly, one catalyst for this turn is the many pivotal, and often experimental, documentaries and essay films that have appeared over since the mid-noughties, from *Notre Musique* (Jean-Luc Godard, 2004), to *Waltz With Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), *Standard Operating Procesure* (Errol Morris, 2008), *The Nine Muses*, *Nostalgia For the Light* (Patricio Guzmán, 2010), *The Act of Killing* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012), *The Look of Silence* (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014), *Lost Letters to Max* (Eric Baudelaire, 2014), *The Pearl Button* (Patricio Guzmán, 2015), and countless others. All in their different ways, these films exhibit an overriding concern with the mutability of

2 See Grønstad 2016 (*Film and the Ethical Imagination*). A different and earlier version of this article appears in its chapter "The Ethics of Matter and Memory".

3 A not insubstantial share of the emerging scholarship on ethics and film/visual culture has its roots in, or is otherwise related to, Holocaust studies. Since memory also features significantly in the various *cultural* texts that deal with the experience of the camps, the association between memory and ethics has been notable in the still nascent field of ethics and cinema. See for example Walker 2005; Saxton 2008; Pollock and Silverman 2011.

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memory and its aesthetic rearticulations. Historical traumas, both collective and individual, hover around the edges of these narratives in the form of unrelenting and sometimes enigmatic images and objects that seem to want something from us, the viewers. Their stylistic and thematic differences notwithstanding, these films cohere conceptually in their reliance upon heterogeneous aesthetic matter to configure memory and its ethical spaces. Shared more or less by all these works is also a sense of making images (re)appear from the haze of an alienating, bewildering historical repression. Traumatic cultural experiences of violence, war, displacement, colonialism, and migration underlie most of these projects, and the ethical stakes involved are twofold: first, to overcome the particular semiotic absence, or blockage of reality, caused by mechanisms of repression, and second, to imbue these cinematic memory spaces with a provocative quality. History must not only be retrieved but confronted. But historical experience is of course irrecoverable and can only be reconstructed, if at all, through aesthetic means. The films mentioned above seem to acknowledge the epistemological implications of this rather substantial burden of representation. As these works make use of highly idiosyncratic strategies of visualization, they might also help us to become aware of how different aesthetic forms generate different types of ethical consciousness.

Karlin, Akomfrah, and the sites of memory

As already stated, there exists an extensive literature on memory and trauma in film studies. The conceptual impetus for my approach here, however, derives in part from the philosophy of British filmmaker Marc Karlin. A friend and occasional collaborator of Chris Marker as well as a founding member of film collectives The Berwick Street Film Collective (which

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made *Nightcleaners* in 1975) and Cinema Action, Karlin made a string of innovative films for the BBC and Channel 4 that mixed fiction and documentary and explored the links between history, memory, and political action. As an experimental filmmaker he was attentive to the ways in which modern life was increasingly permeated with images and, no less importantly, their constant reinterpretation and recontextualization. A film such as *For Memory* (1982; exhibited 1986) concerns itself with the flimsiness of memory and the precariousness of the image, reevaluating three historical events that had been misrepresented in previous accounts (Oliver Cromwell's slaying of soldiers sympathetic to the Levellers; the 1930s battle of Cable Street to confront a Fascist march; and the miners' strike of Clay Cross colliery in Derbyshire, respectively). The recovery of lost or indistinct images is ethically significant not only, or even primarily, for the sake of historical accuracy, but, as Karlin expert Holly Aylett points out, "the act of remembering is necessary to liberate us to construct alternative visions for the future" (Aylett 2015a: 52). Through his use of a set of recognizable formal techniques – long tracking shots, multiple voices, metaphors, and dense narration – Karlin labored to produce a kind of cinema that refused to see the audience as consumers and that "illuminated" rather than "illustrated" complex political and social issues.[4] In asking us "to look more critically at our own contemporary world, and to look again" – to use Aylett's words (ib.: 53)[5] – Karlin's work appears to prefigure some of the ideas of visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff as expressed in his book *The Right to Look* (2011), where that right denotes "the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity" (Mirzoeff 2011: 1).

4 This distinction, incidentally, seems to recall Serge Daney's opposition between true cinema and spectacle cinema (Daney 2007).

5 See also Aylett 2015b.

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In Karlin's notebooks a quotation from Rilke reappears several times: "[w]e are the bees of the invisible. We wildly gather the honey of the invisible to store in the great golden hive" (Aylett 2015a: 52). The gatherer of images that might divulge the obscured or otherwise forgotten interconnections between different forms of historical experience is also a figure inarguably pertinent to John Akomfrah's *The Nine Muses*. The tension between repression and excavation, silence and discourse, and forgetting and remembering is at the heart of the film, in which the work of memory assumes a creative function. The Ghana-born Akomfrah was a founding member of the Black Audio Film Collective, which formed in 1982 and disbanded in 1998.[6] The group, admired by Chris Marker among others, were important innovators of British screen culture. Its most widely known film, the epochal *Handsworth Songs* (1986), dealt with the race riots of the mid-1980s and was made by Akomfrah for Channel 4. After a 2007 retrospective and the publication of the handsome book *The Ghost of Songs* that same year, there was renewed interest in the art produced by the collective. *The Nine Muses* emerged from the single-screen installation work *Mnemosyne* (2010), in turn indebted to *Handsworth Songs*. *Mnemosyne* is a gallery piece that blends archival footage with ambient sounds, poetry, music, Greek mythology, and present-day material shot in Alaska and Liverpool. At one point Akomfrah became convinced that the archives he had turned to for *Handsworth Songs*, containing images of immigrants from 1948 up to the 1970s, were far from exhausted. "Part of the job", he tells one interviewer, "was to see if we could help these images

6 Aesthetically innovative, the BAFC is also known for their work on black historical figures like Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., George Clinton, and Sun Ra. *Handsworth Songs* was exhibited at the Tate Modern after the riots in August 2011.

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migrate from that world [a social-problem prism] into another one where they start to speak for themselves" (Corless 2012: 45). His artistic project is thus one of re-contextualization, of liberating the images from the invisibility of the archive as well as from their discursively constrained framework. As Akomfrah himself points out, the image collection lays claim to a double identity, as both a storehouse of authorized memory and as a phantom "of other kinds of memories that weren't taken up" (ib.: 45). This transplanted cache of visual materials is placed alongside a heterogeneous stylistic assemblage, creating a densely layered patchwork informed by the recognizable aesthetic of the Black Audio Film Collective but also gesturing toward new possibilities for the hybrid work that occupies the zone between documentary, art cinema, and the essay-film.

Akomfrah's project also exhibits a processual dimension, in that the work boasts several incarnations, from the aforementioned installation project *Mnemosyne* (commissioned by the BBC in collaboration with the Arts Council England) that opened at The Public in West Bromwich to the film *The Nine Muses* and onward to the exhibition *Hauntologies* (shown at the Carroll/Fletcher Gallery in London in the fall of 2012). Like the other films cited above, *The Nine Muses* demonstrates the ethically productive method of "enter[ing] imaginatively into history", as Jay Cantor has put it. If we are unable to do that, he writes, "then our world will be a delusion, and our history a spectacle, and eventually, as the drugs wear off, an intolerable weight" (Cantor 1996: 25). While works such as *Waltz With Bashir* and *Nostalgia For the Light* certainly approach the question of history "imaginatively", the hauntological city-symphony that is *The Nine Muses* evokes the imbrication of creativity and remembrance quite explicitly through the figure of Mneomsyne, the Greek goddess of memory and sister to Chronos and Oceanus. From her union

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with Zeus she gave birth to the nine muses: Calliope (epic poetry), Clio (history), Erato (love), Euterpe (music), Melpomene (tragedy), Polyhymnia (hymns), Terpsichore (dance), Thalia (comedy), and Urania (astronomy). The figure of Mnemosyne represents the knowledge of sources and stores the memory not only of everything that has existed but also of what is yet to come. When touched by the muses, the poet would be able to gain access to this knowledge. Akomfrah's work reiterates this trajectory, having *The Nine Muses* develop organically from *Mnemosyne*. Inspired by Robert Graves's book on the Greek myths as well as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), Akomfrah intermingles the richly resonant archival footage with a deeply allusive aesthetic environment consisting of textual fragments from the usual suspects of the Western canon – The Bible, Sophocles, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Nietzsche, Dickinson, Joyce, and Beckett. Interspersed with all this is more contemporary material shot in Alaska, included because the filmmaker felt he needed a contrast to the murkiness of the archival images (Corless 2012: 45). But the textural density of the film does not end there, as this multifaceted world of images and texts is enveloped by an immersive sound design courtesy of Trevor Mathison, another alumnus of the Black Audio Film Collective. We hear, among other things, a low, rumbling drone, industrial noises, pieces by Schubert and Arvo Pärt, and Indian classical music.

As befits a work with this title, *The Nine Muses* is a multi-aesthetic and polyphonic film, yet one that stylistically nonetheless leans toward an expressive minimalism. The phenomena of postwar immigration and the emergence of multiculturalism in Great Britain – the nominal subject matter of the film – are permeated by a thick discursivity, which to some extent serves to universalize or at least extend the experiences of homelessness and alienation so central to the sensibility of the work. Another effect of this aesthetic is the absence of

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any unified and authoritative narrative point of view, or voice. Throughout the work's nine sections, personal and cultural/institutional forms of memory overlap, as do the evocative fragments of different kinds of visual media. Among these are shots of the arrival of Caribbean workers, of dancing teenagers, of Asians dispensing molten steel at a furnace, of a hooded figure on the deck of a ship, and of laughing schoolchildren. Featured also are quotations from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), a clip from the xenophobic "Rivers of Blood" speech by the Conservative Enoch Powell (1968), the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child" as performed by the American soprano Leontyne Price, and newsreel footage conveying a sense of Britain as a place with terminally bad weather. Akomfrah also incorporates footage he shot for a documentary on the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, images of a frosty landscape that portend environmental troubles and imbue the film with a sense of oppressive melancholia.

An extended art project, *The Nine Muses* veers close to the particular fusion of modernist aesthetics and social anthropology that Catherine Russell, in a book of the same name, refers to as "experimental ethnography." Characterized by formal adventurousness and a willingness to probe conventional narratives of cultural representation, Akomfrah's film seems partial to the notion of the undisciplined gaze; as Russell points out, "the gaze is both a structure of vision and a condition of visibility, and its disciplinarity is always tenuous" (Russell 1999: 156). Here, Russell refers to the convoluted history of the theory of the gaze in film studies. In much of this history, the gaze has been understood in terms of pre-structured ways of seeing that are upheld by institutional styles of filmmaking such as Hollywood cinema. When Russell writes that the disciplinarity of the gaze is "tenuous", she emphasizes the degree to which it is a potentially pliable structure – in some ways hegemonic, but also susceptible to acts of creative reap-

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propriation. When fragments of an institutional narrative are inserted into a form which materially and aesthetically is very different from that narrative, the hegemonic gaze exhausts some of its disciplinary power. The archival footage in *The Nine Muses*, unmoored and set to form part of new image ensembles, enacts such a de-disciplinization of the gaze, and in this the film becomes an ethical gesture.

Like *Notre Musique* and, to a lesser extent, *Nostalgia For the Light*, *The Nine Muses* is concerned with the ways in which different forms of memory – personal, institutional, cultural – "intersect and unsettle one another", to borrow the words of one critic (Fisher 2012: 75). But steeped in the past as the film may be, it also quietly foregrounds matters that are highly contemporary, labor and the environment in particular. Much of the archive material shows images of people at work, a theme that connects the film to other films about labor such as Harun Farocki's *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1995) and *Labour in a Single Shot* (2011), Travis Wilkerson's *An Injury to One* (2002), and Jia Zhangke's *24 City* (2008). The footage from Alaska, furthermore, subtly suggests an ecological perspective at the same time as it also allegorizes the immigrants' encounter with the cold and white landscapes of their adopted home. Other examples in which black artists can be seen to make an aesthetic investment in white spaces include Isaac Julien's *True North* (2004) and Paul D. Miller's *Terra Nova: Sinfonia Antarctic* (2009).

On a figurative level, the whiteness of these glacial environments conjures a pre-enunciatory blank slate, a kind of visionary blindness even, upon which both memory and seeing itself are contingent. This was the experience of the androgynous prophet Tiresias, who was struck blind from the sight of the goddess Athena bathing but who also acquired the ability to foretell events in the future. Also a witness to two snakes copulating, Tiresias was turned into a woman

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and later met Odysseus in the underworld; his memory was conserved by the gods. Tiresias's physical blindness enables a more metaphorical way of seeing – an inward gaze that facilitates memory – whose direct opposite would be a perfectly functional gaze shorn of memory and imaginative consciousness and therefore vapid and uncomprehending. "It is the very darkness of memory", Mikhail Iampolski suggests, "that allows visual images to come loose from their contexts, forming new combinations, superimposing themselves on each other or finding hidden similarities" (Iampolski 1998: 3). In *The Nine Muses*, the whiteness of the Alaskan landscape institutes a blank space from which previously confined images may "come loose" from their archival detention to enter into new and epistemologically productive assemblages. Such a poetics of recombination is a vital aspect of the ethical imagination, both because the practice challenges institutionally mediated, sanctioned accounts of history and because it never settles for any definitive, irrevocable, and unified narrative of individual or collective experience. A recombinatory aesthetics keeps the authority of definition perpetually deferred.

Reappropriation

The relationship between seeing and memory and between blindness and sight encapsulated in the figure of Tiresias finds a certain resonance both in Karlin's distinction between films that illuminate and those that merely illustrate and in Daney's opposition between cinema and spectacle. As Iampolski puts it, images that fail to establish a productive relation to memory are nothing but "a meaningless collection of disjointed fragments" (Iampolski 2). But whose memory is at stake here, and how does Akomfrah suture this memory to his sounds and images in a way that is ethically meaningful?

I would like to suggest that his approach comprises three

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distinctive but intertwined attributes: reappropriation, transtextuality, and opacity. The former is tied to a renewed politics of representation. When the Black Audio Film Collective (BAFC) was formed in 1982, the group espoused an aesthetics that eluded all expectations concerning what a black British cinema might entail. The work was not in the social realist vein, it was not polemical, and it was not austerely experimental like some of the art associated with the avant-garde movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, the formally innovative films were often infused with beauty, and rather than focusing solely on immediate issues they gravitated toward problems of the archive, the document, and the inherent capriciousness of memory. The collective became what Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar call "inaugurators of a cinecultural practice" that reshuffled the colonial archive and unraveled a hegemonic historical discourse as a way of rejoining the past to the present (Eshun and Sagar 2007: 13). This practice epitomized an inclination that Hal Foster later would see as prevalent in the art of the noughties: the determination to give concrete shape to forms of historical knowledge that had been left forgotten. Archival art, or the "archival impulse", as Foster names it, emphasizes "obscure traces" rather than "absolute origins" and is driven by a "will to connect" that may signify a particular deficiency in a culture's authorized memory (Foster 2004: 5, 21).

The archival turn of which Akomfrah's work could be seen as one manifestation is also an attempt to question the reliability of the archive and the belief that it contains "unsullied, unmediated" truth, to borrow the filmmaker's own words (Power 2011: 62). This justifiable skepticism seems beholden to Jacques Derrida's reminder that the word 'archive' derives from both *arkhe* and *archaeion*, meaning "at the origin" and "the house of the judge," respectively (Derrida 1996: 36). Our present-day gatekeepers of the historical archive, as Jean

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Fisher points out, are the government and the media, who regulate its flow of information and supervise its "interpretative discourses" (Fisher 2007: 25). One way of critically interrogating the archive, for Akomfrah, is to eliminate the narrative voice, an act of disarticulation rife with ethical ramifications: "[i]f you remove one of the key structuring devices from archival images, they suddenly allow themselves to be reinserted back into other narratives with which you can ask new questions" (Power 2011: 62). It might be tempting to see such a practice of de- and recontextualization as an act of counter-narrative, counter-history, counter-media or (with Michel Foucault) counter-memory, but such a conceptualization is also problematic as it might implicitly acknowledge the legitimacy of the narrative that is being subverted.

Transtextuality

What is going on in Amomfrah's work is something more ambitious than simply the construction of an alternative story about immigration and the experience of the black diaspora in Great Britain. In his talk at the Visible Evidence conference in Toronto in 2015, Akomfrah circled around the topic of what he referred to as "the elsewhere of the image," a kind of potentiality or latency that lies dormant inside it and that awaits a future reception or use. Foster would likely recognize this idea as the utopian element of archival art, expressive of the need "to turn belatedness into becomingness, to recoup failed visions in art, literature, philosophy, and everyday life into possible scenarios of alternative kinds of social relations" (Foster 2004: 22). But in Akomfrah's case, this utopianism is always anchored to the past, thus forming a temporally complex image that becomes the site of an unusual convergence of futurity and history. This is a supercharged image, as it contains inside one and the same

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space the ghosts of the past – the depth of memory – and the potentialities of the future.

In order to describe such a space analytically, we need to think in terms of a model of textual referentiality that links a current text not only to an antecedent text but also to future texts that have yet to materialize. The notion of transtextuality captures this multi-directional referentiality better than the term 'intertextuality'. What is more, such a model is also sensitive to the relational flow of events in the extra-textual world; that is, the idea that any event that occurs in history already comprises multiple prior events. Speaking of the UK race riots of the 1980s, Akomfrah has stated that "what happens in one afternoon has decades in it" (Power 2011: 60). The archival image may thus be grasped as an unfinished inscription, a unit of meaning stabilized only temporarily, and that always awaits its own future reappropriation.

This somewhat complicated model of transtextual temporality, vaguely Benjaminian in its chiastic configuration of units of time, might be more easily graspable if we turn to concepts of heterochrony and anachrony, and Keith Moxey's suggestion that art works engender their own time. Images, he writes, "disturb and disrupt chronology rather than organize it" (Moxey 2013: 174). What he calls "incongruities of time" are marked by a friction not unlike that which pertains to the relationship between image and text (ib.: 175). Is the experience of temporal specificity attainable? Can chunks of historical time be "quoted"? Is memory always corrupted by the prism of the present through which it reaches us? *The Nine Muses* remains ambiguous about its stratifications of time, but its prominent deployment of the solitary *Rückenfigur*, which is the first living being we see in the film, hints at a certain obtuseness of vision. Is the character looking toward the future or, inversely, turning his back on it? Does this emphasis on dorsality in the narratively pregnant opening

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scenes of the film connote a Tiresian form of sightlessness? Intercut as these shots of the *Rückenfigur* are with archival, black-and-white footage of snowy city streets, they assist in a spatialization of transtexual time. The editing of this sequence and the voice-over declaiming lines from the opening of *Paradise Lost* suggest that this brightly-clad figure is perhaps thinking about the past, not necessarily that of the images we see, but some Antediluvian past that has never existed.

Also exposed by these spatio-temporal incongruities are two additional aspects of Akomfrah's labor of memory: transience and spectrality. The filmmaker has stated that his curiosity about the migrant's experience of transitoriness was an animating force behind his work (Power 2011: 63). Capturing audiovisually this sense of impermanence – what we might call the ethics of being adrift in the world – appears to be what *The Nine Muses* reaches for, and it explains to some extent why this poetics of spatial and temporal incongruity materializes so forcefully in the film. Inescapably, this emphasis on transience and uprootedness triggers a host of related themes such as the experience of homelessness, the disappearance of familiar landscapes, the mourning of a certain way of life, the loss of family and friends, the memory of other spaces, and the sensation of being haunted by the past.

For his subsequent project, Akomfrah would develop the latter subject into the installation *Hauntologies* (2012), an exhibition of single-screen and multi-channel video, audio works, re-edited film, and photographic diptychs. The installation, like the film, is replete with aesthetic allusions (featuring references to Renaissance painters like Albrecht Dürer and Hieronymus Bosch and their portrayals of what were some of the earliest known Western depictions of African people), and forges a pungent link between its titular phenomenon and one etymological meaning of the word 'haunt', which is

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'home'. The sense of the spectral suffuses *The Nine Muses* too, although in less explicit fashion, and in some way the rich transtextual tapestry of the film could be seen to orchestrate a ghostly polyvocality that embodies Derrida's idea that the specter is something neither fully present nor fully absent (Derrida 1994). Transtextual speech is suspended, like the migrant experience itself. Home is what haunts the migrant; it is that which is neither wholly there nor quite gone.

But Akomfrah's hauntology is not predominantly elegiac or resigned. It is on the contrary relentless in its insistence upon the ethical demand that memory makes on the viewer, and in its confidence in the epistemological flashes that may occur, like Benjamin's image of the past (Benjamin 1968: 255), through the recombinatory logic of montage. It is in the archival serendipities, omissions, and discrepancies that new knowledge may be found. For Akomfrah, the question of the archive seems to be the same as for Derrida, "the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" (Derrida 1996: 36).

Opacity

As argued above, reappropriation and transtextuality are two of the formal devices Akomfrah mobilizes to respond to this answerability. An ethics of the future needs to be grounded in the intricate dual task of conveying the experiential specificity of the black diaspora without losing sight of the universal dimension of this experience. The kind of narrative that a work like *The Nine Muses* aims to create, then, is one in which the difference between the particular and the general dissolves, a non-narrative narrative where the muses of the Western canon and the migrant experience form part of the same cultural horizon. For Jean Fisher, the work of the BAFC provides "a language that speaks not only to the traumatic

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trajectory of diasporic history but also to the aporia that is the essence of a shared human origin and destiny" (Fisher 2012: 30). The collective's inimitable reinvention of the essay form offers such a new aesthetic language, but – in addition to reappropriation and transtextuality – this language also has a third attribute, which is opacity. The decontextualized archival footage, the shots of the mute, wintry landscapes, the silent *Rückenfigur*, the floating literary quotations – all these components contribute to the film's somewhat impenetrable materiality.

I would like to argue that the appropriate context for this thickness of information is neither a generic predilection for the artistically abstruse nor an indebtedness to the more cryptic styles of modernism. Rather, the form of *The Nine Muses* purposefully connects with the French-Caribbean writer and critic Édouard Glissant's conceptualization of "the right to opacity", which in essence constitutes a blueprint for a theory of ethics (Glissant 1997: 189). In his *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Glissant advances an anti-colonial, anti-hegemonic paradigm of art and politics which altogether transforms the way in which we understand identity, relationality, alterity, and even knowledge itself. Transparency, Glissant writes, "no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image." Instead, "[t]here is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations" (ib.: 111). In an argument that in some respects reminds us of Clyde Taylor's account of practices of entelechy in *The Mask of Art* (1998), Glissant critiques transparency as a representational ideology predicated upon the adjustment of the other's identity to that mandated by Western consciousness. In order for alterity to be digestable, it has to be made to conform to cultural expectations in a symbolic move that inevitably diminishes the phenomenological specificity of the other. This move, which works ceaselessly to

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translate difference into similarity, can be resisted by maintaining the irreducibility of subjectivity. In this structure, opacity is found to be ethically preferable to transparency, since the former better safeguards this irreducibility.

Glissant's philosophy may have exerted an influence on several diasporic artists, notably Anjalika Sagar of the Otolith Group, who explicitly invokes his notion of opacity. For Sagar, opacity implies "the right to a singularity" (Demos 2013: 155). While going unmentioned in the two essays "Transparency and Opacity" and "For Opacity", the intellectual presence of Emmanuel Levinas is palpable both in Glissant and in his adopters in the Otolith Group. A crucial concern for Levinas in a work such as *Totality and Infinity* (1961) is the encounter with alterity and the possible violence the subject might inflict upon the Other – a violence whose perhaps most common manifestation would be the diminution of the Other's irreducible difference. It is not difficult to see how the philosophy of Levinas and Glissant would have a particular purchase on diasporic aesthetics in general and on the work of the BAFC and Akomfrah more specifically.

As a project committed to exploring the experience of migration and the function of memory, *The Nine Muses* may also be read as an engagement with the phenomenon T.J. Demos has referred to as "crisis globalization" (ib.: xiii). Some of the side effects of enhanced connectivity – displacement, exile, homelessness, disparity, and bare life (Agamben) – would seem to elicit a certain response in artists from the African and Asian diasporas. In his study of the migrant aesthetics of filmmakers like Hito Steyerl and Steve McQueen and photographers like Emily Jacir and Ahlam Shibli, Demos charts the ways in which crisis globalization emboldens visual artists to design a new language. This involves the visualization of states of mobility as well as of conditions of deprivation.

The body of work that Demos discusses shares with that

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of Akomfrah an affinity for documentary practice, but one peculiarly haunted by a feverish denseness. *Nervus Rerum*, the Otolith Group's 2008 film about the Jenin refugee camp, demonstrates what Demos sees as the collective's "ethical and aesthetic dedication to opacity" (ib.: 155). Eschewing the tendency toward victim reportage or dramatic realism characteristic of many filmic depictions of the Middle East, *Nervus Rerum* portrays the camp as a disorienting maze, substituting snippets from Jean Genet's *Prisoner of Love* and Fernando Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet* for narrative commentary and witness testimony. The film is governed by what Demos sees as "an obscurity that frustrates knowledge and that assigns to the represented a source of inknowability that is also [...] a sign of potentiality" (ib.: 145). In its dealings with multiple Others – Britain as a host country, the abandoned homeland, the past, the extracts from the Western canon – Akomfrah's film appears to be similarly drawn toward this Glissantian poetics, where the opaque does not really represent a threat to an identification with the Other but instead provides a different basis for the evolution of intersubjective experience. For Glissant, opacity does not equal obscurity but is first and foremost tied to the irreducibility of difference (Glissant 1997: 191).

Conclusion

An ethics of form emerges precisely in the space in which the conceptual idea of opacity materializes artistically. Although in this essay I have treated the phenomena of reappropriation and transtextuality on the same level as opacity, they are in a certain sense aesthetic raw material for the gestation of what one could call opacity effects. A cinema of reappropriation, transtextuality, and opacity is a cinema that is way beyond questions of realism or, for that matter, fantasy and fiction. It represents a form of visual thinking, a way of using im-

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ages and signs to criticize other images and signs and thus renew our image ecologies, that chimes well with the visions of Karlin and Daney with regard to a true cinema capable of illumination rather than mere illustration. Reappropriation and transtextuality as aesthetic practices trounce the purity and homogeneity of more conventional works (an argument that has ethical implications of its own, but that would be a topic big enough for a separate study). Moreover, it is a practice whose basic impulse is being mirrored or consolidated on a larger societal and technological level in the vigorous embrace of documentary forms in the art sphere, in the convergence of film and video, and in the physical relocation of the filmic from the theaters to the galleries. As an already composite form, the essay film is a perfect vehicle for this aesthetics. As borne out by *The Nine Muses*, the essay film is also a genre that has a special affinity with memory and with loss; as one critic remarks, loss is "the primary motor of the modern essay film" (Tracy 2013: 48). Always close to the sensibility of the essay film, then, is a feeling of melancholia, but, as art historian Michael Ann Holly so suggestively puts it, this melancholia might be harnessed as a critical resource because it can act as a catalyst for "a historical practice that is founded on an ethical obligation to the past in all of its reality" (Holly 2013: 83). The experience of transience is central to the life of the immigrant and *The Nine Muses* finds an aesthetic form that succeeds in imaging this transience, an act in which ethics and form melt into one.

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Negotiating Cinematic Staging of Colonial Past in the Blogosphere: Abdellatif Kechiche's *Vénus noire*

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Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Vénus noire* tells the story of Sara Baartman, a Khoe woman who performed in European freak shows as the "Hottentot Venus" in the early 1800s. On its release in France in 2010, the film received bad reviews, the marks of which are still visible on the internet. In *Memory in Culture*, Astrid Erll notes that "media products must always be understood as no more than an 'offer' to a mnemonic community" which in changing contexts can either be accepted, ignored, or re-used in ways contrary to their original intention (Erll 2011a: 123). Later the same year Erll asks whether "there are certain properties of literary works which make them more 'actualizable' than others, which effect that the works lend themselves to rereading, rewriting, remediating, and continued discussion" (Erll 2011b: 3). She suggests that a combination of "highly schematic" and "highly ambivalent" qualities creating a tension that puzzles and engages readers at the same time might constitute such a potential.

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With Erll as a starting point, reviews and discussions triggered by *Vénus noire* in French blogs will constitute the main topic of this investigation. The discussions will be related to narrative and cinematographic characteristics of *Vénus noire*: what are the key elements in the film that generate the strong reactions of its viewers, and on what grounds do they embrace or reject the film as a memorial practice? What roles do the frames provided by the blog genre play for alternative formations of the colonial past generated by blog discussions on *Vénus noire*? Do specific effects or possibilities emerge through the medial interplay between film and blog?

Repentance and reparation

Vénus noire's staging of the French colonial past may be considered as part of a "global memory fever" which, according to Mireille Rosello in *The Reparative in Narratives. Works of Mourning in Progress*, published the same year as Kechihe's film, has marked French culture and public debate in recent years. Rosello discusses this phenomenon through an analysis of the term "repentance", frequently used in French media discourses on the colonial past, which she contrasts with the notion "reparation".

According to Rosello, "repentance" is a form of remorse on behalf of the nation, perceived as a process that "will never end, [...] likely to be some sort of undesirable obsession with guilt, with the past constructed as a reason to feel guilty" (Rosello 2010: 5). In debates on colonialism, "repentance" comes across in a derogatory use as "the name that I give to the kind of memory that I do not value" (ib.: 6), associated with "a morbid obsession with horrible deeds that it would be much healthier to collectively forget, given that it is impossible to forgive let alone explain" (ib.: 8). The opponents of repentance, who are the ones that actually use the term, argue

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that repentance emphasises the wrongdoings of colonialism in ways that are harmful to the French sense of national unity. Unfairly judging the past according to the standards of the present, it aggravates a dangerous racial, social, and cultural fragmentation of contemporary French society.[1] As Rosello sees it, the repentance label functions as a rhetorical trap, the purpose of which is to disqualify opponents. Regardless of nuances, it forces every debate on colonialism into a dead-end "for-and-against logic" (ib.: 5).

"Reparation" in Melanie Klein's use of the term also concerns a sense of remorse, but on an individual level. According to Klein, reparation is the child's way of dealing with the guilt it feels towards its parents because of its frustration and hatred towards them. It consists in making good in fantasy the equally imaginary injuries inflicted on its parents, essential for allowing the child to break free from its parents and become an autonomous individual whilst remaining attached to them (Klein 1975: 317). As Joshua Chambers-Letson explains it, reparations are acts of negotiation with the past:

> Reparation [...] is not about a sublimation of past injury or a forgetting of guilt, so much as it is a coming to terms with the past as a means of putting oneself together [...]. Reparation is [...] about finding ways to live and love in relation to the injuries of our past and futures. (Chambers-Letson 2007: 173)

Furthermore, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (2003), the heterogeneous and weak whole established by reparative negotiations becomes a tool for examining different

1 Rosello cites some of Nicolas Sarkozy's speeches as one example of the "anti-repentance" position (Rosello 2010: 9-11), and Daniel Lefeuvre's book *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* as another. The term also appears in the discussions on *Vénus noire* in the blog *L'Afrique du Sud en couleurs* (Hervieu 2010).

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ways of reading. Opposing "reparative reading" and "paranoid reading", Sedgwick defines the latter as a suspicious and anticipatory approach to texts through which conflicting oppositions are reinforced, and transformation is made difficult to achieve (Sedgwick 2003: 124-146), while the former represents an attitude of surrender and openness to the new and unexpected (ib.:147-151). Reparative reading thus establishes "an ethic of giving up authority to the otherness of the wholly other, a more 'slip-slidy' sort of effect" (Lather 2006: 2).

Drawing on both Klein's and Sedgwick's uses of the term, Rosello emphasises that reparation should not be considered "a three-stage dialectic process" (Rosello 2010: 19), but rather a constant oscillation between the alternative positions of dwelling on and healing the past, equally unable to settle for one of the options as to reconcile them. Reparative narrative structures thus embody the wrongdoings of the past without allowing readers (or viewers) to break completely free from their traumatic impact. As a result, when and if such narratives succeed, they may offer a way out of polarised debates (204).

As cyberspace discussions are often characterised precisely by irreconcilable debaters locked in antithetical positions, the parallels and the tension between repentance and reparation seem relevant for the analysis of the reception of *Vénus noire* in the blogosphere. How can dynamics of polarisation be traced in the blog discussions on *Vénus noire*, and how are they enabled by certain media specific features? What kind of impact, if any, do the specific filmic qualities of *Vénus noire* have on these dynamics? Do they enhance existing hostility, or encourage future reconciliation? To what extent is the impact determined by intermediality? I will begin with the last question and present a brief account of elements from other media that are incorporated into in the story-plot of *Vénus noire*.

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The Hottentot Venus and the archive: Medial superimpositions

The fascination that Baartman's stage character generated in nineteenth-century Europe revolved around her female physical features, i.e. unusually large buttocks (steatopygia) and genitalia (the so-called "Hottentot apron"). Her case epitomises the colonial European typecasting of the black woman in ways apt to shock twenty-first-century film viewers as racist and degrading to women. A major category of archival material on Baartman consequently springs out of the popular culture of which she was part. This is reflected in the film plot through inclusions of her stage performances, and show posters and newspaper clippings of the Hottentot Venus that the Baartman character tellingly but silently collects and uses to decorate her bedroom wall. One scene in a bar also centres on an English nineteenth-century satirical ballad on the Hottentot Venus. Baartman's performances eventually resulted in a court case against her "manager" Hendrick Cezar in 1810, due to an abolitionist campaign accusing him of slavery on British soil. The court case's judicial discourse, including Baartman's own testimony, is also reproduced in *Vénus noire*.

Finally, Baartman's anatomy attracted the interest of French scientists like Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Georges Cuvier. Professor Cuvier and a group of naturalists examined Baartman at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris in March 1815 in order to thoroughly document her physical characteristics, with the intent of categorising her as a specimen belonging to what they considered the "lower human races". After Baartman's death in December 1815, Cuvier also performed an autopsy on her body, preserving her genitalia and brain in formalin jars after first having made a full-size plaster cast of her body. Drawings of her naked body from the sessions in the Jardin des Plantes are extensively featured in *Vénus noire*. The film

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in fact opens and closes with the cast being unveiled in a scene where Cuvier appears before L'Académie Royale de Médecine to present the results of his examination, in which all of his lines are exact quotations from the autopsy report.

It was mainly because of the role that Baartman came to play for Cuvier's scientific work that she has been remembered for so long after her death, fostered by the exhibition of her remains and the body cast at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until as late as 1974. This public display has ensured that even without the contribution of Kechiche's film, she is still part of a collective and individual memory of people in France (mainly Paris) in their forties or older having visited the museum since childhood. In addition, some twenty years ago, after the coming to power of Nelson Mandela in 1994, claims were made for the remains of Baartman to be returned to South Africa to be buried in native soil. This request resulted in a lengthy debate of political, judicial, and scientific repercussions that finally ended in a vote in the French Assemblée Nationale in 2002, enabling the repatriation of the body. TV news reports of the vote are included in an epilogue after the closing credits of *Vénus noire*, along with scenes from the burial ceremony in South Africa later the same year. These events consequently appear as Kechiche's motivation to make his film.

In this way, various sites of memory belonging to different media, genres, and discursive practices have a strong visual and ideological impact on the film's universe. The effect of this is at least twofold. On the one hand, evoked spaces, like the park and botanical garden of Jardin des Plantes, allow the past to blend into the present for French viewers, suddenly transforming familiar and beloved places of the French capital into sites of shame. On the other hand, the fragmented archival material also reinforces our urge to learn "the truth" about Baartman's personal motivations. The film however

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categorically fails to fulfil such an expectation as documentation on her life is sparse and incoherent.

Although today Baartman has acquired iconic status as a symbol respectively of slavery (in the US) and of post-apartheid nation building (in South Africa), the increasing recent interest in her fate, sometimes referred to as the "Baartman industry", ultimately appears as a striking case of a continuous construction of the past feeding on oblivion. *Vénus noire* relates to this dilemma by way of a subdued and ambiguous narrative. Without accounting for the protagonist's own perspective, it ruthlessly unfolds details concerning her exhibition and mistreatment. Archival fragments parade before our eyes, like closed enigmas of the past, left as they are, accompanied by barely perceptible analysis. As a result, the film as an act of remembrance seems to silence itself to the highest possible extent – perhaps in order to better incite film viewers to react and speak up?

From cinematic silence to the verbal reality of blogs

Although Sara Baartman clearly appears as the main character of *Vénus noire*, the one that the camera focuses on and follows, we never seem to get under her skin. This effect is created by the lead actress Yahmina Torres's remarkably impassive acting style. In addition, her character rarely ever expresses herself in the film. On account of language problems, she doesn't understand much of the conversation going on around her, and appears equally unable to communicate her views. Her passivity and the hopelessness of her situation are also accentuated by the plot's circular composition, which informs us right from the start about the unbearable outcome of the story.

Even though one could interpret Torres' acting style according to psychological-realistic parameters and consider the Baartman character as depressed or traumatised, I instead

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propose to read it as an articulation of *opacity* in the film, with reference to the way in which Édouard Glissant employs this term.[2] According to Glissant, opacity is whatever interrupts the working of the Western ideal of transparency that considers itself a neutral approach to the understanding of others (Glissant 2000: 192). The opacity of *Vénus noire* can be considered a conscious, ethically motivated narrative choice that acts out the instrumentalisation of the past inevitably involved in any re-presentation of historical wrongdoings.

Moreover, the effect of the combined hopelessness and impassivity of the film's plot and narration is reinforced by its cinematography, in particular its distinctive framing. For while the Baartman character stays unresponsive to the abuse to which she is submitted, a handheld, slightly trembling camera follows her every move in close-range long takes, often with lingering extreme facial close-ups. This aesthetic strategy deprives the footage of perspective and range of depth by establishing visual patterns dominated by what Gilles Deleuze has called the *haptic*. Pulling the viewer closer to the filmed object and moving rather than focusing, the haptic camera favours perception of textures at the expense of the distinction of forms and space (Marks 2000: 162). Perceived as a variety of the affection-image in the Deleuzian sense, the haptic shot establishes "physical" closeness between viewer, character, and film. This implies embodied involvement, spatial disorientation, and the disappearance of social roles. Hampering

2 The following account of *Vénus noire*'s aesthetics is based on more detailed readings in: Jorunn Gjerden, Kari Jegerstedt, and Željka Švrljuga, "'The Venus Hottentot is Unavailable for Comment': Questioning Representation through Aesthetic Practices" (2016: 281-303); and Jorunn Gjerden, "Gazes, faces, hands: Othering objectification and spectatorial surrender in Abdellatif Kechiche's *Vénus noire* and Carl Th. Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*" (forthcoming).

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optical and cognitive mastery, haptic cinema thus incites a spectatorship of surrender and immersion.

As *Vénus noire* largely renounces dialogue, voice-over, and causal plot-driven action, its aesthetics force us to get close while also denying us going deep. The film mobilises the viewers' entire affective apparatus, often in excruciating ways, without allowing us to step back in order to make sense of what we are being visually, bodily, and affectively immersed in.

The wordless embodied closeness imposed by haptic cinema on the viewer can be considered a genre-specific cinematic quality (Ladegaard 2014: 152). This emphasises the genre gap that separates *Vénus noire* from the blogosphere. For contrast, the prevailing asset of blog discussions, "composed of information rather than matter" (Donath 1999: 1), is distance, as social media exclude all kinds of human interaction except verbal exchange. This genre-specific trait also entails a number of potential effects, both positive and negative.

Stine Lomborg argues that social media are predominantly defined by their communicative functionalities and uses. Collaborative and symmetrical in nature, blogs enable ordinary users to contribute to an ongoing creation of content in a de-professionalised, de-institutionalised space. The direct feedback that blogs permit make their texts "emergent and continuously revised" as they "change over time as different users leave their mark on them" (Lomborg 2011: 65-66). Negotiation can thus be considered a constitutive trait of blogs as a genre.

At the same time, cyberspace disembodiment also facilitates ruthless behaviour among debaters, especially in social media that allow anonymity. Posters may appear "unburdened by physical face-to-face identity categorization" (Lallas 2014: 296-297), which permits "the mocking tendency Erving Goffman labels 'the treatment of the absent' […] to creep into

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digital discussion" (297) on every level. John Suler names this phenomenon "the online disinhibition effect" (Suler 2004: 321), and argues that it establishes a compartmentalized self enabling the individual to avert responsibility for deviant and hostile behaviour (ib.: 322).

The six blog posts analysed in the following are selected in order to exemplify these communicative and/or polarised dynamics that characterise social media. This means that all the blog posts considered are followed by a user discussion of some length and complexity. There are also some significant differences between the blogs in terms of their platforms and audience. *Le lac des signes* (LDS) is written by *Le Monde Diplomatique* journalists. People commenting on this blog are thus random newspaper readers unhampered by the social bonds of tighter cyberspace communities.[3] The other five blogs target more specialised audiences. Three of them are primarily cinematic. *Zéro de conduite* (ZDC), the most professional one, provides online resources for teachers who wish to include films in their syllabi.[4] More informal in style, *Le blog de Dasola* (BDD) and *Best of D* (BOD) are personal blogs by young *cinéphiles* who also write about other everyday topics that interest them, for readers who appear to know one another.[5] Finally, the blogs *Feminéma* (FEM)[6] and *Bellebene* (BB)[7] discuss *Vénus noire* as part of their engagements with issues of race and/or gender, and address closely connected online communities that share their agendas. As we shall see, the either confrontational or participatory verbal exchanges of the selected blogs intersect with the visual and cinematic qualities of *Vénus noire* in different ways.

3 Pardo 2010. Abbreviated LDS.
4 Zama 2010. Abbreviated ZDC.
5 Dasola 2010. Abbreviated BBD. D 2010. Abbreviated BOD.
6 Didion/Feminéma 2013. Abbreviated FEM.
7 Bellebene/Clarisse 2010. Abbreviated BB.

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Polarised online discussion dynamics: Don't feed the trolls

The debate triggered by the *Le lac des signes* blog post provides a good example of a confrontational online discussion. It is dominated by anonymous posters who react to the review without actually having seen the film. The review itself is a serious analysis of *Vénus noire* by film journalist Carlos Pardo, with an emphasis on Sara Baartman as symbol and case victim of colonial oppression. Pardo also highlights some of *Vénus noire*'s narrative and cinematographic characteristics, and discusses its impact on viewers (LDS: 2).

The first comments, however, come across as surprisingly hostile. The posters "Selim" and "meriyem" start attacking what they consider the mainstream and politically correct anti-racism of *Vénus noire* and its future viewers. In ways that echo the logic of repentance, they also criticise its French-Tunisian director for thematising French offenses against a South-African woman in the nineteenth century instead of addressing violation of human rights and oppression of women going on in the Maghreb today. An accumulation of insults, pejoratives, and exclamation marks in their posts indicate a high level of aggression.

This opening of a discussion on a balanced review of *Vénus noire* leaves one slightly flabbergasted, as "Selim" and "meriyem" immediately go off topic rather than actually discussing the film and the blog review, thus sabotaging the debate before it has even started. The disruptive argumentative tactics put to work here can be described as cyberspace trolling behaviour.

What is 'trolling'? In recent debates in the media, the term has come to signify online bullying and verbal abuse in general. This perception requires some nuances. In a pioneer research article, Judith Donath explains trolling as one among several

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online identity deception strategies. It consists in deviating a discussion and/or provoking as strong emotional responses as possible from other debaters as an end in itself, while pretending to "pass as a legitimate participant" in the discussion (Donath 1999: 15): "Trolling is where you set your fishing lines in the water and then slowly go back and forth dragging the bait and hoping for a bite. Trolling on the Net is the same concept – someone baits a post and then waits for the bite on the line and then enjoys the fight" (ib.: 14). Rather than actually participating in the discussion, trolls get a kick out of the turmoil their abusive and deceptive comments generate.[8]

In the case of "Selim" and "meryiem", the deliberate provocative purpose of their comments is confirmed by the Arab names they provide for themselves while engaging in right-wing attacks on Arabs. The choice of alias thus becomes part of their unsubtle rhetorical tactic. Although their trolling strategies are quickly identified by other posters (LDS: 6), they manage to set the tone for the rest of the debate. The following posters do not seem to get past denouncing and/or countering details in their off-topic arguments. They also become obsessed with labelling each other as politically correct and anti-racist versus trolls disguising as Arabs, hence forcing the discussion into static warfare between opposing camps.

When confronted with trolling, the default cyberspace solution consists in silencing the trolls by stopping feeding them new arguments. "Frédéric"'s rhetorical strategy is emblematic in this respect. As soon as the trolls are spotted and named, he stops addressing them. Referring to them instead in the third person, he starts advancing his counterarguments negatively

8 This explanation shows that the expression originates from the English verb 'to troll', i.e. a fishing technique, and not from the Norwegian noun *troll*, although both metaphors are today commonly used in several languages to describe the phenomenon.

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and hypothetically, since actually stating them would be falling prey to the traps the trolls have set: "*Don't go tell them* that this guy [Kechiche] came to France at the age of six and that he has consequently spent 88% of his life in France, these bright guys wouldn't understand. *Don't go tell them* that this makes them racist" (LDS: 6, my emphasis).[9] Of course, in this way, "Frédéric" gets to express his views anyhow, while disabling further dialogue. The poster "Murmure" follows up with the short "Frédéric, je partage votre mutisme" [Frédéric, I share your muteness] (LDS: 8), which also replaces actual exchange with sheer antagonism.

Eventually, however, a poster swallows the trolls' bait, i.e. gets offended and emotionally disturbed. "Deïr Yassin" admits identifying with Baartman and feeling affected by "Selim"'s cynicism, as he himself originates from a formerly colonised people. This exposure of sincerity and vulnerability is immediately picked up on by "Selim", who follows up with new arguments whose increasing absurdity is only designed to inflict more pain and generate stronger reactions (LDS: 12).

The outcome of "Selim"'s efforts is a polarised discussion deprived of actual communication. Demetrios Jason Lallas confirms that such polarisation is a documented effect of insulting troll rhetoric, and that it may in fact alter the debaters' perception of an issue. It follows that one does not necessarily troll only for a laugh: "Cyberpunk activists exploit people whose guard is down both for their own amusement and to advance their political agendas" (Lallas 2014: 302-303).

In the case of *Le lac des signes,* a final comment from "Shiv7" indicates that the trolling does in fact result in the

9 "N'allez pas leur dire que ce type [Kechiche] est arrivé en France à 6 ans et a donc vécu 88% de son temps en France, ils ne comprendraient pas, ces lumières. N'allez pas leur dire qu'ils sont par là racistes".

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disqualification of Kechiche's film as yet another left-wing attempt at "repentance". "Shiv7" asserts that the film attempts to cleanse History itself with the detergent of our contemporary morality (LDS: 13), and exploits History as a means of silencing political opponents in the present by way of nasty accusations. Triggered by the attacks of "Selim" and "meryiem", these arguments are now advanced sincerely and straightforwardly.

One may ask how this pseudo discussion that strictly speaking does not even relate to *Vénus noire* is relevant for my analysis. It is indeed, in the sense that it captures the worst aspect of social media, but also the most efficient and influential one. Rational arguments do not win discussions (or elections) anymore – deliberate rhetorical sabotage and deceit do. "Post-truth" was the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year for 2016.[10] Efforts at understanding trolling dynamics seem more important than ever, and they are also what *Vénus noire* is up against. So can the film's aesthetics affect the polarising dynamics of cyberspace community discussions? Does its form actually enable it to function as memorial practice?

Memory and ambiguity

According to Astrid Erll, as we have seen, media products relating to the past must be regarded only as an "offer" to a mnemonic community that is not necessarily accepted (Erll 2011a: 123). Similarly, Mireille Rosello characterises the current French culture of memorialisation as an "interdisciplinary proliferation of voices [...] collectively trying to regulate

10 The choice of the Oxford English Dictionary's word of the year is based on research about frequency and context of use of a term. See https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016.

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and revise, to propose some narratives as legitimate, correct old ones and choose new ones to replace them" in processes through which these new proposed narratives become "object[s] of furious battles" (Rosello 2010: 4-5).

Erll's and Rosello's considerations may apply to the blog posters treated in this section, since these posters, as opposed to those of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, have actually seen *Vénus noire* before reviewing and commenting on it. Furthermore, the blogs in question have a narrower political and/or cinematic focus, which makes their groups of readers more limited, and more inclined to partake seriously in conversations on the film.

However, it proves difficult to decide whether *Vénus noire* is accepted by blog communities as an adequate account of a fragment of French colonial history, since it is not at all clear of what this "offer" consists. This is because Kechiche instead chooses to accentuate the difficulties that the telling of this particular story implies, in order to make the viewer aware of the film as construction of memory. Having no other sources than the Hottentot Venus figure from popular culture and Cuvier's autopsy report to rely on, such construction faces the dilemma of either to some extent reproducing nineteenth-century stereotypes, or simply making a fiction through which Baartman can be granted undocumented freedom and agency. Both solutions risk falling prey to instrumentalisation, only with opposite political/ideological purposes.

Kechiche's subdued narrative, apparently reluctant to opt for any of these solutions, should in my opinion be understood against the backdrop of this double bind. The Baartman character does not at any point become a psychological-realistic subject-heroine who unambiguously distinguishes herself from the figure of the archive, and with whom the viewer can identify. At the same time, the film's haptic cinematography forces viewers to get "physically" extremely

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close to the character, through the endless sweeping takes of sweaty skin shot close up. This poignant embodiment that characterises the film makes categorisation difficult for the viewer, a difficulty which is reinforced by the fact that the Baartman character emerges from oblivion as neither subject nor object. She appears distant and coldly observed as well as uncomfortably, overwhelmingly, and invasively close. The structure that *Vénus noire* offers to the memory of Sara Baartman by way of this profound ambiguity comes across more as a negotiable and performative mode of remembrance than as a representational and connotative one.

Bloggers and their readers perceive and react to this ambiguity in different ways, which I will account for in the following, ranging from dismissal and condemnation to reluctant acknowledgement. My analysis will simultaneously focus on three different aspects related to these reactions: firstly, the aesthetic features of the film that engage viewers the most; secondly, the qualities that reactions in blogs acquire in order to boost further exchange; and thirdly, the way in which blog discussion may contribute to the possible functioning of *Vénus noire* as a type of memorial practice.

The most negative viewers define *Vénus noire*'s aesthetics in terms of lack, such as the impossibility of identifying with the protagonist, which is noted by several posters. In a comment on the *Le Monde Diplomatique* review, "Edith" for instance asserts that Kechiche relates "historical facts" without making an effort to give an account of the events, but instead offers us scenes that we "may relate to in whatever way we like" (LDS: 14). As the film avoids taking sides and actually *telling* the story in ways that the viewer may relate to in a clarified or settled manner, its director betrays the substance of the story, according to "Edith". Letting viewers think "whatever they like" is not necessarily a bad thing, though, as "zama", the professional film critic of the blog *Zéro de conduite*, argues.

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With reference to Brecht, her review states that by denying viewers the opportunity to lose themselves comfortably in fictional illusion, *Vénus noire* emphasises the power structures of its own spectatorship (ZDC: 2). This reading doesn't strike a chord with any other viewer of the film, however. The impossibility of identifying with the protagonist is only conceived as unsuccessful, or even immoral.

For instance, the blog *Best of D* rejects *Vénus noire* as memorial practice based on Sara's lack of voice and the general absence of dialogue. As it sets out to be a historical film, it needs to meet certain standards in terms of ultimately having a didactic purpose, "D" argues. Instead, locked in a claustrophobic cinematic space, the characters of *Vénus noire* are deprived of the ability to act, to express and to explain themselves, providing the film with "un côté trop terre à terre", i.e. a lack of more abstract or imaginative vantage points, which in "D"'s opinion makes it ill-adapted to the story it recounts (BOD: 3). Quoting a line from the news report epilogue of the film, according to which "one can never repair the evil that was done" to Baartman, "D" adds that this impossibility of remaking history may explain Kechiche's aesthetic choices, but that the viewer nevertheless needs to see a beautiful film, regardless of its subject, and that Kechiche should have met this need.

"D"'s reader "cece" endorses this remark. Acknowledging that the lack of archival documentation poses a problem, "cece" still advances that Kechiche "could have invented a bit, or added some flashbacks, to allow us to get interested in the heroine" (BOD: 3).[11] Instead, the director fails to reinstitute this important story into collective French memory, not by avoiding engaging the viewer emotionally, but by doing

11 "il aurait pu romancer, ou bien intégrer des flashbacks, pour qu'on puisse s'intéresser à l'héroïne".

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so in the wrong way, so to speak: "The proof is that during Saartje's death scene, I didn't feel a thing, I even wanted her to die more quickly so that this interminable film could come to an end" (BOD: 3).[12]

In sum, the mainstream cinema genre expectations that *Vénus noire* does not meet causes "Edith", "D", and "cece" to dismiss the film both as historical account and aesthetic object on similar grounds. "zama"'s alternative interpretation is unable to alter this impression, perhaps because it simply describes the film inadequately. As the less professional accounts and exchanges indicate, *Vénus noire* does not enable detached reflection, but strong emotional involvement that excludes psychological-realistic identification with characters.

The other major aesthetic feature in *Vénus noire* that provokes many posters is the lack of narrative progression, also touched on by "cece". For instance, commenting on "zama"'s review, "cecilia" condemns the film's slowness and repetition for being unmotivated by the plot, and hence speculative: "*Vénus noire lingers* on the exhibition of the young woman, *at great length*. A lack of research on the subject, a very *superficial* treatment of this very serious matter. Very disappointing, and I fear that this film might be a 'cheap" exploitation of a painful story" (ZDC: 4, my emphasis).[13] What is striking here is that while condemning the film's narration, the poster describes its cinematography (long close-range takes that are indeed endless and superficial) with great accuracy, to the extent that the spatial imagery expressing the discomfort of

12 "La prevue, pendant la scène de la mort de Saartje, je n'ai rien ressenti, je voulais même qu'elle meurt plus vite, pour en finir avec ce film, interminable".

13 "Vénus Noire *traine sur* l'exhibition de la jeune femme, *en long et en large*. Un manque de recherche sur le sujet, un traitement de ces sujet grave *superficiel*. Très décevant, et je ne crains que ce film ne soit que l'exploitation 'cheap' d'une histoire douloureuse".

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the viewer ("traîner sur", "en long et en large") in fact also describes the literal movements of the camera.

Although such aesthetics differ so much from the expectations that "cecilia" has of a serious film that she considers them cynically and inappropriately pornographic, the spatial metaphors she invents for expressing this actually boost the following discussion. "fisui84" picks up on the spatial metaphors by stating that the camera constantly zooming in on characters situated her as viewer "*too much in the centre of the film* which made it too exhausting" (ZDC: 4, my emphasis),[14] while "esaintot" similarly considers that the repetitive close-range takes result in an incoherent story. "[E]xcellent actors" hence remain frustratingly "stuck" or literally "squeezed" ("coincés") into the restricted space of the narrative, she reckons (ZDC: 5).[15] In other words, if the film's temporal plot structure is lacking, its spatial presence and closeness is definitely "trop" – too much. The combination of slow/repetitive narrative pace and accumulating close-ups makes *Vénus noire* utterly claustrophobic. Conversely, "noumene" intervenes between "fisui84" and "esaintot" to qualify the film as "magistral" precisely because of the close-range takes, which prevent us from looking away (ZDC: 5). As opposed to "zama"'s initial blog post quoting Brecht, then, "cecilia"'s comment engages fellow posters, and generates an actual exchange of points of view.

The aforementioned spatial imagery that is processually developed among the posters I have selected seems to be what causes this effect. This imagery is obviously triggered by *Vénus noire*'s camerawork, as other posters employ parallel terms when describing the film. We have already noted "D"'s use

14 "trop au centre du film et qui en devenait trop fatiguant".
15 "D'excellents acteurs *coincés* dans une occasion ratée et trop longue".

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of the idiom "terre à terre", an expression literally meaning "too close to the ground". She uses it to criticise the film for being too attached to the concrete or physical, but again, by the same token, the literal meaning of the expression, neatly and unintentionally, also describes its camerawork. Similarly, commenting in *Le blog de Dasola*, "ffred" notes that the film is "too long, repetitive", and that "*the venus isn't captivating* ['attachante']. One is quickly *taken hostage* by the voyeurism and feels very uncomfortable" (BDD: 3, my emphasis).[16] Although the Venus character doesn't "stick" to you, as the literal sense of the verb 'attacher' indicates, one is at the same time *taken hostage* by the voyeurism of the film, "ffred" states. As the camerawork forces us throughout the film to stay disturbingly close to the naked skin that we never get under, we feel increasingly uncomfortable. This paradox, expressed by several posters, thus appears constitutive of the viewing experience of *Vénus noire*: not catchy enough, but at the same time all too captivating.

In this way, the spatial metaphors employed by several posters generate more responses by way of chains of associations. The oral and informal style of blog comments also seems to allow the spatial terms to linger between the concrete and the abstract in a way that resonates well with the film's aesthetic strategy. Consequently, even though the purpose of the metaphors is to dismiss the film as an aesthetic object, they end up by processing and explaining its form, hence contributing positively to its potential as memorial practice.

By contrast, an opposite dynamics is developed in the discussion on narrative pace in *Le blog de Dasola*. With arguments similar to those of "D", "Dasola" accentuates the same formal characteristics, finding that the stage performances and

16 "C'est trop long, répétitif, la vénus n'est pas attachante. On est vite pris en otage du voyeurisme et très mal à l'aise".

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the degrading *salons parisiens* scenes in particular are too long, and that they deeply distress the viewer. In this respect, she accuses Kechiche for having a complacent take on these scenes, in the sense that the film exposes sexualised mistreatment in a way that exceeds the needs of its plot, thus walking a fine line between serious art film and sheer pornography. Nevertheless, despite her scepticism towards several aspects of the film, "Dasola" in fact ends up by reluctantly recommending it (BDD: 2).

Regardless of "Dasola"'s ambivalent endorsement, for the majority of her readers the abstract noun 'complaisance' is interpreted as a much clearer warning against viewing *Vénus noire* than it actually is. As many as thirteen posters state that they will now avoid seeing the film due to "Dasola"'s warnings, basing their decision on readings of her review that eliminate all its hesitation. "Brize", for instance, argues that the specific cinematic account of Baartman's story distorts the narrative by insisting on unnecessarily distressing visual details, which in her view not only entails "complaisance", but even "voyeurism". This negative turn causes other posters to propose books on the topic instead, apparently torn between moral obligations to become aware of the historical atrocities the film recounts and the reluctance to endure its 2 hours and 40 minutes of agony.

As a result, although "Dasola"'s review is much more of a recommendation than "D"'s, the use of abstract nouns like "complaisance" and "voyeurism" forces the discussion back into simplistic online polarisation that blocks the possibility of dialogue, and ultimately of possible intersections between blog and film.

Finally, due to their political agendas concerning issues of gender and race, the blogs *Bellebene* and *Feminéma* differ from those previously discussed in the sense that they express a clearer obligation to support and recommend *Vénus noire*

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because of its important topic. At the same time, the film's surprising form distresses them accordingly. This ambivalence affects not only their vocabulary, but also their argumentative and syntactic clarity.

"Bellebene"'s contribution is particularly interesting because she changes her opinion considerably after viewing the film. Her initial blog post on *Vénus noire* is not strictly speaking a review, since she publishes it five days prior to the release of the film. The post consists in a long account of Baartman's biography, copy-pasted from Wikipedia, followed by a strong and confident recommendation to see the film: "In these troubled times, where we struggle more and more in order to find our place, I think that this film will do everybody some good!" (BB: 2).[17] The "nous" evoked in the last sentence refers to the black community at large, as *Bellebene* is a blog that thematises and addresses the francophone black female community. Her endorsement clearly emerges against a backdrop of cyberspace political activism, solely based on the film's announced topic. She even moralistically intervenes in the debate following her review, stating that it is a duty of memory to go see the film.

However, a few days after having finally seen the film, commenting on *Best of D*'s review of it, "Bellebene" nuances her argumentation, and appears genuinely torn between opposite emotions. On the one side, she wishes to stand by her initial endorsement, and in so doing honour the important contribution the film constitutes in terms of telling the suppressed stories of black women in a francophone context. On the other side, the alarmingly unexpected form of the film has clearly shocked her. As she expresses it, she is "partagée" –

17 "En ces temps troubles, où nous avons de plus en plus de mal à trouver notre place, je pense que ce film nous fera du bien à toutes et à toutes!"

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divided (BOD: 4). In an effort to express its impact on her, she characterises the film through repeated negations: she cannot say that it is a good film, nor a good story. Kechiche relies heavily on the weight of the images, which, interestingly, she describes as sometimes shocking, sometimes harsh, and sometimes "inappropriately restrained" ("d'une pudeur presque déplacée"). Although it is not at all clear which scenes or takes she means when using these terms, one recognises the paradoxical "too little too much" characteristic associated with the perplexing formal structure of *Vénus noire*: the film comes across as too harsh and inappropriately modest at the same time. Furthermore, epistemic modality ("peut-être"), the conditional tense, and a syntax dominated by repeated unanswered questions reinforces the impression of a viewing experience of utter indecision and ambiguity, accompanied by tears confusingly caused either by restored South African dignity or by French national shame and remorse – possibly both.[18] In sum, this contradictory and inarticulate review may be read as merely confused and confusing, or indeed as a precisely ambiguous articulation of an actual reparative effect on a black French woman identifying with the protagonist victim of the film as well as with the nation responsible for her mistreatment. This effect is brought to expression by the clash between the perplexing formal structure of Kechiche's film and the oral and personal style of "Bellebene"'s blog, which normally promotes clear activist standpoints.

Finally, in a similar way, the blogger "Didion" of the blog *Feminéma* also strikingly articulates the ambiguity and the dilemmas of *Vénus noire* as narrative by relating them even

18 "[J]'étais bouleversée. Je me suis demandée ce que je faisais dans un pays qui a attendu les années 2000 pour estimer que le corps de cette femme n'appartenait pas à la science. Et j'ai pleuré, comme les sud africains, en voyant les images de ses restes rappatriés sur sa terre natale" (BOD: 4).

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more clearly to her own excruciating experience of the film. Under the title "Can I recommend a film I hated watching?", having initially established that "this is a very long film about a depressed woman exhibited as a freak in cultures that despise Black people", she rhetorically asks whether there in fact can be "another way to tell this story, except to underscore Sartjie's abjectness" (FEM: 2). But even so, even if more edifying ways of commemorating Sara Baartman's story would simply instrumentalise her slightly differently, is Kechiche's solution really an acceptable one? "Didion" honestly cannot decide:

> The film made me angry and frustrated – and hell, I do this hard stuff for a living. […] Did I need the endless scenes of her drinking, being mistreated, getting sicker, and being probed by the scientists in Paris? Did I need this film – one of very few that features a Black woman as its central character – to show her so unhappy throughout? I wanted to turn it off even though I knew about most of that stuff before seeing the film. […] So let me sum it up: *damn*. And if you're anything like me, you'll keep running over those scenes days afterward. It's the best worst film I've ever seen. (FEM: 5-6)

The fact that "Didion" knew about the details of Baartman's story before watching the film serves to confirm that the film's aesthetic choices are what trigger her strong reaction. "Servetus", the post's first commentator, seems overwhelmed: "Wow. Now that's an endorsement", but "Didion" immediately objects: "Is it? I'm pretty sure that my deep ambivalence will send people running … perhaps more away from this film than toward it" (FEM: 7). This modification (also relativised by the question mark, the ellipsis, and epistemic modality) is entirely in line with the formulations of her review: she does in fact never recommend the film, but literally poses the question as to whether she can recommend something

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she so profoundly resented. Furthermore, to the extent that she reaches a conclusion, it consists in an outright oxymoron: "the best worst film I've ever seen".

Concluding remarks

The viewing experiences described notably by "Bellebene" and "Didion" testify to an increasing level of ambiguity and inner tension generated by *Vénus noire*. The contradictory formulations of "Didion" in particular indicate that the impact of the film on the viewer is not one of compromise or balance of opposites, but, despite the subdued tone of the narrative, something more like a piercing dissonance that gets more insistent and unbearable as the film progresses. While these characteristics certainly are in keeping with Mireille Rosello's account of reparative narratives as non-dialectic structures constantly oscillating between conflicting vantage points that they are unable to reconcile, it appears counter-intuitive to consider such qualities as *reparative*. What can possibly be healed through the pain and disgust inflicted by *Vénus noire* on its viewers? Perhaps Kechiche only twists the knife deeper into the wounds of colonialism. But then again, as Rosello also states, "if a story that we make of the past has the ability to hurt, then there is no reason to assume that it could not do something else" (Rosello 2010: 19).

In addition, as far as intersection of genres is concerned, a few major aspects have emerged from my reading. Firstly, the immersive spectatorship and opaque narration of *Vénus noire* do seem to possess the capacity to break up simplistic blog antagonism. Its aesthetics mobilise viewers emotionally, or even bodily, in ways that disturb the "disinhibition effect" of social media. As the intimate and personal invade the account of the past, History can no longer remain distant, nor a matter of indifference. At the same time, however, as the

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blog discussions also indicate, the almost too strong emphasis on the concrete and the present in *Vénus noire* perhaps also risks depriving the film of its potential as memorial practice.

Secondly, to the extent that the film contributes to the recollection of an aspect of French colonial history, this effect in fact appears reinforced by the oral, processual, and associative dynamics of blog discussions. At their best, blogs develop a provisional critical language that makes *Vénus noire* accessible to a wider audience while accounting for the entire perplexing impact of the film's aesthetic qualities.

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Body and Narrative: Mediated Memory

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When I recently moved into a new apartment I perused the old family photos, still on paper and kept in chronological order in albums. Those dating back from my own early childhood and from my parents' life before I was born are black and white, while photos of my own family life with my children are in color, but definitely not the right colors. Over the years they have taken on a reddish, brownish hue. It is not a problem; to complete my memory I can easily recall the right colors and project them on to the photos. But when I show them to my grandchildren, they react differently. Getting the colors right doesn't matter; old days just look odd anyway.

The same happens to me when I look at the old photos of my parents and the places they visited. I do not have a living memory of those places, or of my parents at that age. My dad looks like me, I think, although in reality it is the other way round. However, this is the logic of remembrance: the present of the memorial process and its memorizing subject is always

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the point of departure. Moreover, I cannot control, let alone verify, the chromatic details I automatically add to the black-and-white photos, some of which are easy to apply to enliven the faded glossy pieces of paper, like the colors of sky, trees, water, and the sand on the beach. But my dad's hair before it turned grey and his pants and shoes? Or my mum's blouse, hat, and summer skirt – and the cottage behind them that belonged to friends I do not know and who are long dead? However, I cannot avoid supplementing the few colors I'm sure of with the full scale of colors for everything retained on paper. In front of a photographed scene the memorizing mind does not work in patches, but in colored 3D totalities, simply because that is the way 2D scenes emerge in our memory; we invest our own ordinary sense perceptions and they cannot avoid working in the mode of total 3D scenarios (cf. Schütz 1955). However, the relation of our sense experience to the past is still uncertain and largely imagined, as is the short narrative of the scene with my parents that I cannot help producing to make the photo come to life in my production of memory here and now. Sense experience, even in fragments, is always overdetermined by the present and the totalizing *modus operandi* of our sense perception.

I am not the only one to have made this reflection. In his essay "Imaginary Homelands" (1981) Salman Rushdie is sitting at his desk in London, looking at a small photo in black and white of his childhood home in Mumbai hanging on his wall. Returning later to Mumbai, walking up to the house, when faced with the actual colors he realizes that they had vanished, both in real life and in his recall – where the grey-toned photo has subconsciously shaped his memory in London as well as the expected sight of Mumbai revisited. When he also finds out that his father, long dead, still appears in the telephone directory alongside the old address and phone number, he has to come to terms with the fact that he

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does not own or control the past, nor his own memory of it. Moreover, he also has to recognize that the present where he now lives and where his memories unfold is also not 'home' in any sense. That present memories take the shape of total scenarios does not mean they are referentially true.

It is the insurmountable abyss between past and present that releases the memorial process, not the past itself or our sense of its totality. Memory is not about total recall, but about bridging the abyss in such a way that some kind of past can cross it to be part of the present. Memory is therefore, first of all, an imaginary process with the aim of constructing not *a* or *the* past, but *my* past, different from the past of others. To make it *the* past of a culture, it takes the science of historians supported by sources and methods. However, they also come up with a construction in the present with a claim to collective validity as the right version of the past, more often than not spurring disagreements and even fights about interpretations of evidence or the rightful ownership of the past. Historians cannot do the whole job as acclaimed custodians of the past, simply because the past is not a ready-made totality stored somewhere and waiting to be called forth as evidence. It is a composition of scattered fragments from various times and places which, as fragments, are combined by a memorizing subject to co-exist in the same time and place, namely where Rushdie and I are here and now, engaged in the process of remembrance, he at his desk and I with my album. Memory is therefore always a phenomenon embodied in memorizing subjects, never disembodied or entirely absorbed by our consciousness or scholarly skills. Hence, the reliability of the reference of memory is never self-evident but always a contestable product of remembrance, making the construction of the individual or collective past a permanent battle ground for argumentation, negotiation, suppression, or censorship.

So far it is clear that remembrance as the process, memory

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as the product, and the past as a constructed reference, true or not, are three interacting key terms for the understanding of memory. However, with the photos a fourth dimension is added, which plays a pivotal role in the memorial experience as an integral part of the embodied process of remembrance, both for Rushdie and myself. As a perceived reality, the photos release the memorial process and eventually force Rushdie physically to revisit Mumbai and later to write about it in his essay. It also offers some referential details which determine what the memorizing subject has to add to the tableau in the photo beyond colors: emotions, smell, and other sensorial details, bodily movements included. To use the term 'photographic memory' as the equivalent of total recall is grossly misleading. A photo, like a painting or a text, provides us with a highly selective representation of the past, shaped in accordance with the aesthetic principles and technologies of the medium in question. This media-specific process of selection and construction I will call *mediation*, in this case with the photo as one medium, language as another, and the body as a third. Mediation is never processed by one medium alone.

Mediation is not a passive, neutral, transparent process outside the objects to be mediated. In contrast, a medium understood in the classical sense of *organon* is part of the objects being mediated, and the mediation actively shapes the particularity of remembrance. A medium like Rushdie's photo is a material part both of the past to be transformed into something present by remembrance and, when pinned to his wall, also of the present. In this capacity it points to a future that is being determined by the concrete unfolding of remembrance, which in turn results in a construction of memory that triggers concrete actions mediated by the photo, in Rushdie's case his journey back to India and his future work as a migrant writer.

However, the necessarily embodied nature of the mediation

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seems of no importance to Rushdie. Nevertheless, he looks at the photo, he sits at his desk, he moves to India, he points to the spatial materiality of being at home, etc. So his body is also part of the phenomena to be mediated; by this mediation his English life and his Indian background merge into Rushdie the Migrant. Most important to Rushdie himself is the language he uses in his essay to turn the imagined past, the embodied memorial process, and the present conditions of its reconstruction into a narrative that points to a future providing him with a particular identity as migrant writer. His actual practice shows remembrance to be a mediated process that involves a conglomerate of different media, most prominently body, images, and language (cf. Erll and Rigney 2009).

In the following I will discuss three authors to explore the tightly knit interconnection between media, body, and imagination in memorial processes, placing the role of mediation at the center: André Brink, Richard Flanagan, and Christos Tsiolkas, all of migrant stock like Rushdie. For them, as for Rushdie, memorial processes are not only challenged but also released by an unbridgeable gap between past and present that activates imagination before recall, and also triggers a need for memory before any actual memorial process unfolds as a particular memory, ready to be communicated to others. My readings will focus on the role of mediation, from body to language, in the threefold process of emergence of memory, construction of memory, and communication of memory.[1]

1 Memory studies have flourished over the last 20 years. Two works with a wide-ranging historical perspective are Casey 2000 and Ricœur 2000; see also the interdisciplinary anthology Erll and Nünning 2008.

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Emergence of memory: In the veld

In what sense is the gap between past and present constitutive when a memorial space is created or imposed upon the past? We need literature and other processes of imagination to address such questions for the very simple reason that we do not remember how remembrance became part of our human capacities – in the same way as we do not remember how we acquired our first language, only equipped as we are with this same language with which to ponder on its initial acquisition. Languages learned later do not change this situation.

Hence, the emergence of our memory is *not* part of our memories, which is why most theories of memory, axiomatically as it were, are grounded in various favorite metaphors (cf. Draaisma 1995): the mind is like water, or a tabula rasa, open to unfiltered perceptions, or a selective filter for perception, or a mechanism of necessary repressed and re-occurring experiences, or a set of innate ideas. The emergence of memory is constituted by a split between past and present, fostering a dialectics between perceptions and projections of sense experience that sparks a concrete memorial process.

To substantiate this claim, I will briefly investigate passages from Andre Brink's fabulous novel on the complexity of memory, *An Instant in the Wind* (1976), that hone in on the process of the initial emergence of a memorial space before a remembrance invests it with concrete memorial content. In a brief sequence, Elizabeth, a white woman of Cape Town, is fighting her way through a completely foreign location in the far-away hinterlands of the Cape region with a runaway slave, Adam or Abo. For the protagonist, the unknown and rough South African veld is void of any memories. It is an experiential blank deprived of all history, memory, and subjectivity. For her it is hardly a life-world, only naked materiality, with the effect of reducing herself to a piece of simple organic matter:

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Separate objects on the road caught her attention, absorbing her completely so that she became oblivious of motion altogether. A thorn tree stump with all redundant bark and softness stripped by the wind and sun, reduced to pure wood, a bare hard pattern of indestructible grain. A rock formation corroded through centuries, all sandiness and flakiness destroyed, terrifying and beautiful in its utter stillness, its refusal to be anything but itself. […] For long stretches she would wander on with her head bowed scrutinising the ground immediately in front of her feet, looking for wagon trails cut into the hard soil, flattened branches, discarded objects. Something, anything: the barest sign to reassure her that she'd really passed that way before. But there was nothing. Not the slightest indication or admission by the landscape that it acknowledged her, that it was aware of her. […] Nothing. Just nothing. By what am I led, in what do I recognise my past, where do I store all the evidence of my past moments? Only in this body walking on through space? Have I no more than this? (Brink 1976: 160-162)

Memory, and with it also identity, consciousness, and subjectivity, does not grow from the soil of a place like plants, as it is understood in many phenomenological theories that cherish the *genius loci* (Casey 2000, cf. Casey 2013). Brink insists on the naked and alien materiality of the landscape that requires a challenging human effort to turn our presence into belonging and identity, an activity which does not follow an already prepared program but evolves while it unfolds, relying entirely on our own imagination (Schütz 1955, cf. Johansen and Larsen 2002: Ch. 7). The surroundings offer nothing. This is an embryonic remembrance in as much as it is a desperate attempt to find some recognizable fragments that correspond to a known past. Elizabeth is exploring her past experimentally in order to reorganize the present experience along recognizable patterns. This past is not marked around her where she is, so she has to project it from somewhere else onto the present space. She tries to organize her past to make it serve as a mediation between herself and the material bareness around her.

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The emptiness of the landscape is a common feature in white South African literature. The land is a place of constant fear and fighting, not an embracing and welcoming setting. In his *White Writing* (1988), J.M. Coetzee points to a general attitude to the landscape in the South African farm novel and *plaasroman*:

> The landscape remains alien, impenetrable, until a language is found in which to win it, speak it, represent it. It is no oversimplification to say that landscape art and landscape writing in South Africa from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth revolve around the question of finding a language to fit Africa. […] Is there a language in which people of European identity, or if not of European identity, then of a highly problematical South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and to be spoken to by Africa? […] Many English-colonial doubts about identity are projected and blamed upon English language itself, partly because, as a literary medium, English carries echoes of a very different natural world. (Coetzee 1988: 8)

Language is an insufficient medium to bridge landscape and collective or individual identity. Elizabeth in the veld is a case in point: mediation does not materialize even were she to describe what she perceives.

Coetzee's argument is that white literature, whether in English or Afrikaans, is silent about non-white views of landscape and people. The actual labor invested in the landscape over the centuries by indigenous peoples is made invisible. To Coetzee the estrangement of whites *vis-à-vis* the landscape is a product of a neglect of this history and the memories it triggers: a neglect, or inaccessibility, that seems necessary to white identity and its proto-European projections. Abo, or Adam, Elizabeth's native companion and lover, marks the opposite position. As a slave he has been detached from his memory-invested landscape in the white colonial city before he escorts Elizabeth back into his native land with her rude

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husband. After having left him, Abo educates Elizabeth in how to approach the landscape. He serves as the mediator between her and the landscape by re-investing it with his memories, later overlapping with their shared memories of a short-lived idyllic interregnum until they are hunted down by the white settlers.

Being a narrative, thus a verbal product, Elizabeth's experience of finding herself caught up in a memorial void craving for something that can spark a memory of things known takes place on two levels: first, the level of Elizabeth's character, and second, that of the narrator. In the quotation, she is an organism with only a basic bodily sense of time and space, yet therefore a sense of location and direction – here called 'attention'. Nevertheless, hers is a body on the brink of the a-human or non-human, ending in an absolute lack of location and identity. There is no medium to articulate any memorial traces – she becomes 'oblivious'. The protagonist thus being pure body, although a living human body, requires a narrator to make her accessible to us. What emerges through the quotation is a memorial space, based on attention (intentionality, the phenomenologists would say), but not yet invested with memory, only prepared for it.

The other level is impersonated by the narrator, who contains the level of conscious reflection which in Elizabeth is translated into pure bodily movement. This reflection combines a descriptive level, thus reduplicating the purely organic status of Elizabeth, and a more comprehensive interpretation of her quest, as can be seen in the first few lines of the quotation – first a description of her from the outside and from the inside, connected by an inference ('so that'), and then, in a sentence with subject and finite verb, a description of the surroundings as she sees them, but only in the narrator's interpretation. The narrator oscillates between his own perspective and hers, the only instance able to embrace them

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both being a narrative and a suggestive inferential construction. The narrator also judges the landscape, not as empty, but as 'terrifying and beautiful' – exactly the alienated white perspective that Coetzee accentuates and the point of view of both the narrator and Elizabeth. The landscape is not only unknown, but unknowable to them. As Coetzee points out, Abo's resourceful memories and the mediation they offer are marginalized.

On one level there are no memories, and on the other there is the outsider's estrangement; on one level a memorial space is opened, and on the other it is invested but only with the particular memory triggered by the narrator's white perspective. The emergence of the memorial space is a process of body and perception before it is invested with memories which out in the veld never arise as a synthesized and graspable memory.

Construction of memory: Co-existing fragments

My next example is Richard Flanagan's captivating *The Sound of One Hand Clapping* (2007).

The novel is set in Tasmania with two Slovenian war refugees, aka *reffoes*, Sonja and her father Bojan, striving hard to go beyond their traumatic memories of the Second World War in the Balkans, yet without knowing how to handle their memorial baggage. The past is not unknown or unknowable as such, but inaccessible. The gap between past and present is turned into an inner conflict between a wish to access the painful experiences and a fear of opening the gates to their past misery. Therefore a memorial space will have to be created where a mediation can be generated that enables them both to pursue the quest for knowing the past and to mobilize their resistance to coming too close to it.

For several reasons they have no or only a troubled verbal access to their past. First, because Sonja knows only a few

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words in Slovenian, and Bojan's English is rather rudimentary. They never communicate on the same level. Second, because the traumatic core is placed on the margins of or outside reflexive language, whether English or Slovenian. Hence, the memorial process will have to unfold in another medium, which happens to be the body. With or without a shared language, they are at least present as bodies in the same time and space, but with a different approach to the body as medium that enables them to activate and mediate their separate memories.

Father and daughter are not locked up in the same traumatic past. Bojan is traumatized by the atrocities of the Nazis during the war, his murdered family and his raped wife, Maria. Sonja is haunted by the incomprehensible day in 1954 when her mother simply walked away from her, then aged three or four, and never returned, leaving only a few things behind and the sound of a Slovenian lullaby composed of words unknown to Sonja and only remembered as sound patterns. At a painfully slow pace it eventually turns out toward the end of the novel that the two events are nevertheless related: Maria, haunted by her rape and the sight of her father being shot, finally walks away to commit suicide in the Tasmanian winter of 1954. This connection cannot be established without a shared language between father and daughter to serve as a common medium that can create the sense of a shared past and present. The characters do not possess any sense of sharing a medium, past or present. But gradually and painfully the body becomes a medium that paves the way for a communication between father and daughter in the same memorial space.

As readers we have a double task – first tracing the mystery at the heart of Sonja's trauma and the unspeakable horror of Bojan's, then combining them. We are guessing all the way through, experiencing the same painful search for the truth as

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the characters and also their stubborn resistance, because the details are only delivered reluctantly – they were "trying as hard to forget as [they were] trying to remember" (Flanagan 1998: 261). We have to proceed along two paths. On the one hand we follow the composition of the novel. From chapter to chapter, we shift like the characters between the disconnected past and present, in the beginning between 1954 and the mid-60s. But the present is still moving forward as the chain of narrated events advances, so the temporal position of the threshold between past and present changes. The present begins as the 1960s but ends as the 1990s, while the 1960s is now being absorbed by the past. The present is actually a series of ever-changing temporal nodes. In the 1990s Sonja returns from Sydney to Hobart to have an abortion. Yet, in the end she decides to keep the baby and stay on, reunited with Bojan. None of them knows exactly why she returns.

Nevertheless, as in the Zen Buddhist riddle of the title, they try to "shape a mystery into something knowable" (ib.: 319). The past moves slowly forward from 1954 to the 1990s, but at the same time it also extends backward to the Second World War as the characters hesitantly dig out their past. In other words, the readers are faced with the same conundrum of the past as the characters – guessing, reconstructing, and connecting in order to make the scattered fragments co-exist in the changing here-and-now where father and daughter are both present.

Being deprived of words with which to grasp the past, both we and the characters have to read the embodied representation of memories in the characters' behavior. They cannot recall the past in words, only perform it in actions, which then embrace extreme oppositions. In Sonja's case she is, on the one hand, totally detached emotionally from her body and indulging in a mechanical and high-speed sex life; on the other, she repeatedly sings the incomprehensible

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sounds of the Slovenian lullaby in a re-enactment of a past but undefinable happiness:

What did the words mean? They were without meaning. They were nonsense words like 'Humpty Dumpty'. Yet they meant everything. She knew they meant everything. She knew they meant love, but why? (ib.: 211)

The beginning of the novel and the end, related to us by the narrator, are identical in form, but different in meaning – maybe the sound of one hand clapping:

All this you will come to understand but can never know, and all of it took place long, long ago in a world that has since perished into peat, in a forgotten winter on an island of which few have ever heard. It began in that time before snow, completely and irrevocably, covers footprints. As black clouds shroud the star and moonlit heavens, as an unshadowable darkness comes upon the whispering land.

At that precise moment around which time was to cusp, Maria Buloh's burgundy-coloured shoes reached the third and lowest snow-powdered step outside their wooden hut. It was then as she turned her face away from the hut, that Maria Buloh knew she had already gone too far and that she could no longer return. (ib.: 1)

The last sentences of the novel are identical, but now they are about Sonja with her baby in a meadow in Tasmania:

… for how could she ever tell her daughter of what only those who lived it can ever know?

[For] all of it took place long, long ago in a world that has since perished into peat, in a forgotten winter on an island of which few have ever heard. It began in that time before snow, completely and irrevocably, covers footprints. As black clouds shroud the star and moonlit heavens, as an unshadowable darkness comes upon the whispering land.

At that precise moment around which time was to cusp. (ib.: 425)

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The last sentence takes on two different meanings: in the beginning of the novel it forebodes the opening of a disaster, and at the end it marks the closure of the time of difference; now past and present coalesce. The first occurrence is the narrator's reference to Maria, the last is the narrator's reference to Sonja, but neither of them are part of the verbal dimension, only of the bodily performance of the past that gives them a presence: Maria turned toward the past by walking away from her daughter, while Sonja, in a reverse movement, looks toward the future with her daughter.

With Bojan it is different. He is not facing a void in the past like Sonja, but an unbearable violence. When he is with the other *reffoes*, they simply share the same silenced horror, without communication:

> Bojan's friendships now, such as they were, were with strangers who without being told know the horror of each other's stories, who demanded no explanations, and gave no justification for their own bad behaviour. They never told these stories […] There were horrors Bojan kept within him without even a story to enclose them, that he kept shapeless in the hope of dissolving them. (ib.: 109)

Bad behavior is actually one part of his life: violence, drinking, self-destruction. Sonja is taken away from him at one point to live in foster care, because of his violent tendencies. And later he hits her senselessly in a desperate and radically inversed love for her, knowing she has been with boys, a father's remembrance of his duty to protect his child without being able to exercise it:

> Sonja pleaded with him now in Slovenian, chattering like a caged, maddened bird: *'Ni, Artie, ni, ni, ni, ni …'* But no language meant much to Bojan now. He hit her again and again." (ib.: 272)

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The other part of his life is determined by his practical skills. Manual work allows him to be at ease with himself and the world: he is a good cook of Slovenian recipes, an excellent cabinet maker, and deft with a sewing machine. His competent hands, the semi-automatic routines they obey and the products of their work, replace the distortion of memory by words and violence, but also lock him up in the past as in short-lived illusionary bubbles of happiness, not talked about but performed in identical repetitions. At one point Bojan, unexpectedly, has sewn a dress for the adolescent Sonja:

> Those hands, so confident at making. She listened to the rolling sound of the old black Singer at work, speeding up and slowing down in thrumming bursts, as though it were on a journey and them all travelling with it. […] He held her lightly and together they danced around the sewing machine to an old country song playing on the radio. […] Sonja felt happy. She felt a certain grace. A lightness, an understanding that there was this fundamental goodness in life that could be danced and that one could be part of it dancing. (ib.: 203)

The ambiguity in the embodiment of memory – here of Bojan's old skills – lies in the fact that both of them, through their bodies, perform a past which cannot be channeled into words, but they also, and at the same time, avoid reworking the past; it is simultaneously a real present and an illusionary and repeated past.

Therefore, the dance and other peacefully shared moments are not permanent escapes from the vicious circle of violence, but only a temporary breaking away from it. The same holds for the circular closure of the beginning and the end of the novel. Does it mark a new beginning for Sonja or a repetition of Maria's life? The names of father and daughter echo each other's phonemes, apart from the B and the S; perhaps they are more part of each other than they realize? A conundrum is

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built into all processes of remembrance which is as unsolvable as the question of the sound of one hand clapping – only to be danced. The process of reaching beyond the temporary but gradually expanded moments of joined bodily mediation of memory is still open. They have succeeded in communicating the events of the past to each other as isolated moments of a shared past, *their* shared past. But they have not yet been able to turn those moments into a shared negotiation of how to cope with their larger past. The search for a medium beyond the body has not yet ended.

Nevertheless, the many embodied manifestations of memory may qualify for the term 'mediated social action'. If a medium, like the body, is itself an active part of what it is mediating, then embodied memory is a social action in the sense that by being embodied, memory leaves the individual sphere of consciousness and inner life and becomes a way in which an embodied subject locates itself in a social context, among and for others. The usual difference between individual and collective memory is here of no relevance. As embodied, memory is always both, and hence part of the ambiguities and conflicts of the culture in which it is embodied. The memorial space, as also in André Brink, is embodied and therefore an intersubjective space. If remembrance can be called 'mediated social action', it is also clear that a better term would be 'mediated social interaction'. This is the topic of the next novel to come under consideration here.[2]

2 In social theory, the notion 'mediated social action' is often used to indicate that no social action, however spontaneous it may appear, happens without the use of various cultural tools, discourse in particular, but also objects, institutions, and behavior. Memory may emerge in the present as embodied habits which are decontextualized repetitions of past experience, like the use of a keyboard or Bojan's diligent use of his hands, separated from conscious reflection when performed. The relation to collective memory of this mediation is underlined by James Wertsch, among others, in *Voices of*

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Communication of memory: Negotiating memories

The role of memory in Christos Tsiolkas' internationally best-selling Australian novel *The Slap* (2008) extends the perspective of the two first novels addressed here. Neither the emergence nor the construction of memory is the heart of the matter, but communication and negotiation of already stored memories. The individual perspective of Coetzee's Elizabeth and the small circle around Flanagan's Bojan and Sonja are here widened to embrace a larger multicultural community, making remembrance a more complex endeavor.

The novel is set in multicultural Melbourne. The social and ideological center is a family of Greek immigrants, surrounded by partners, spouses, and friends of the family, including Aboriginals, Europeans, White Australians, people from the Pacific, Christians, and Muslims who, together, represent the postcolonial hybridity of Australia but also, ironically, push the characters of pure Anglo-Celtic descent into the wings of the social scene. Yet, they represent an Australian majority that has a hard time accepting the arrival of people from other ethnic and geographical backgrounds (Carter 2006, Jupp 2007). All the characters in *The Slap* have moved from different places, or their parents have, to Melbourne, a huge intersection of the roads of migration. Different family values, celebrated or contested, set the agenda for all interactions. Individually, the characters find themselves in a transitional

Collective Remembering (2002, cf. also his *Mind as Action*, 1998). However, embodiment as a crucial aspect of mediation is only rarely given the weight it deserves; Henri Bergson does so in *Matière et Mémoire* (1896), as do Sigmund Freud (1904), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), Alfred Schütz (1955), and Edward Casey (2000). In the important anthology edited by Sigrid Norris and Rodney H. Jones, *Discourse in Action* (2005), the linguistic dimension figures most prominently.

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phase in their lives. The forty-year-old: young(ish) or middle-aged? The teenagers: adolescent or adult? The older generation, Hector's parents: Greek, Australian, or just dying? The well-established Aboriginal colleague with a wife newly converted to Islam: Australian or un-Australian? The increasingly self-conscious gay teenager: a real bloke or a sissy?

Under such cultural and social conditions, the characters are forced to activate, construct, or live with hidden and broken personal memories from their diverse backgrounds while trying to re-contextualize themselves and redefine their identities in a multicultural context with a rapidly disappearing collective anchoring. There is no physical, social, or ideological space where they can locate the particular memories from their mixed personal histories and come to terms with them. They become free-floating memorial fragments, more and more incomprehensible to those who remember and inaccessible to other people within their multicultural environment.

Eight of the characters each act as the protagonist of one chapter, beginning with Hector, of Greek descent, now turning forty. During his birthday party in the first chapter, a divisive and decisive event suddenly transfixes everybody's memorial volatility as a piercing and biting actuality. Hugo, the three-year-old son of the overprotective Rosie, threatens the other kids with a baseball bat. Rosie is the white underdog childhood friend of Ashia, Hector's half-Asian wife. With her hot-tempered, alcoholic artist husband, Gary, Rosie has moved to Melbourne from West Australia. Hugo swings the bat dangerously close to the son of Harry, Hector's Greek cousin and a successful car dealer, and receives an instant slap from Harry. Everybody reacts passionately to the smack, but in different and contradictory ways. It forces the whole party to reflect on what it takes to have a collective set of norms and values to direct a shared understanding of a social

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event beyond the daily routine, which eventually involves their whole identity as well. The slap comes to redefine their mutual relationships on all levels.

The slap reveals another dimension of memories at work in migrant environments beside the more or less troubled personal memories. This is what I will call the *collective embodied tradition* which they constantly and spontaneously reenact as a memory without paying attention to its memorial foundation, which, nevertheless, becomes visible when it materializes in social interaction as the embodiment of culturally transmitted values, attitudes, speech, and actions (cf. Connerton 1989). If the personal memories are mainly hidden and hardly verbalized, the embodied tradition is the memorial glue of the community and its identity formations. Flanagan's Bojan also embodies a tradition in his manual skills, but mostly destructively; crawling through the veld, Coetzee's Elizabeth tries in vain to do the same until she becomes absorbed by Abo's embodied tradition.

The embodied tradition is a practice defined as a bodily mediated social action with a history: "the habitualized ways in which people reproduce relationships among social actors, resources and settings. […] mediated actions become practices by being linked with actions in real time, and […] come to define not only 'what social actors are doing' but also 'who they are'" (Norris and Jones 2005: 98). A family gathering is such a collective embodied tradition, where a group reenacts a stable social order which is reasserted by their almost stereotyped way of talking and behaving. Hector's party is such an event. Family and friends meet to celebrate and consolidate the unity and conviviality of their social circle. By their actions they confirm how gatherings like this one have been happening for as long as they can remember and reaffirm their identity.

The slap reveals the family as a powerless and disharmoni-

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ous unit close to being an illusion. The embodied tradition can only handle repetition, not rupture. When they all have to cope with the slap and prevent it from releasing a social eruption that sends friends and family away from each other in all directions, they do it in such diverse ways that an eruption is exactly what happens, making eight of them separate protagonists, each with their own chapter. Here, their personal memories and unstable position within the entire group shapes their own interpretation of the event. A discomforting doubt seeps into their minds: is it possible at all to share personal memories and a collective memory practiced as an embodied tradition beyond individualized fragments?

This doubt is confirmed by *The Slap*. Here, memories *are* not common because of their content, but may *become* a shared resource through communication within a community that establishes the relevant content as well as the limits of the shared universe of memory. This communication could be termed *negotiation* (cf. Nuttall and Coetzee 1998), a notion that has been important in memory studies from Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory to Michael Rothberg's multidirectional memory (Halbwachs 1925, Rothberg 2009). However, as the non-verbal embodied tradition in this case constitutes the basic memory, negotiation has a hard time reaching a common ground beyond the individual and partly antagonistic personal memories.

The novel's overarching structure of enunciation emphasizes this predicament. It is defined by the structure of the eight chapters, each with a different protagonist who also appears in other chapters. All the key characters are seen in turn both from within and without, while developing their different views on the same events, on themselves, and on the other characters, each of them adding something which is unknown to the others. Using free indirect discourse, Tsiolkas does not turn them into first person narrators, but works on

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a shifting boundary between inner and outer space which, therefore, is subject to constant reinterpretation. What can be shared and what cannot in terms of knowledge, judgment, and understanding is never settled once and for all.

Therefore, what we see and hear and how it is put into perspective remains an unsettled matter of dialogue and negotiation, for the reader too. Each character adopts a different position on the slap as the central event. To establish a shared memory of it would require an ongoing negotiation between the characters, both of the slap itself and, more importantly, of their personal and collective backgrounds and identities which each of them invest in their approach to the slap. However, the novel shows the impossibility of negotiating a new shared perspective through dialogue. Negotiation is not a delimited act like a court case, but a recurring daily challenge. They live in more or less disconnected and individualized bubbles, simply because constructions of memory only come to play a role in their identity formation when communicated and accepted by others – not with reference to a shared past. This dialogue is precisely what they are unable to perform.

In *The Slap* the family unites individual and collective identities and is the storehouse of memories as embodied tradition. As such, it generates the norms that define which personal memories are important and can be made public and which ones must remain hidden – like domestic violence, homosexuality, or an affair. It serves as the point of reference in the negotiations of memory between the characters. However, the family does not appear as an unquestioned unit, but as a cross-cultural reality in many forms: from the Greek extended family via the modern nuclear family to other forms of cohabitation like bohemian partnerships and gay couples. Hence, for all characters a family, or another type of partnership, is actually less a unity than a collection of broken experiences: the Greek family had to emigrate; for

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some the family means a traumatized childhood; for others it is a dream, attractive and frightening at the same time, and ex-marital affairs fly under the radar of shared memories; divorce is a reality as is domestic violence behind closed doors. Thus, the family is itself a matter of differentiation and negotiation or, as for Hector's Greek parents, a fading ideal from a lost world with no alternatives. It is never a perfect match of individual and collective memory with a form that is recognizable, accepted by everybody, and translatable into a unified embodied tradition.

In the novel the contested role of the family on the collective level corresponds to the ambiguous role of the body on the individual level. Both body and family have a collective and individual dimension. The family is a collective unit charging the ideal individual behavior with the clear goal of reproducing the family structure and maintaining the embodied tradition. The body, on the other hand, is marked by collectively recognizable features of gender and ethnicity, often categorized in stereotypes; yet, it is also the site of individual explorations of sexuality and cross-ethnic relationships that mark a self-defined individual identity beyond the contested standards of the family. Most of the relationships in the novel are the result of such experiments, not a repeat of the Greek paternalistic family or the white Australian marriage.

The painful awareness of the tacit friction between body and family flares up when ignited by the slap. In a second it challenges everybody's understanding of both body identity and family norms. For some of the characters boxing a child's ears is a violent transgression bordering on a crime against humanity and actually prohibited by Australian law. For some it stands out as an unforgivable act of child abuse; for others it is an unfortunate mishap that can be reconciled by regret and forgiveness; for others again it is just a trivial affair between kids and adults when kids act outrageously.

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For Rosie, the mother, it is an unforgivable wrongdoing. She presses charges against Harry, but loses the case after the attempts to stage reconciliation before they meet in court fail. Harry is pressed by Hector to ask forgiveness from Rosie. When they meet, Rosie is as unforgiving as Harry is insincere in his remorse. There is no shared space from which to find a common ground, and the judicial platform only pushes people further apart.

The re-contextualization of the slap from a family affair to the legal framework of retaliation only makes matters worse. No-one is willing to take the risk of renegotiating with others the balance between what should be remembered and what should be forgotten, or take a new look at themselves and their deeply buried painful memories and their traditional values, all of which legitimize the fixed boundary between open and hidden personal memories and lock the painful memories up forever in the safety box of the past. Although all the chapters open the possibility of establishing an alternative re-contextualization of the slap to a framework of mutual reconciliation, nobody seriously tries to do so. Everybody is stubbornly waiting for others to forgive.

The two attempts of re-contextualization can be seen as a process of embodied mediation. In the first case, the context of retaliation, the slap is re-contextualized from the family party to the judicial system through the complex workings of legal texts and procedures, with the embodied action in the courtroom at the center. Here, the forensic memories of the event blend with the public unraveling of painful episodes from Rosie's past and Hector's and Ashia's private recollections of Harry's beating of his wife. In the second case, the spontaneous punishment of Hugo is lifted out of the family gathering to the context of reconciliation mediated by intimate dialogue between the parties, again with embodied action at center, namely the personal encounter between Harry

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and Rosie. Here, painful memories are activated in spite of the appeal to forgiveness and forgetting: memories of the slap, of the shortcomings of Rosie and Gary, and of Harry's beating of his wife. In both cases the mediation intensifies memories that separate people as individual islands.

Tsiolkas has little confidence that people can transcend their individual confinement of personal memories and embodied traditions (cf. Pavlides 2013). Their capacity to reconsider their memories in order to re-contextualize transgressive actions in contexts of productive negotiation is limited. Their positions are carved in stone. *The Slap* seems to insist on the inevitability of the individualization of life in a world of globalized flows of migration, and also the narrow limits of the human capacity to re-contextualize personal memories and embodied traditions into a space of mutual negotiation of cultural baggage and the identities migrants travel with and locals hold on to. Invitations to forgive are profoundly ambiguous (cf. Larsen 2014).

Memory beyond place

With migration giving a perspective on memory studies today, we can return to Rushdie's ruminations on the relation between memory, migration, and literature.[3] "Having been borne across the world, we are translated men", Rushdie says

3 Recent developments in memory studies open the field to issues of globalization, transnationalism, and migration, with the shared fundamental condition that place-bound memories are contested and have to be reconstructed to be instrumental for identity formation, a condition that applies to both locals and migrants who co-exist in the same place. (See works like Levy and Sznaider 2002, Agnew 2005, Aydemir and Rotas 2008, Gutman, Brown and Sodaro 2010, Philips and Reyes 2011, Cesari and Rigney 2014.) A special dimension has to do with memory, human rights, and reconciliation (see Soyinka 1999, Levy and Sznaider 2010).

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about himself (Rushdie 2010: 17), but also taking a wider perspective. In this context memory is a broken mirror, he says, the fragmented shards which may paralyze attempts to redefine identities. But fragmentation may also be an opportunity: "The broken glass is not merely a mirror of nostalgia. It is also, I believe, a useful tool with which to work in the present" (ib.: 12).

Remembrance is this work in the present, using the media available – the body, narratives, language – to turn the past as re-constructed memory into an intervention in the present in order to open it, interpret it, and direct it toward a new future. The study of this process is a pressing issue in a world of globalized migration which, as Rebecca Walkowitz points out, influences migrants and dwellers with the same force, but not with the same effect (Walkowitz 2006). We live in intercultural spaces with memories that require a differentiated understanding of how media construct memories from a background which is not shared, but requires negotiation to enter a shared space. The novels I have focused on are, as Rushdie points out, "great literature out of cultural transplantation, out of examining ways in which to cope with a new world" (Rushdie 1981: 20).

The three authors considered here are skeptical, even pessimistic with regard to the human capacity to imagine new contexts for a common life. Re-opening their languages and reconsidering their embodied traditions may reactivate the mediation of memory as mediated social interaction. The imaginary writing of literature insists on the complexity of the problem, and thereby it also keeps the possibility alive against all odds.

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"Memory is a seamstress": Media of Memory in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*

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Drawing the outline of her new narrative, *Orlando* (published in 1928), Virginia Woolf writes in her diary: "I feel the need of an escapade after these serious poetic experimental books whose form is always so closely considered. I want to kick up my heels and be off" (Woolf 1954: 104). Intended as an "escapade" and a "satire" (ib.: 104), and narrating the fantastical story of a character whose lifespan covers no less than 400 years, the result may to some extent be less serious than her previous novels, but it is nevertheless very experimental. Presenting itself as a biography about the protagonist Orlando, the book's objective is to explore not only the change of times, climate, customs, and taste, but also the history of one individual. This delving into the puzzling nexus of time, life, individuality, and memory makes Orlando a psychological entity faced with identity problems.

Although Woolf in general refutes the idea of selfhood as a stable, ordered, or unified entity – *Orlando* may be the most pivotal of her works in this regard – I read the novel

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as her wry exploration of the traditional nineteenth-century *Bildungsroman*. The rudimentary theme of the education novel is the eventful course of the formation of an individuality whose goal it is to reach moral and psychological maturity, a sense of self-confidence in regards to the world and to one's own history. "What is life?" is one of the novel's recurrent questions, and it ponders the construction of identity out of the myriad selves of a person who, according to the biographer, might have as many of them as a "thousand" (Woolf 1998: 295). Orlando is subjected to perennial change, and still must forge an identity of her own. Memory plays a crucial role in this process. The biographer considers that the construction of an identity hinges on the connection between memory and one's experiences.

In the following I will explore the formation project in *Orlando* by analyzing how memory works in this novel – how the protagonist re-imagines or re-experiences the past. Specifically, I examine how memories are mediatized, that is how they are *conveyed* and *channeled* to Orlando, and how they impact on the protagonist. I shall look into the function of the media of memory in effectuating, on the one side, a chaos of memories menacing the protagonist's mental integrity, but also how, on the other side, it may be conducive to identity-building. I will put an emphasis on the last chapter in which Orlando, by then about 400 years old, in an accelerated rhythm remembers impressions and experiences from her former life, which plunge her into an identity crisis. My contribution attempts to close a gap in the research on *Orlando*, the main tenet of which focuses on Orlando's sex change, which Julia Briggs calls the "novel's central event" (Briggs 2005: 201), and other aspects pertaining to the gender of the protagonist. Although the novel's focus on memory and its role in the identity construction process has not gone unnoticed by Woolf scholars (cf. Hussey 1986: 37-38; Caughie 1991:

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77), it is a topic that is insufficiently researched. The most notable exception is Teresa Prudente's scrupulous exploration of "the co-existence of linear extension of time and timeless dimensions in the process of memory" (Prudente 2009: 35). This is arguably a cornerstone for all future research on time in Woolf, but regarding *Orlando* her focus is different from mine.

A key question in the following is: How can objects convey memories? In her sketches of the novel, Woolf writes: "I want to embody all those enumerable little ideas and tiny stories which flash into my mind at all seasons" (Woolf 1981: 104). I read this statement as a crucial hint concerning the medium character of objects and their part in the acts of memory in *Orlando* and in Woolf's later works: 1) the mind is subject to exterior invocations; and 2) objects are bodies that carry ideas and stories, or emotions, as she states in "Sketch of the Past" – "I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace" (Woolf 2002: 81). In this sense the past is inscribed into objects, and thus they mediate the past and invoke memories. Answering to this power residing in objects, memory in *Orlando* is twofold: it lays bare the mind's multitudes, and it is the basis for a patterning or a structuring of life. The contrasts between these forces of mediated memory – the latter engendering a sense of unity and integrity, the former creating variety, distraction, or chaos – inform the novel's exploration of time, memory, and individuality.

"A thousand odd, disconnected fragments": Distractive media of memory

Early in the novel the young Lord Orlando – at some time in the seventeenth century – ponders the distractive force of memory. The biographer shows us the young man in an attempt to pursue his dreams of becoming an author and

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searching his Memory – the biographer uses a capital in a parody of the profuse allegorizations common in the age – for suitable topics for his poem. But he makes the unsettling discovery that memories are activated by external phenomena, and thereby often turn awry. "The most ordinary movement in the world […] may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments" (Woolf 1998: 76). When he perceives an external object, as in this incident a paper with an "ink-blot" on it, there is no coincidence between what he sees before him (the sensual perception) and whatever past perception (the cognitive apperception; memory) emerges in his mind. External phenomena provoke all sorts of images and kick off a chaotic dynamic in Orlando: "Every single thing, once he tried to dislodge it from its place in his mind, he found thus cumbered with other matter like the lump of glass which, after a year at the bottom of the sea, is grown about with bones and dragon-flies, and coins and the tresses of drowned women" (ib.: 97). This is the young Orlando experiencing how the "enumerable ideas and tiny stories that flash" (Woolf 1981: 104) into his mind may unsettle any mental stability. Set afloat by the smallest agitation, Orlando's memory seems to be incapable of concentrating on one image; rather images are superimposed on each other "as one lantern slide is half seen through the next" (Woolf 1998: 76).

Generally, in *Orlando* – and in other works by Woolf – memory acts are instigated ("agitated") by external objects (or "movements"). In this sense, they are media of memory, a medium being defined as the means, material, or system, the intermediator or the messenger by which a message reaches out to a recipient. Obvious examples are the telephone, the (musical) instrument, the radio, and the mirror, but everything can be such a messenger because even everyday objects may channel meanings and thus function as intermediators. The key point about the mediating power of things in *Orlando*

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is that the memory images transmitted by them do not appear to be analogical to the external objects, although little is made explicit about the transaction between objects and the mind. At any rate, the things objects usually produce in Orlando's mind are "odd" and "disconnected" from the initial spur to remember. During one of these experiences Orlando grumbles: "Nothing is any longer one thing" (ib.: 290). Objects thus mediate the confusion of difference, displacement, and distraction.

In particular, the last section of the novel, which depicts an Orlando – now fixed as a female – prone to meditation, melancholic and increasingly concerned with the past, displays a marked proliferation and intensification of these incidents. Burdened with the enormous sum of impressions, sentiments, and experiences that have been continuously piling up in her mind for almost 400 years, she is also more and more subject to the disorientation that objects incite in her mind. The unsettling power memory exerts on the clarity and unity of his mind which the young Lord Orlando already experiences may in the mature Lady Orlando sometimes provoke the feeling of ecstasy, which is the feeling of being transported outside of oneself. But these disorienting memory acts frequently also create a chaos that threatens to undermine her mental integrity and imperils her relation with the outer reality of the world. The disturbing experiences of the media of memory are highlighted in the scene that takes place in a lift in a London department store, and the other on the ensuing drive home – during both of which she is bombarded by objects mediating past experiences that shock her mind and will not coagulate into a whole.

Somewhere out in the sixth part of the novel the ludic narrator states that Orlando has reached the "present moment": "It was the eleventh of October. It was 1928. It was the present moment" (ib.: 284). Lady Orlando is in her ap-

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pearance an aristocratic woman in her thirties, rushing with her motorcar from her ancestral country house to do some shopping in Oxford Street, and after that speeding through London back home again into the country. From the moment the "present" announces itself with a "terrific explosion right in her ear" (ib.: 284), mimicking the strike of a clock, the novel will highlight the problem of Orlando being increasingly torn between the "the narrow plank of the present" and the "raging torrent beneath" (ib.: 285), and seemingly incapable of finding the right balance.

> […] she […] went into the shop. Shade and scent enveloped her. The present fell from her like drops of scalding water. Light swayed up and down like thin stuffs puffed out by a summer breeze. She took a list from her bag and began reading in a curious stiff voice as first as if she were holding the words – boy's boots, bath salts, sardines – under a tap of many-coloured water. She watched them change as the light fell on them. Bath and boots became blunt, obtuse; sardines serrated itself like a saw. […] Then she got into the lift, for the good reason that the door stood open; and was shot smoothly upwards. The very fabric of life now, she thought as she rose, is magic. In the eighteenth century, we knew how everything was done; but here I rise through the air; […] Now the lift gave a little jerk as it stopped at the first floor; and she had a vision of innumerable coloured stuffs flaunting in a breeze from which came distinct, strange smells; and each time the lift stopped and flung its doors open, there was another slice of the world displayed with all the smells of that world clinging to it. She was reminded of the river off Wapping in the time of Elizabeth, where the treasure ships and the merchant ships used to anchor. […] But descending in the lift again […] she was sunk far beneath the present moment; and thought when the lift bumped on the ground, that she heard a pot broken against a river bank. (ib.: 286, 290)

The present "falls" in the moment the thousand impressions that the shop conveys to her hit her mind. Thus plunged into the past, everything starts to flicker. The meaning of the words

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on her shopping list drift away and the objects they normally refer to take on other shapes and contents. The "innumerable" objects on display in the big store invoke another "slice of the world" and another stratum of her biography. Visual and olfactory impressions take her back to earlier epochs in her life. Using the lift aggravates the situation, since it makes her visualize the time span of her life as a spatial vertical axis: the bottom representing the past ("sunk far beyond the present moment"), the top floors representing the present (the "very fabric of life now"). She envisages the lift as a time machine sending her on a bewildering journey through her mind.

These experiences of the lift and the amazement of the memories immediately drive her into melancholy musings on time and a sense of chaos: "'Time has passed over me', she thought, trying to collect herself; 'this is the oncome of middle age. How strange it is! Nothing is any longer one thing! I take up a handbag and I think of an old bumboat woman frozen in the ice. Someone lights a pink candle and I see a girl in Russian trousers.' […] Her eyes filled with tears" (ib.: 290). The objects Lady Orlando sees and touches yet again mediate meanings and images different and disconnected from the ones she thought inherent in them: a handbag becomes a boat, a candle turns into Sasha, the Russian girl, Oxford Street reminds her of "mountains. Turkey? India? Persia?" (ib.: 291). The disruptive force that these mediating surfaces has on her mind disjoints her own history, making it seem totally incoherent and leaving her in a state of loss and pain. This is intensified further during the following frantic drive through the streets of London:

> The Old Kent Road was very crowded on Thursday, the eleventh of October 1928. People split off pavements. There were women with shopping bags. Children ran out. There were sales at drapers' shops. Streets widened and narrowed. Long vistas steadily shrunk together. Here was a market. Here a funeral. Here a procession with banners

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upon which was written 'Ra-Un', but what else? Meat was very red. Butchers stood at the door. Women almost had their heels sliced off. Amor Vin– that was over a porch. A woman looked out of a bedroom window, profoundly contemplative, and very still. Applejohn and Applebed, Undert–. Nothing could be seen whole or read from start to finish. What was seen begun – like two friends starting to meet each other across the street – was never seen ending. After twenty minutes the body and mind were like scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack and, indeed, the process of motoring fast out of London so much resembles the chopping up small of identity which precedes unconsciousness and perhaps death itself that it is an open question in what sense Orlando can be said to have existed in the present moment. (ib.: 292)

During the confusing drive through London streets on the way home, southeast to the country, the world to Orlando appears to be cut into small pieces and her identity seems to further disintegrate in the face of the myriad impressions. The passage is succinct: due to the "chopping up small of identity" Orlando's mind is like "scraps of torn paper tumbling from a sack". The drive through London has the effect of an experience that seriously threatens Orlando's mental integrity. At this point, the biographer presents a hasty sketch of why the multi-temporal layers of the mind of man in general – and of Orlando in particular – can be so bewildering:

For if there are (at a venture) seventy-six different times all ticking in the mind at once, how many different people are there not – Heaven help us – all having lodgment at one time or another in the human spirit. […] these selves of which we are built up, one on top of another, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand, have attachments elsewhere, sympathies, little constitutions and rights of their own, call them what you will (and for many of these things there is no name) so that one will only come if it is raining, another in a room with green curtains, another when Mrs Jones is not there, another if you can promise it a glass of wine – and so on; […]. (ib.: 294)

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In this skit the biographer humorously ruminates on the power of objects and impressions to call upon different aspects and layers of our selfhood and thus cause displacements and altercations in our minds. The instability of the crowded mind is, in Woolf's fiction and essays, not least caused by the invocation of the myriad objects of the outer world. In her 1919 essay "Modern Novels" she explains the predicament of modern men and women living in the great cities and the impact of impressions, sensations, images: "The mind, exposed to the ordinary course of life, receives upon its surface a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, composing in their sum what we might venture to call life itself; and to figure further as the semi-transparent envelope, or luminous halo, surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" (Woolf 1988: 33). So symptomatic is the depiction of modern life in the city in *Orlando* that Raymond Williams makes it a key to the "fragmentary experience" of modern urban life and its challenge to the formation of identity: "the discontinuity, the atomism, of the city were aesthetically experienced as a problem of perception which raised problems of identity" (Williams 1975: 290). The threat to identity posed by the impressions provoked by external objects is enhanced if, as in Orlando's case, the "surface" of the mind encompasses a mass of experiences accumulated over an extremely eventful and shifting life. Orlando's complex mental canvas makes her all the more victim to the mediating powers of outside objects.

But then a reversal occurs:

> Indeed we should have given her over for a person entirely disassembled were it not that here, at last, one green screen was held out on the right, against which the little bits of paper fell more slowly; and then another was held out on the left [...] and the green screens were held continu-

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ously on either side, so that her mind regained the illusion of holding things within itself and she saw a cottage, a farmyard and four cows, all precisely life-size. (Woolf 1998: 294)

The biographer assures us that Orlando soon recovers a sense of having "the illusion of holding things within herself" when she gets out of the urban space and into the landscape's "green screens" on both sides of the road. There is no assurance that this reintegration will last – and it will not – nor that it is more than an illusion, but nevertheless the novel offers the suggestion that there is indeed some relief from the memory chaos in Orlando's mind. The "screens" "held continuously on either side" implies that they are holding her together. What might be the meaning of these screens?

"Memory is a seamstress": Memory and the seams of winding identity

Judging from the ludic tone of a number of asides or excursions, the biographer is apparently equally happy to divulge theories concerning the unity or plurality of an individual's mind as to stress the need for some kind of mental order and stabilizing devices. Subsequent to the number of passages where she narrates how the experience of the past and the sheer number of episodes to remember almost push her protagonist out of her mind, the biographer shows an eager interest in reflecting on how an "illusion of holding things within herself" (ib.: 293) can come about. The question that arises is of how to counter the need to narrate the truth about a character's experiences and multi-layered personality with the obligation to rescue that character from the shattering experience caused by the invocations of external objects. In close connection with the narration of Orlando's crisis, the biographer introduces a mental profile of someone who suc-

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ceeds in compensating for the mind's openness to the multiplicity of the world and finding a balance: "And indeed […] most successful practitioners of the art of life […] somehow contrive to synchronize the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten the past" (ib.: 291). How is this "synchronization" achievable? It appears that "synchronization" means a collection into some kind of spatial form, and, as we will see from the following examples, usually into some *tubular structure*.

A decisive step towards a more successful practice "of the art of life" is reached when Orlando arrives home after the drive:

> The whole of her darkened and settled, as when some foil whose addition makes the round and solidity of a surface is added to it, and the shallow becomes deep and the near distant; and all is contained as water is contained by the sides of a well. So she was now darkened and stilled, and become, with the addition of this Orlando, what is called, rightly or wrongly, a single self, a real self. (ib.: 299)

Now Orlando has found what just before has been mentioned as something that she desires, but has not been able to achieve – "the true self", the "compact of all the selves we have it in us to be; commanded and locked up by the Captain self, the Key self, which amalgamates and controls them all" (ib.: 296). Getting home provides a "foil" that is wrapped around her mind ("the whole of her"), and enclosed within this envelope she seems "stilled" and "settled".

At this moment the surfaces of the innumerable objects around her are transformed into depth just as the former intrusive closeness becomes distance: "the shallow becomes deep and the near distant". The key image is the one of the

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"well". From now on, the novel starts reiterating the imagery of containing and tubular structures in a variety of versions: a well, a pool, a hollow, a tunnel. Minow-Pinkney suggests that there is a shift in the novel from metonymy to metaphor, e.g. from surface to depth, from displacement and contiguity to identity and unity (Minow-Pinkney 1987: 142), without however identifying where and why it happens or following the important lead that this textual development provides. I read this as a crucial moment in the novel's investigation of memory that marks the setup of a contrasting – and indeed complementary – mode of memory to the one previously discussed, namely the integrative one. The novel, approaching its end and closure, strives to find a unity for its protagonist as well as for its own narration, and indeed the collecting and joining of the loose threads in Orlando's mind (and those of the narrative) are the motivating forces behind this thrust into the integrative mode of memory.

This becomes clear in a striking passage which is all about the integrative mode of Memory:

> Nature […] who delights in muddle and mystery, so that even now (the first of November 1927) we know not why we go upstairs, or why we come down again, our most daily movements are like the passage of a ship on an unknown sea, and the sailors at the mast-head ask, pointing their glasses to the horizon; Is there land or is there none? to which, if we are prophets, we make answer 'Yes'; if we are truthful we say 'No'; nature, who has so much to answer for besides the perhaps unwieldy length of this sentence, has further complicated her task, and added to our confusion by providing not only a perfect rag-bag of odds and ends within us […] but has contrived that the whole assortment shall be lightly stitched together by a single thread. Memory is the seamstress, and a capricious one at that. Memory runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after. (Woolf 1998: 75-76)

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In this passage about the incongruous nature of life and existence ("odds and ends within us"), heterogeneity and discord are not only described; they are also performed by a biographer in one of her usual sprightly self-reflective modes as part of the textual action ("this sentence"). The biographer cheerfully describes and evokes these "queer tricks" of nature by putting together contrasting or disconnected elements, either as "muddle and mystery" or as frivolous juxtapositions ("cheek by jowl") of Queen Alexandra's wedding veil and "a policeman's trousers" or of a family's underlinen.

What holds all this together is the integrative mode of memory. Memory is here allegorized as a seamstress whose stitching is a metaphor of what happens when memory connects and joins together "the rag-bag", without however creating a unity that harks to any hierarchical principle ("we know not what comes next, and what follows after"). This representation of memory as a seamstress is in accordance with a tradition stemming from ancient literature and mythology, but the biographer imbues it with new energy. The seam made by the "single thread" that "lightly" stitches together the "whole assortment" stands out as a key paradigm in the passage, and is arguably one of the most productive metaphorical patterns in the whole novel – the continuous, undulating line joining one point with another. The paradigm of the seam consists of the following elements: "passage of the ship", "the sentence", or later "the line" on which the "underlinen of a family of fourteen hangs" (Woolf 1998: 76). Most of them are zig-zag lines, mostly horizontal, moving and shifting "in and out, up and down, hither and thither" like the "the passage of the ship" or the "line" that holds the underlinen of the "family of fourteen" together despite the gale, or the writing of the "unwieldy sentence". The meaning of the thread used by that diligent seamstress is to provide some sense of unity and continuity amongst the different

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"odd and ends". All these seams join the disparate together, but due to the winding pattern they also allow deviations, altercation, and change within the unity. More manifestations of this metaphorical paradigm are produced in the last crucial parts of the novel: the "curving drive" (ib.: 300) and the "ferny path" with its "many turns and windings" (ib.: 308), both on her estate, or indeed the frequent references to the Serpentine Lake in Hyde Park. Further, the "gallery" and the "tunnel" in her house or the "well" and the decisive "pool" are versions of this spatio-temporal metaphorical pattern.

These undulating seams and tubular containers are all, in my view, media of integrative memory in that they join episodes and impressions together; they keep and store them, and mediate to Orlando an impression of being "stilled" and "settled" (ib.: 299), and "the illusion of holding things within" themselves (Woolf 1998: 293). To further illustrate how these figures function as media of memory one must consider what Woolf writes about memory in her autobiographical essay from 1939, "Sketch of the Past":

> I often wonder – that things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds; are in fact still in existence? And if so, will it not be possible, one time, that some device will be invented by which we can tap them? I see it – the past – as an avenue lying behind; a long ribbon of scenes, emotions. There at the end of the avenue still, are the garden and the nursery. Instead of remembering here a scene and there a sound, I shall fit a plug into the wall; and listen to the past. […] I feel that strong emotion must leave its trace; and it is only a question of discovering how we can get ourselves again attached to it, so that we shall be able to live our lives through from the start. (Woolf 2002: 81).

By thinking of strong emotions as physical entities that leave marks and traces on their spatial surroundings, and which might be re-experienced at will, Woolf here very concretely

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describes the way she imagines a medium of memory working. She envisages the past as "an avenue" or as a "ribbon of scenes, emotions", implying that emotions are etched, engraved, or impressed upon objects, just as music is stored in the grooves of a gramophone record. In all the buildings and houses on that avenue there are stored the great, intense emotions, and therefore one might, Woolf fantasizes, plug into the walls and listen to them, very much in the same way as in 1939 one listened to the radio. But as long as a tapping device has not been invented, one must depend on the objects' capacity to channel the past in a random way and thus "remember here a scene and there a sound".

This passage from "Sketch of the Past" shows that Woolf has a very clear notion of objects mediating the emotions that have been stored in them. The metaphors she uses in the essay ("ribbon" or "avenue") to illustrate the media of memory are consistent with the metaphorical pattern in *Orlando* and its spatio-temporal logic. Whether it is the seam that the Memory stitches, the undulating paths, or "curving drives", it is all about containing the past and its impressions and incidents in tubular structures that hold them together. These metaphors mediate not chaos, as in the flux of surfaces that Orlando is bombarded with in the unruly urban space, but rather integrated wholes. They channel to her the sentiment that her past consists of continuous and contained experiences, and further, that there is a connection between the present and the past. These structures are spread around in the novel, but one of them is of particular importance; it is an edifice, it is the principal medium of memory in *Orlando* and in Woolf's works in general – being at home in one's house.

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Storing the past at home: The medium of the house

The great manor house built by Orlando's ancestors is presented on the first pages of the novel as a container of the wind which makes the objects in it swing in perpetuity: "the house [...] was so vast that there seemed trapped in it the wind itself, blowing this way, blowing that way, winter and summer. The green arras with the hunters on it moved perpetually" (Woolf 1998: 14). With the mention of the seasons the narration signals that the house is itself something through which time can be represented. This is confirmed later when we read that its very architecture seems to be modeled on the calendar: it consists of 365 rooms and 52 staircases (ib.: 107), making it virtually a monument to time. The palace in *Orlando* is not only constructed on the basis of the spatial patterning of a year in days and weeks, but it is also, as we are told later, built over a considerable stretch of time so that the various architectural fashions and tastes readily demonstrate different ages. From the beginning, then, the novel establishes a spatiotemporal symbolical device the core function of which is to contain the passage of time. To Orlando, the house instigates of memories because her past is inscribed in it.

Comparisons of the past and architectural structures are common in Woolf's work. In "Sketch of the Past", she compares a period of her childhood to a large room: "A great hall I could liken it to" (Woolf 2002: 91), and in one of her well-known essays ("Great Men's Houses" from 1932) Woolf pithily remarks that "all houses have voices" (Woolf 2009: 295). Childhood can be likened to a room in a house, and such rooms have "voices" because the emotions from that time have been stored and contained in them and in the objects to be found there. In this sense objects channel meanings and voices, and thus are capable of triggering memories.

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After the shattering experiences of disintegration in the lift and the subsequent drive through London, and the soothing effect of "holding things within herself" caused by the tubular structure of "the green screen[s]" that "were held continuously on either side" (Woolf 1998: 293), she finally reaches her grand estate. Motoring up the "curving drive", observing "trees, deer, and turf" "with the greatest satisfaction as if her mind had become a fluid that flowed round things and enclosed them" (ib.: 300) – again the emphasis is on self-possession, roundness, enclosure, integration – Lady Orlando is much changed as she enters the house:

> She fancied that the room's brightened as she came in; stirred, opened their eyes as if they had been dozing in her absence. She fancied, too, that, hundreds and thousands of times as she had seen them, they never looked the same twice, as if so long a life as theirs had stored in them a myriad moods […] and her own fortunes and the people's characters who visited them. […] They had nothing to conceal. She knew their sorrows and joys. She knew what age each part of them was and its little secrets – a hidden drawer, a concealed cupboard, or some deficiency perhaps, such as a part made up, or added later. They, too, knew her in all her moods and changes. She had hidden nothing from them, had come to them as boy and woman, crying and dancing, brooding and gay. In this window-seat, she had written her first verse; in that chapel, she had been married. […] Gently opening a door, she stood on the threshold so that (as she fancied) the room could not see her and watched the tapestry rising and falling on the eternal faint breeze which never failed to move it. Still the hunter rode; still Daphne flew. The heart still beat, she thought, however faintly, however far with-drawn; the frail indomitable heart of the immense building.
>
> […]
>
> So she sat at the end of the gallery with her dogs couched round her, in Queen Elizabeth's hard arm-chair. The gallery stretched far away to a point where the light almost failed. It was a tunnel bored deep into the past. As her eyes peered down it, she could see people laughing and talking; the great men she had known; Dryden, Swift, and Pope; and

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statesmen in colloquy; and lovers […]. Still further down, she saw sets of splendid dancers formed for the quadrille. A fluty, frail nevertheless stately music began to play. An organ boomed. A coffin was borne into the chapel. A marriage procession came out of it. Armed men with helmets left for the wars. (ib.: 301-305)

This great passage is emblematic of the English country house motif.[1] The house is represented as a living organism, and the relationship between the living humans and anthropomorphized building is one of continual exchange. The house represents historical lineage, emphasizing continuity, but the biographer goes a step further, stating that it not only represents the past, but also contains it: it is the still living body of all the lives that have inhabited it. The rooms, the cupboards, the drawers have "stored in them a myriad moods", the change of seasons, and human experiences: Orlando's own experience as well as those of numerous visitors, lyrically described in the image of the shell. The rooms are not inert, but moving and rather teeming with life, shown in the recurrent image of the arras in the Ambassador's room picturing the mythological scene from Ovid of the river nymph Daphne fleeing the enamored god Apollo. This scene and its plethora of symbolical meanings – of rapture, sexual desire, male chasing female, metamorphosis (Daphne changes into a laurel tree), or eternal youth (the laurel is always green) – shed light on the novel's motifs of desire, love, (gender) change,

1 Ben Jonson's poem "To Penshurst", the first poem that entirely focuses on the motif, is a masterpiece imitated by Aemilia Lanyer in her "The Description of Cooke-ham", whereas Andrew Marvel's "Upon Appleton House" is arguably the greatest country house poem in any language. Prose classics include Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, E.M. Forster's *Howard's End*, or Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*. Indeed, Orlando himself explores the country house genre in one of his profuse poems and apostrophizes "his house and race in terms of the most moving eloquence" (Woolf 1998: 103).

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perennial youthfulness, and the struggle for a settled identity. The scene also points to Marcel's bed chamber in Combray in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, where the *laterna magica* depicting Golo chasing Genéviève de Brabant projects a structurally similar cinematographic narrative on the walls under Marcel's perceptive eyes. This reference not only signals that *Orlando* is also a narrative centered on time and remembrance, but also that memories are spatially organized, and that childhood homes or holiday houses play particularly important roles in temporal consciousness.

The next section of the passage mentions another spatio-temporal metaphor with a long history in Woolf's texts: a "gallery stretched far away to a point where the light almost failed. It was a tunnel bored deep into the past". While working on *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf writes in her diary about what she calls her "discovery": "I dig out beautiful caves behind my characters. […] The idea is that the caves shall connect and each comes to daylight at the present moment" (30 August 1923, Woolf 1954: 59). As unelaborated as this diary entry may be, the gist of the metaphor is clear. The past of each individual and character of Woolf's novels is envisaged as a system of hidden, subterraneous tunnels and channels that join the threads of memory together to create a greater whole. In *To the Lighthouse*, the narrator simply says this about Lily Briscoe, who is about to finish her work: "She went on tunneling her way into her picture, into the past" (Woolf 1992: 188). In *Orlando* the meaning of the "tunnel" metaphor appears to be fairly similar: "the immensely long tunnel in which she seemed to have been travelling for hundreds of years widened" (Woolf 1998: 284). The tunnel of course belongs to the long list of tubular objects, structures, and movements that mediate the impression of integration of the many memories and bring about a more stable individuality in the beholder. To what extent Orlando's contemplation

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and interiorization of these metaphors of containing and integration may guarantee a more sustained feeling of stable selfhood is suggested in the following passage. Here she once again drifts into the vertiginous feeling of flux, but is able to collect herself and retrieve some kind of mental balance by resorting to yet another containment structure, "the pool".

> […] she was relieved of the pressure of the present. There was something strange in the shadow that the flicker of her eyes cast, something which […] is always absent from the present – whence its terror, its nondescript character – […] a shadow without substance or quality of its own, yet has the power to change whatever it adds itself to. […] Her mind began to toss like the sea. Yes, she thought, heaving a deep sigh of relief […] I can begin to live again. I am by the Serpentine, she thought, the little boat is climbing through the white arch of a thousand deaths. […] the shadow of faintness […] had deepened now, at the back of her brain (which is the part furthest from sight) into a pool where things dwell in darkness so deep that what they are we scarcely know. She now looked down into this pool or sea in which everything is reflected – and, indeed, some say that all our most violent passions, and art and religion, are the reflections which we see in the dark hollow at the back of the head when the visible world is obscured for the time. She looked there now, long, deeply, profoundly, and immediately the ferny path up the hill along which she was walking became not entirely a path, but partly the Serpentine; […] everything was partly something else, as if her mind had become a forest with glades branching here and there; things came nearer, and further, and mingled and separated and made the strangest alliances and combinations in an incessant chequer of light and shade. (Woolf 1992: 307-308)

This passage again displays a mind being jolted from one impression to another as a result of being disconnected from the present. Now however she is able to locate the site of the transformations inside of her own mind, in "a pool", later referred to as the "pool of the mind" (Woolf 1992: 312). The passage demonstrates how Orlando seems to be able to rec-

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oncile the outer with her inner world. The exterior element, described as "something strange in the shadow", "absent from the present", but which has the "power to change whatever it adds itself to", soon takes on a shape and becomes "a pool" in which everything that is "reflected" in it is changed. Out of the elusive shadow there emerges something with the characteristics of both a container and a mirroring surface. Mirrors are usually regarded as objects that reproduce identity, but here – and as a rule in Woolf (Defromont 1992: esp. 65-67) – the mirror is referred to as a medium that changes "whatever it adds itself to". This "pool" being a device which is both a metaphor of the mind ("the dark hollow in the back of the head"; a "pool of the mind", Woolf 1992: 312) *and* a medium of metamorphosis, it appears to present an image of her mind which is the result of a successful intermediation of the invasive exterior and the receiving interior.

That this promises a more settled sense of selfhood than what has been the case earlier is further suggested by her exclamation "I can begin to live now", with its ring of relief. Furthermore, the words characterizing her look ("now, long, deeply, profoundly") and their long soothing vowels, as well as the description of a forest scene at the end of the long sentence, express harmony and self-confidence, the opposite of the rushed, unsettling experiences that Orlando has previously suffered through. In this lyrical outburst Orlando's mind is compared to a sylvan maze adhering to one law only, that of incessant flux, distraction, and blurring of distinctions: "everything was, in part, something else". This arabesque universe in which distances, shapes, colors, light, and dark are combined and separated, juxtaposed or superimposed, allegorizes magnificently the 400-year-old Orlando's slow coming to terms with her multi-layered, multi-temporal consciousness. Now Orlando's mind apparently seems to be capable of a peaceful transaction between exterior objects

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and interior reactions, depths and surfaces, past and present; capable of holding "(temporal) multiplicity together" (Ellis 2007: 97).

Once Orlando has been able to conceive of the series of flickering images as being mediated from a source inside of her mind, she can immerse herself in her rich past and re-experience and re-explore the numerous incidents and seemingly neverending changes without apprehension:

> Night had come – night that she loved of all times, night in which the reflections in the dark pool of the mind shine more clearly than by day. It was not necessary to faint now in order to look deep into the darkness where things shaped themselves and to see in the pool of the mind now Shakespeare, now a girl in Russian trousers, now a toy boat on the Serpentine, and then the Atlantic itself, where storms in great waves past Cape Horn. (Woolf 1998: 312)

Lady Orlando seems contented, not anxious, not frustrated by the act of contemplating herself in the mirroring "pool of her mind" that assembles the images. The past is now held together in one place, and almost cinematographically she can follow the steady flux of the memory images stored in her being projected before her eyes.

Conclusion

In Virginia Woolf's works objects record "strong emotions" and carry their "traces" (Woolf 2002: 81). In this sense, objects are media of memory, having the capacity to transmit these emotions and meanings from the past back to us, make us remember them and "live our lives through from the start" (Woolf 2001: 81). Orlando's mind, however, reacts in unexpected ways to the invocations by the objects which "may agitate a thousand odd, disconnected fragments" (Woolf

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1998: 76). In fact, the ensuing feeling of disintegration and complete flux is perilous to her mental state and drives her close to breakdown. The disintegrative force that exterior things have upon Orlando's mind is later contrasted by a clustering of objects and impressions in tubular structures like seams, tunnels, wells, paths, galleries, and pools. All these are media of memory that have a function similar to the "avenues" and "ribbons of scenes, emotions" that Woolf reflects upon in "Sketch of the Past", in that they invoke a feeling of assembling and integrating the myriad impressions of one's past. Being figures of collection and unity, they help Orlando to come to terms with the vertiginous change and heterogeneity that have run through the course of her life and which her mind has just barely managed to cope with. These tubular structures correspond to the search for identity that Woolf in her works refers to as a "tunneling process". Their manifestation in the sixth part of the novel marks the shift from a crisis-ridden protagonist verging on disintegration to an individual able to face her own multi-layered history with a sense of wondrous self-confidence. Now Orlando has the feeling of holding her past within herself.

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Media, Memory, and Meaning in Narrative Art: Trauma in Renate Dorrestein's Novel *A Heart of Stone*

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Renate Dorrestein's novel *A Heart of Stone* comes across as a powerful prose-fictional narrative about the severe mental trauma and bereavement suffered by a twelve-year-old girl in the Netherlands in 1973. The child's excruciatingly inadequate resources to master her memorial baggage in subsequent life result mentally in deeply repressed memories, emotionally in unbearable feelings, and behaviourally in lethal impediments to a normal life. These consequences for the gravely stricken main character Ellen van Bemmel eventually, twenty-five years later, give way to a process fostering the possibility of healing, of self-therapy, and the trajectory towards freedom, not least in her attempts at an active mediation of past and present by way of language's combinatory and imaging forces. For Ellen, who, in the novel's present, is an independent woman of thirty-eight, this process is inaugurated by seemingly random events; most importantly, perhaps, the sudden opportunity she gets to purchase and move back into the house of her child-

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hood. During her healing process she attains personal insights and an alternative knowledge necessary for a redistribution of both repressed and living memory.

Gradually, she ventures out on a courageous, repetitional journey into her traumatising past, re-living aspects of the bereavements of her childhood and re-possessing the traumatising spaces. Not least, she iteratively immerses herself in the (re)reading of forgotten or repressed materials (most notably the family photo album, in her mature years the only family heirloom retrieved for her after her childhood catastrophe), in a (re)exposure to extant media of the time, photography in particular, and also in her own writing about the past. Her activation of all three media resources represents an attempt at creating a metonymic or a metaphoric relation to the traumatising events. From this perspective, *A Heart of Stone* lends itself to approaches inspired by psychoanalysis. For example, the novel's narrative form carries elements similar to the workings of the "talking cure" (Freud and Breuer 2001), to which I will return in my conclusion. The "dialogic" and processual qualities of the novel can thus be witnessed not only in the relationship between the photographies and Ellen's phrasings in her writing, but also in the main character's and the text's dynamic use of language and other media to negotiate and reconstruct a livable memory that stabilises an identity in the present. This power of the novel helps in making Ellen's repressed memories not only (re)livable but – crucially – also *sayable*.

However, Dorrestein's novel is more than the construction of a coherent life story, paratactically combining isolated events into a meaningful whole by reestablishing an already encoded representative relationship between text and image. It is also an ongoing process of imaging and mediation, a fragmented representation of another order, experimental and disruptive. This power of the novel to make the process

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unfold is what little by little, and in spatio-temporal leaps and ruptures, tugs the truly creative memorial process in the direction of an individually experienced but as yet speechless *visibility*.

Sayability and visibility stand out as the two powers that productively labour alongside each other to handle the repressed memorial matter and its manifold mediation in order to find a readable and thereby a both publicly and personally understandable balance between them, one between narration and depiction. This balance is also what endows Dorrestein's fictional prose in *A Heart of Stone* with one of its foremost qualities: its tangibility – its in particular aesthetically heightened sensorial acuteness bestowed upon represented events, characters, bodies, emotions, and objects, upon the dialectical process of repression and remembrance, and upon the disruptive shifts between represented media and images. Thus, the effects of textual and medial action are both produced and experienced by the dramatised, first-person narrator Ellen, in tandem with the novel's implied author.

In the ongoing present of *A Heart of Stone*, the thirty-eight-year-old forensic pathologist Ellen ("I am a doctor for the dead, not the living"; Dorrestein 2001: 126; *passim*), single and pregnant with her first child (a baby girl), must needs stay bedridden for months before the delivery, due to her condition of a prolapsed uterus. The sales advertisement she has come across by chance has enabled her to repossess her childhood's spacious house and garden, which now literally come to function as her memorial space. With the love of her caring parents and her companionship with four siblings until she turned twelve, Ellen's family home was the site of great happiness. It was also the business space for her parents' family company: a well-esteemed, productive and always up-to-date, internationally oriented newspaper-cutting agency with a manifold archive kept in the house, specialising in the USA.

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The writing situation of the novel, then, is dramatised against the background of Ellen reading photos: studying, associating, and reminiscing, sideways and in-depth, on the basis of the pictures from her childhood in the family's photo album. For the first time in her life she makes the painful yet productive effort of writing, i.e. of narrating and imaging. She makes the attempt at phrasing into a sayable combinatorics of continuity the rupturing visibilities of the fragmented bits of her increasingly remembered past that her mind, in the process, allows to be selected for her. This eventually leads on to activating her repressed memory of the severe mental trauma and bereavement that she was exposed to at the age of twelve. In other words, Ellen's memorial space produces images not only of an archive but also of a site in which history and remembrance appear as shattered and are transformed into a dynamic space where glimpses of the past are reassembled and reshaped in an ongoing process that negotiates with the present.

Before progressing further in my reading, let me at this point narrow down my line of inquiry by asking: what can fictional narrative and literary use of images and media achieve in relation to the understanding and self-therapeutic healing of repressed mental trauma? What qualities of literary and medial language are apt to capture the chaotically condensed sensual impressions, memories, images, and powerful emotions of a traumatised life, and make them creatively accessible for understanding?

We have already witnessed the operations of the phrasal power of language in making repressed memories sayable. Furthermore, in his first step of defining what he calls "the sentence-image", Jacques Rancière names this force in language "the phrasal power of continuity and parataxis", and it possesses an already encoded relationship between text and image (Rancière 2007: 46). In Roman Jakobson's wording,

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this force operates along the combination axis of language under the operational principle of contiguity (Jakobson 1960: 358). The paratactical combinatorics of nearness, then, functions as phrasal continuity and makes things sayable. It is largely based on already encoded verisimilitude, possible motivations, and on the linkage of causes and effects. Moreover, while already encoded, the power of combination and phrasal sayability is largely *external* to the sensual materiality of that of which it speaks. It is precisely in a narrative's power of turning exernalities into a continuous life story based on recuperated memories that its double vicissitude lies. For one, it holds a productive potential for globally existential human understanding and knowledge; it can explain, and transform shards into a "whole". Yet on the other hand, its representational codes pose limitations to the possible representation of *un*encoded matter and the sensorial and affective insights that it may hold. Thus, the question of to whom a narrative belongs, whose narrative it is, arises. Has it been lived, truly experienced, in individuation? Obviously, the combinatorics of phrasal sayability borders onto the power of already encoded and general knowledge. That, let us note, is a power which at times can be wilfully or inadvertently usurped and misappropriated.

In circumscribing language's imaging power of rupture (Rancière 2007: 46), on the other hand, Rancière performs his second step in identifying the sentence-image. Basically, this power in language helps make things sensorially visible and belongs to another representational order that is as yet *un*encoded. Jakobson (1960: 358) locates this force within language's selection axis under the principle of sensorial equivalence (i.e. likenesses and differences). Crucially, this imaging power is *inherent* in that which makes itself visible by it, and that attempts to reach the level of utterance. The imagings are sudden, performative ruptures in space and

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time, disturbing yet paradoxically dependent upon the force of the otherwise continuous, "logical" phrasal combination of human situations and events, as well as phrased memory. The great array of ruptures in space and time in Dorrestein's novel shakes and stirs Ellen's repressed memories and emotions into surfacing in the opened crevices of the discernible story line. In this manner, repressed mental images are brought to visibility as well as to the threshold of sayability – and in the next instance: to *individuated* human understanding and knowledge.

Imaging by disruptions is not a power of ordering, yet one of specific, individuating, "lived" equivalence. Precisely therein lies *its* double viscissitude. For one, it truly may possess the productive potential for sudden breakthroughs of sensual memory and individuated "insight", thus allowing in the next instance also for sayability. On the other hand, it may topple over into textual-actional misfiring. It is the balance between Rancière's tandem forces in the sentence-image – the phrasal power of continuity, and the imaging power of rupture – that in its aesthetic work is crucial for productive and creative effect. – The imaging-power of rupture in language, also in the work of reinvigorating repressed memories, belongs to anyone who has been shockingly affected by it, both in real-life and in fiction. At the same time, unlike in the case of the predominantly story-line oriented narrative, the vicissitudes of mental trauma in relation to a textual performative are not in the same measure exposed to wilful or inadvertent misappropriation.

In the attempt to observe the analytical distinction just made between the processes of language's phrasal power of continuity, and those of the imaging power of rupture, let me now resume my reading of the novel where I left off. First, I will single out the central and phraseable narrative strands of repressed and presently reinvigorated memory processed by

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Ellen's reading of photos and her writing of sudden remembrances. From there I will move on to a closer discussion of the leaps in the visible imaging, and of the leaps in the imaging among the array of visible media, that set in motion the individuated, materially lived insight.

Traumatic core

In the darkness of a March evening during Easter 1973, the happy and resourceful twelve-year-old Ellen returns home on her bike with her dog Orson after his evening walk. Ellen is the middle child of five siblings in a thrifty and caring family, in which Mom and Dad love their children and vice versa, and where Mom and Dad also love each other. With two teenage siblings, Sybille and Kes, who are on the cusp of maturity, and with her four-year-old brother Carlos and the newborn baby Ida, Ellen is being raised in a trustful setting with a concern for the needs of both the mind and the body. She is, in her Dad's iterated phrase, "the cement of the family"; "you are fine just the way you are" (Dorrestein 2001: 137; *passim*): these are nomers indicating both the respect and the love bestowed upon her, yet also the serious burdens placed perhaps somewhat prematurely on her shoulders. While there has been some extra commotion in the house since the baby girl arrived a little more than half a year ago, this has mainly given rise to good-natured irritation, some additional chores, and heightened yet good-humoured jokes and sarcasms in the family. A more ominous sign, however, and part of the bustle during this commotional period, is the occurrence in which four-year-old Carlos' skin is severely burnt when he accidentally overturns the tea-kettle, which Ellen had placed on the cooker out of her sense of duty to assist. By no means was Ellen to blame, yet she is doomed to feel guilt and shame for the accident for years to come.

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Among a series of other fragments, this snippet of reminiscence surfaces in the mind of the narrating, adult Ellen. Now, twenty-five years posterior to her Easter-evening bike-ride, she – a single woman with a childless marriage and a series of short relationships with men behind her – continues her reading of and her peculiar yet uniquely productive "dialogue" with the photo album. What the photographs tell her sparks sudden recollections in her of situations and events from the past. Their fragmented "talk" and Ellen's writing are extended into the remembrance of a series of phenomena and events corollary to what the photos show. Suddenly intruding are scraps of vivid images, phrases, and formulations, and snippets from an array of media which, so it turns out, have been part of and seminal to her life up until her very present. By way of Ellen's reiterated, fragmented perceptions of these mixed and variegated scraps and cut-outs, the weight of a powerful emotional yet speechlessly repressed complex in her is also gradually laid bare.

A severe impediment both in and to Ellen's existence is that the details of her life leading up to her and Orson's return home that Easter night, and the complicated trajectory of her succeeding life, are truncated from each other. The abyss in between is the effect of a hurtful eclipse that intricately emanates from the instantaneous occasion of her overwhelming exposure to an unspeakable, mental traumatisation on that particular night. That powerful exposure has not only eclipsed and thereby repressed from memory the details of her experience of the occasion itself; as mental repression it has also cast shadows over and generated chasms in other, and later, parts of her life. While she certainly possesses recollections of her life as a youth and a grown-up, yet out of these parts she has been unable to produce a fathomable and liveable life story that would comprise her remembered sense perceptions, images, and thoughts, and which at the same

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time could help heal her mental wounds. In her bedridden condition, preparing for and helping forward the birth of a new life entirely *hers*, the uterine care takes on new layers of meaning. Ellen's tremendous effort to recollect and to combine scraps of powerful images and sense impressions into writing becomes a textual action in which the vicissitudes of mental trauma can be perceived and eventually be mastered as *hers*. By way of her textual work, the core of the repression becomes reinvigorated. Not least, the repressed is also productively made present as memories with the creative capacity to heal; it becomes part of a textual-medial action of atonement, and thus of being an intertwined component in an act of (self-)reconciliation (Felman 2003; Felman and Laub 1992).

Moving back now to the excruciating March evening, we realise that Ellen's early years have been fortunate ones, her family a truly safe harbour and source of authentic love and care, and she herself a very happy child. Yet, on returning home that Easter night, the twelve-year-old girl finds her whole family motionless, scattered on the floor, some under the kitchen table, some halfway into cupboards. They have been asphyxiated with plastic bags tied around their heads, most of them have been stabbed by a knife, and – so it turns out – they were first drugged and sedated by an arsenal of medications prescribed by the family doctor. The horrific scene is a combination of a series of homicides, and a suicide. In the speechless agony of her overwhelming trauma of mental violence and bereavement, in which – in a matter of seconds – her entire existence loses its foundation and is turned upside down, she suddenly perceives that her younger brother Carlos' face retches inside his plastic bag under the kitchen table. She hurriedly unties his bag, gives him pulmonary first-aid, makes him breathe again and saves his life. The two of them, still speechless, instinctually rush to the house's

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darkest locker-room in the cellar. There, on the afternoon of the following day, they are found by the police – still panic-stricken, silently perched beside each other on a wooden shelf.

In the following segments I will first analytically disentangle and assess some more of the most central components of Renate Dorrestein's novelistic narrative about Ellen, and then proceed to analysing its imaging and textual-medial complexities. In so doing, I will focus in particular on the aesthetic functions of the imaging, textual, and medial occurrences involved.

Building a story line

Posterior to the traumatising family catastrophe, and during Ellen's six ensuing years at an orphans' home, where she is initially placed with her brother, she is struck by a second major separation and irretrievable loss: Carlos is taken away from her and is adopted by another family. This comes to pass despite the utterly strenuous attempt the two of them make at escaping and saving themselves, through wind and sleet along the railway tracks one Christmas Eve. They have headed in the wrong direction and instead meet and are given first-aid treatment by Ellen's former teacher, before being returned to the orphanage, from which young Carlos is then eventually removed and moves away. A single attempt at a reunion between sister and younger brother five years later in life is futile; her brother has become another person, and they never meet again.

Bereavement and separation then give way to self-destruction and in part activate the death drive in Ellen (Freud 2001). Having completed college and medical school and finished her specialised training, she is married to Thijs for thirteen years. They remain childless, drift further and further apart, and eventually divorce. She has professionally become a fo-

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rensic pathologist, "a doctor for the dead" (Dorrestein 2001: 126; *passim*). In her tormented coolness, she cuts the corpses open, examines them, then stitches them up again, yet always on the search for the causes of death as signified *knowledge*. The images of corpses that break through in Ellen's writing in the present, however, take on the disrupting visual power of embodied media and only then approach a radically new sayability and liberation.

For Ellen, and alongside her medically symbolised knowledge, corpses have for years also carried the speechlessly repressed function of *showing* and *seeing* not merely others' but her own eventual death. Since her catastrophic trauma at twelve, they have placed Ellen in the proximity of primary repression's pre-lingual and paradoxical abhorrence for and attraction to the corpse as *abject* (Kristeva 1982). Furthermore, corporeal smells and fluids, not least those of her family's sexual bodies and her parents' love-making, which she had already learned to have a natural relation to prior to her traumatisation, have turned into ineffable, abjective defilement for her. – In her nuanced approach to abjection, Kristeva makes the careful differentiation between work within the symbolic order's already encoded signification of death and of corpses, which renders knowledge and meaning from death, and on the other hand, the as yet unencoded work of the repressed materiality of showing (one's) death (Kristeva 1982: 3; Felluga 2017). It is precisely the latter which needs to be set free in a life-experientially individuated, eruptive visibility that can be phrased as alterity and become sayable as insight. This doubleness of Kristeva's take on the abjective position resonates with Ellen's painful and utterly traumatising personal and professional situation in adult life. It also speaks to how Ellen is able to endure her repeated traumatic pain at all. At the same time, the combinatorics of the frail yet vaguely accessible story line whose build-up I pursue and analytically

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piece together here, and the power of the disrupting images and media which we have already seen at work and that I will turn to in more analytical detail below, in essence make up precisely the novel's complex sentence-image, for whose nomer I lean on Rancière's thought.

Meanwhile, and now back in the vague story line, Ellen in her blocked and stalled self-psychological development and simultaneously in the midst of executing her professional-medical work, undergoes lengthy psychoanalytically-oriented psychotherapy, sneering sarcastically and destructively at some of her therapists, who seemingly have no effect on her. Next to her job, she starts leading a reckless life of one-night stands, repeatedly bereaving herself from any lasting relationships with men. Yet her self-destruction goes further: Ellen's inability to bond in any lasting relationship is accompanied by lasciviousness, in which she makes extensive use of non-committed, impersonal sex in its sole function of being an estranged consumer commodity. – For beyond the immediate pain from her tremendous initial trauma and its aftermaths, another traumatising anxiety has already from the beginning taken seat and continues to grow in Ellen over her next twenty-five years. Her mother, it turned out, was the mentally ill perpetrator of the crime on that devastating Easter night years ago now, suffering from post-partum psychosis. While Mom had covertly collected an abundant reservoir of potent medications against her severe post-natal depression, she had dispensed these into the evening family meal, which Ellen missed since she was walking the dog. Ellen's growing, traumatising agony is centred around her burning question: was *father* in on it – *Dad*, who to Ellen had been the very embodiment of rock-solid love and trust ever since her rearing and socialising years?

Though she has no evidence, she strongly feels for twenty-five years of her life that Father *has* betrayed her, which

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amounts to another experience of loss of true love, and another, yet deeper sensation of bereavement. For many years Ellen cannot mourn her Dad. As in the melancholic, his person has taken seat within Ellen's own body (Freud 2001a; Kristeva 1989). She cannot expel him from her body, which in Ellen's self-image and experience now amounts to no less than her own tainted corpse. – All of this, in the faint story line that can be analysed as phrased and sayable, is based on the verisimilitudal, cause-and-effect relations stemming out of the police's evidence: the medium of a single handwritten note, saying: "We'll see to it that they don't suffer" (Dorrestein 2001: 192). It eventually turns out the note was handwritten entirely by Mom, without Dad's knowledge or complicity at all. In the stirring-up of her memory of her only visit to the family grave, with its granite Heart of Stone, it is not just Ellen's own heart that is conjured up as a present-day image, yet certainly also the hearts of her parents. Still, in the present of the novel, more evidence of Dad's innocence and unbroken trust later appears by way of her friend Bas, and then first Ellen's guilt, yet later her trustful love of her father returns with full force.

By chance Ellen sees her childhood home coming up for sale: she buys it on the spur of the moment. It has been completely redesigned, ripped of all its family interiors and its newspaper-cutting agency archives: this was once the successful livelihood for the still well-functioning van Bemmel family and their staff of students. Yet she now dares to explore the rooms again, even, as the very last one, the dark-cellar storage-room where she and her four-year-old brother were found severely traumatised and speechless twenty-five years ago. Ellen is pregnant by now, with a girl, the result of one of her many casual, short-lived relationships with men. She decides to bear the child, she starts feeling maternal love, and she also starts nourishing feelings for Bas, a former agency-staff member and dear friend of hers, who still lives close to

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the house. Suffering a uterine prolapse, she has to remain in bed for the duration of her pregnancy, yet Bas is always there to help her in any matter.

Now, twenty-five years after her initial, catastrophic traumatisation, she receives from her former orphanage-assistant friend the only heirloom left from her childhood home: the *family photo album*. It has suddenly been retrieved at the institution after having been tucked away there without Ellen's knowledge. In bed now, and afresh in her childhood home, looking at the photos, Ellen starts her "dialogue" with this photographic medium: she writes as a first-person narrator – haphazardly, criss-cross, with vast temporal leaps back and forth. The sensorial impacts of the shifts to this medium and its images from her and her family members' distant past jump-shifts by proxy to the representational intrusion of other visible and heard media with "past" images, phrases (ads, fashion, culture), song lyrics (pop music), headlines (the newspaper cut-outs), lines of dialogue (films), politics (TV and the news media), etc. This massive textual-medial action now triggers the repressed and forgotten personal memories in Ellen.

When especially painful memories are touched upon, her discourse fences off and at times briefly fades over to third-person narration, then again back to first-person: obviously, she is initially not ready to repeat her traumas fully and confront their repressed memories. In these passages, she also writes in a dreamlike language, fantasising. However, she suddenly also recollects pleasant memories, and associates from them to sensual equivalences in other images, as well as to sensorial likenesses in an array of textual references and in medial phenomena. All of these she has previously truly sensed and lived by, but they have "lived on", as it were, "materially", yet have been in phenomenal oblivion for twenty-five years. In her necessarily cut-up writing, studying the photo album helps Ellen open up ruptures for other

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material images long lost, that are now unsystematically and obliquely jotted down on paper. Of great help is her diary's triggering of her memory. The same goes for her recollection of the news-agency's cut-up techniques; she lets snippets be marked down on paper: from politics, films, famous cinematic one-liners, rhythmic music, from her schooling in literature, ancient mythology, cultural history, from her acquired discourse of the medical profession and of forensic pathology, and more. There, one type of textuality, discourse, and mediality is superimposed upon the other. The "unsystematic systematic" of the archive and its modern corollary of a site in which history and reminiscences appear as shattered and are transformed into a dynamic space where shards of the past are reassembled and reshaped now stand her in good stead in an ongoing process that negotiates with the present.

The crevices produced out of such haphazard writing open sudden spaces for imaging and visibility even of her innermost hidden and repressed – and as yet *unphrased* – recollections: towards the end of her pregnancy, which she has spent writing, she carefully enters the area of their old kitchen. Yet beyond that, she also carefully tiptoes downstairs and enters the still dark cellar-storage room, in which the memories now emerge in repetitions of the boxed-in space where she sat hidden with her brother in the immediate aftermath of the initial mental traumatisation that had struck her. Triggering her repressed memory still further is the sudden appearance in her mind of the strongly emotional and sensorial image of her four-year-old brother, terrified to death. And then, returning to her, now as conscious understanding, is as well the internalisation of her distrust of her Dad, and by extension: of other men. The important insight emerges, too, that what traumatically took hold of her, as it were like a destiny, was a mental blow that then, at the age of twelve, she had no available resources to master.

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Now, on the other hand, both language's *phrasal* power and its unique *sensorial imaging* power become creative tandem resources for her. In this process she undergoes a freeing-out, a kind of liberation, for her future life and further insight to come: she decides to name her yet unborn baby girl *Ida-Sophie*. By way of the impact of the use of names, she seeks liberation from her deepfelt, lifelong emotions of guilt and shame on occasion of her memory of her then newborn baby sister *Ida*. It turns out, to Ellen's further despair, that Mom during her severe illness has kept stabbing and bruising the infant. Ellen's guilt has for years been connected to her youthful irritation and frustration over yet another child in the family twenty-five years ago, which made her convince the family to name her now long deceased sister *Ida*: at the time, it was the ugliest name Ellen could think of. Now, Ellen's decision to name her own child Ida-Sophie abates her feelings of guilt and shame, while, in accordance with the second half of the name, her own child will prospectively be an "Ida-Who-Knows", possessing insight, thus tentatively settling Ellen's issue of bad conscience in an act of "nominal" atonement.

Bas meets with Ellen again and starts helping her with the house and garden. He is another twisted soul and soulmate, who masters *his* mental life with a daily intake of Prozac, and by now runs a productive gardening centre nearby. Ellen, who started the work on her recently regained garden before she became bedridden, and Bas, the expert gardener, labour extensively with the cultivation of ornamental plants and communicate partly in the language of horticulture, which triggers yet more memories for Ellen. – Bas becomes an agent in the service of mediation in Ellen's process of reconciliation, not least when he incidentally finds in her house and submits to Ellen the documentation of her Dad's factual ticket purchase for a holiday trip he had planned for Mom and

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himself to Florida during the period of Mom's post-partum depression. The sudden appearance of this object, in a sense also a "medium", finally convinces Ellen that she has judged her Dad wrongly. This is clear evidence that Ellen's Dad *did* try to help his wife and to prevent their post-birth commotion of twenty-five years ago, which, as Ellen and Bas corroborate, also comprised her mother's violent-aggressive torture of her little baby. Dad did wish to make life easier for his wife, to assist her, to save the children from extra burdens, and to take Mom for a trip to rest and gain new experiences. Having gained this insight, a period of guilty shame and finally true mourning for her Dad follows for Ellen. Her emotions of violent bereavements and of the imagined fundamental betrayal abate. By now, she finds reconfirmation of trust and genuine love in her emerging memory of him. He never betrayed or deceived her. – Along the same lines, *Bas* now purchases tickets to Florida for Ellen and himself, and a possible future and life together presents itself, as a family of three.

The imaging power of rupture

In some of the analytical comments above, it has already in part been necessary to move from the novel's *story-line* dimension to its dimension of *imaging rupture*, where elements are suddenly forgrounded in the leaps of the narrative and its forking off in new directions. Fictional narratives related to the representation of mental trauma make active use of and draw upon creative speech-acts and textual-medial performativity, both of which help repressed memories to be triggered sensorially and to become visible and sayable through the active production of memories. This is how fictional narratives sensorially work towards the representation of individuated, "lived" and "experienced" life. Here, textual representation works towards making sensorially visible and audible that

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which has remained unseen and unheard until it breaks loose in visible repetitions of repressed experiences. While sensorially inherent in that of which it speaks, and directly involving the senses, in terms of therapeutic effect this representational process foregrounds another, affective kind of healing through the use of language to promote discursive knowledge and activates a power to release compelling insights that exist only on the brink of the sayable.

Dorrestein's novel abounds in textually imaging actions, as well as in the erupting impacts of sudden shifts between represented medial phenomena that are superimposed upon one another. Thus, a high number of instantaneous textual-medial shifts and repetitions occur throughout the text by way of the crevices and ruptures they open, and they make space for an alternate visibility, bringing memories to the verge of becoming new sayabilities. Such occurrences are imaging events in Dorresten's narrative prose fiction. They produce perceptional likenesses, which extend across a variety of local contexts. I have already pointed to the importance of the numerous shifts back and forth to the family photo album, and the repetitive imaging of the crucial cut-up "structure-without-structurality" of the newspaper archive, the existence of which Ellen now recalls as it serves as a model for her disruptive narrative. Yet there is more. In the following I give a comprehensive analysis of the imaging-rupturing cuts and shifts in textuality and between the represented media in the novel, which imbue the text with instantaneous impacts from a diversified pattern of actional linguistic repetitions.

A Heart of Stone plays with numerous texts and various discursive practices, genres, and media. It involves a complex, cut-up, and fragmented first-person narrative code including dialogue, a thorough aesthetic, plenitude-oriented composition, snippets from and fragmented references to the Bible (Easter, Christmas Eve), and Greek myth (Medea and Jason;

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Eros and Thanatos). It has the structural similarities with elements of the melodrama, the thriller, newspaper and magazine journalism, and with the techniques involved in photography (and the vocabulary of the photographer: not least the focus on the momentary shutter and opening device of the camera lense – the adept photographer in the family is Ellen's brother Kes). Furthermore, there are the repeated impacts of the workings of the cut-and-glued archive, numerous scraps of rhythmic music and lyrics excerpts, and innumerable references to films and film stars, as well as excerpts of characters' and lines dialogue. There are quotations from other modern media, serial fragments of the discourses of the current politics of the 1960s and the 1970s, and of the areas of reported criminality, and public life. Moreover, repeated snippets occur of commercials for modern fashion and hygiene products, and manifold, reported events from the modern cultural history of the USA and the Netherlands. There are repetitively recurring elements of the discourse of forensic pathology, of the discourse of medical science in general, and from the dialoguing of psychotherapy's working-through in particular. There are even scraps from the official time-tables of Nederlandse Spoorwegen, from various purchases and travelling tickets, and there is a host of repetitions of vernacular and cultural gestures of the time, even including repeated elements of a language of morbidity, the discourse of the art of gardening and horticulture, etc.

All of these, repetitively superimposed upon one another throughout, have in the fictional world of the novel been individually experienced. The disruptive leaps that they, in their perceptional similarities, extend across the story line's externally controlled contexts of the *human*-life story, crack up that immediately "understandable", general story. Although personalised to some degree, individually lived mental trauma cannot be mastered merely by a narrative language that is

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external to that of which it speaks. Trauma is also a unique, embodied experience, and is in need of apt representation, sensorially internal to that of which it speaks. Therefore, in the cracks and crevices that this massive sensorial imaging opens up, even repressed emotions and memories are stirred and triggered. They may come to be perceived, anew, as repetition of something that Ellen, in her individuated case, has not known the existence of for years.

The talking cure

We have already looked at a quite special, potential "talking-cure" pattern in *A Heart of Stone*, where Ellen, presented with the family photo album, first "reads" what the photographs tell her, then responds by writing in her own tentative and fragmented language. This device is quite comprehensive throughout the novel; it doubtlessly also functions as a liberating, "talking-cure" work for Ellen, in which she gradually frees herself from feelings of guilt and shame, yet also manages to set her own repressed memories free.

Here I will draw attention to another talking-cure pattern, which also gives the fragmented novelistic text a comprehensive composition: the textual play between Ellen the first-person narrator and the implied author, which in turn opens up a textual play of two types of repetition (Miller 1982). In the formal "dialogue" with Ellen, the implied author creates a crucial compositional layer in the novel: among other things, the implied author, understood as an instance of subjectivity in the text, shapes the novel into two main parts containing three photo-reading chapters in each, plus an epilogue. The implied author also supplies the necessary plenitude of compositional form by way of a more or less even distribution of repetitional word-strings, motifs, as well as by a system of expressive gestures. Examples of these are Dad's already

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mentioned "Ellen, you are the cement of the family"; "You are fine just the way you are", and furthermore, Dad's loyal wink of an eye above his eyeglasses (Dorrestein 2001: *passim*). The implied author aesthetically enacts the repetitive distribution of names like Ida and Ida-Sophie, which like other of these devices function as *Leitmotifs*. The implied author also installs relevant and congenial excerpts and references to concrete myths from the Greek world. There are elements of the myth of Medea and Jason (Medea murdered her children to spite her husband's unfaithfulness), and of the myth of Eros and Thanatos, which Freud alludes to in his essays on "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) and "Mourning and Melancholia" (1915). The latter myth is cleary a narrative that is central to both Freud's and the novel's ongoing dicussion of the instinctual life drive and death drive, both of which are compatible with the struggles in Ellen's traumatised mind.

The "dialogue" between these two sensorial voice-and-visibility instances – Ellen the first-person narrator and the implied author – is the space of another parallel to psychoanalysis' talking-cure in *A Heart of Stone*. Here lies the aesthetically and therapeutically successful negotiation into a creative sentence-image with a truly performative force (Rancière 2007: 46), installed by and in between the two linguistic extremes of sayability and visibility – the phrasal power of continuity, and the imaging power of rupture – that I discussed in my initial theoretical section leading up to the formulation of my research questions. It turns out that the sentence-image carries highly productive powers in late modern narrative art about mental trauma, repressed memory, imaging, and media shifts, and possesses in high measure the potential to produce the requirements for a processual formation of healing and a livable meaning as insight for both fictional characters as well as readers. (1) The phrasal power of combination little by little exerts the rudiments of a story

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line to be understood as meaningful and turned into encoded knowledge, whether or not it is actually Ellen's life story, or the product of the power of narrative. (2) The massively active and rapidly shifting imaging power of rupture, of not yet encoded, speechless images, memories, intertexts, and modern media, somehow resonate repetitively with each other, working as substitutes and triggering instances of the innermost repressed memories, images, and emotions. – The outcome of the cure-through-dialogue compositional form is that the imaging power gets interspersed with and momentarily provides sensual repetitions of individually, perceived materials that are repressed, and brings them onto the threshold of sayability. Their crevices creatively open up for visibility (to Ellen, to the implied author, and to readers) – a visibility of lived and experienced matter that Ellen has kept repressed for twenty-five years.

In conclusion

This concludes the discussion of my first research question: what can aesthetic narrative and aesthetic use of media achieve in relation to the understanding and the therapeutic healing, or self-therapeutic processing, of mental trauma? – It is time to attempt formulate an answer to the second question I raised: what qualities of aesthetic or literary and medial language are apt to capture the chaotically condensed or substituted sensual impressions, memories, images, and strong emotions of a severely traumatised life? What *is* aesthetically performative prose-fictional language?

My answer would be that it is a language which *acts textually*: it does what it says. Or, as in performative memory constructions: by the impacts of sudden shifts and repetitions, it truly *re*-installs into the world – and yet anew – sensorial, lived, and experienced images, yet still without full phras-

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ing. These are images which either were not there before, or that have been expelled (repressed) from the world, and now become creatively reinstated by sensorially imaging repetition. This is so, as theories of what truly are speech acts and performatives teach us, while the creativity or performativity of language depends on the installation of elements endowed with deictic-shifter functions *and their iterability*. "Deictic shifters" means elements that are placeholders in language pointing to the embodied and situated nature of language use (Austin 1975; Jakobson 1957a and b; Miller 2001, 2010, 2014): "I am, you are, they are here, and hold this place". But at the same time: "this phenomenon here, holds this place".

Furthermore, the repetition of the shifts between iterated placeholders creates a complex textual play of self-referentiality that extends across a variety of localised and ordered, pre-encoded discursive contexts. To take full effect, however, this creative play must be "countersigned": other subjective instances in the literary text, or readers, viewers, crucially somebody, must agree, so to speak, about the perceptionally-impacting direction and function of these placeholders (images, time levels, place indicators, textual motifs, snippets of phrases or word-strings, or the operative manner of represented media, truly experienced and sensed by reading the text). The other must agree, *countersign*, that these iterated placeholding-imagings are also sensed and experienced as lived by him or her. When that *happens* in language, then the creative play takes productive effect (Derrida 1982). – Within the novel's fictional world, a character that takes on the role of other in this sense, and productively countersigns the textually self-referential play that extends across a variety of contexts, is obviously Bas, who by extension creatively helps "re-ground" Ellen's writing in a newly understood life context that has space both for Ellen, the coming baby girl, and himself.

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Referring by shifts, ruptures and repetition *to each other*, and subsuming-comprising *different* localised contexts, these sudden leaps are by their impacts enabled to carve out and draw the contours of a new, or reproduce anew, an alternative communicative space to be phrased. This also goes for repressed memories. Deictic placeholders, images, and memories, as well as represented media in Dorrestein's case, utter themselves *inherently*; they are real matter without an already proscribed phrasing – they make themselves visible, hearable, as sensorial, experiential "insight". They do need language's power of phraseability and combinatorics as well, in order to reach the completeness of sayability, and eventually to attain the level of *external*, generalised knowledge. Yet primarily they are powers of *inherent*, sensorial imaging matter. Thus aesthetic narratives are engaged in an oblique play between *knowing* and *doing*, between the mimetically understandable and the as yet unkown. This play, as is also the case in the aesthetically narrative representation of mental trauma, opens up for the impact of an experienced space of alterity – another existence, unhinged from the repressive power of already encoded social bonds. When such narratives include the matter of repressed memory, they possess the power to lay the grounds for liberation and atonement, and to function as instances of (self-)reconciliatory work in language.

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"The past still has possibilities": The Art of Memory in Daniel Eisenberg's Postwar Films

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Mnemotechnics have always relied on the visualization of space, storing time by means of spatial images. From the memory palace of ancient Roman rhetoric and the memory theater of the Venetian Renaissance to Pierre Nora's distinction between *lieux* and *milieux de mémoire*, the long spatial turn taken by memory studies is one that has gradually moved from virtual to physical space. The two founding fathers that laid the ground for the study of collective memory in the 1920s both took recourse to cartography, charting the process of recollection mediated through complex spatial networks. In *On Collective Memory* (1925) the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs outlined a practice through which memory first is grafted onto the terrain and then summoned up from it, as visible landmarks come to serve as placeholders for a shared vision of the past. Our physical surroundings provide not only a medium for the storage and retrieval of memory,

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Halbwachs argued, but also a social framework (*cadres sociaux*) that binds collectives together over time.

The atlas of pictorial memory that was compiled at the same historical moment by the German-Jewish art historian Aby Warburg bluntly contradicted the territorializing logic of Halbwach's mnemonic topography. Named after the Greek goddess of memory and the river in Hades from which the initiated drank to recall their past lives, the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-28) was designed to trace psychic states of pain or passion embedded in images from pagan antiquity to the present (Warburg 2013-16). Continually rearranging his eclectic collection of iconographic material onto wooden boards stretched with black canvas, Warburg conceived of his *Bilderatlas* as a seismograph to register the chthonic waves and tremors that rippled below the territory of cultural knowledge.

These early forays into the topographies and undercurrents of collective memory were to cross paths with a very different campaign to redraw the map, guided by the geopolitical concept of *Lebensraum*, the ultimate aim of which was the systematic destruction of the memory of European Jewry. Whereas Warburg's library was rescued from the Nazi takeover in 1933, smuggled out of Hamburg and shipped to London, Halbwachs was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944 and killed in Buchenwald shortly before the war's end. The oft-mentioned imbrication of memory studies and the atrocities of the Second World War may thus be said to have predated the revelations of the Nazi camps and their entry into the awareness of the outside world.

Unacknowledged during the war, demolished by the perpetrators before they fled the scene, and suppressed in the memory of those who survived them, the camps were long to remain, to paraphrase Nora, a *non-lieux de mémoire*. Since no public memories of the camps were formed outside the

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system while they were in operation, the collective memory of the killing campaigns was from the outset a confrontation with a place after the event. This confounded relation between *imagines* and *loci* – the ability to form mental images and the location, real or virtual, from where they may be retrieved, following the principles stipulated by the art of memory – would emerge as a key concern during the rise of cultural memory studies in the early nineties, reflected in its prevailing paradigms of post-memory, trauma, and secondary witnessing. These terms convey a fundamental uncertainty about the provenance of memory, as memories are no longer properly confined to the interior of the consciousness of the individual subject, but seem to be lurking somewhere on its fringes.

The coinage of the concept of post-memory is part of a general inflation of proclaimed aftermaths: the post-modern, post-historical, post-national, post-colonial, post-racial, post-medial, and so on. The prefix *post-* doesn't so much seem to mark an end as a return, however, for by proclaiming the end of something one also asserts its afterlife. As understood by James E. Young, post-memory denotes a "vicarious past" (Young 1998), that is to say, an afterlife of memory. It was precisely the conditions for such an afterlife, or *Nachleben*, that Warburg had set out to trace across the panels of his *Mnemosyne Atlas*. In common with the convoluted logic of post-memory, the survival of pagan antiquity pursued by Warburg thus poses a challenge to how the temporal structure of memory has commonly been understood. In her posthumously published book *The Life of the Mind* (1978), for example, Hannah Arendt describes the act of recollection as a fully conscious, causal, and controlled process in which the faculty of imagination transforms a sensation into an image:

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> Mnemosyne, Memory, is the mother of the Muses, and remembrance, the most frequent and also the most basic thinking experience, has to do with things that are absent, that have disappeared from my senses. Yet the absent that is summoned up and made present to my mind – a person, an event, a monument – cannot appear in the way it appeared to my senses, as though remembrance were a kind of witchcraft. In order to appear to my mind only, it must first be de-sensed, and the capacity to transform sense-objects into images is called "imagination". (Arendt 1978: 85)

In the play of presence and absence outlined by Arendt, what has disappeared from the senses reappears in the mind. The model of historical memory implemented by Warburg, however, may indeed be described as "a kind of witchcraft", suggested by his description of the *Mnemosyne Atlas* as a ghost story for adults and of the researcher of pictorial memory as a necromancer. This has also been the crucial point emphasized by Giorgio Agamben in his enduring commentary on Warburg, commenced in 1975 after a year-long study in the Warburg Institute Library in London, and most recently expounded in his book-length essay *Nymphs*, written almost four decades later. While insisting, like Arendt, that "memory is impossible without an image" (Agamben 2013: 9), the possibility of memory requires that images are returned to, and reanimated by, the senses. Here, Agamben refracts Warburg's notion of imagistic memory through Walter Benjamin's conception of the historical index, the epiphanic and flash-like actualization of the past in the present that allows us to glimpse them together, if only for an instant. Irretrievably lost if not recognized at this critical point in the present, in the now of recognizability that Benjamin understood as a moment of awakening, the image of the past is always in danger of disappearing.

Following Agamben, the task to bring images back to life,

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to summon the ghosts in order to break their spell, is tantamount to the task of redeeming the past that Benjamin attributes to the historical materialist. In the labor of post-memory, the process described by Arendt would thus appear to be cast in reverse, as memories have to be re-sensed in order to be imagined. For what is passed on from one generation to the next is not so much a memory as its ruin, conveyed through silences, symptoms, and gestures. Yet somehow, or somewhere, this experience needs to be confronted. Post-memory does not only expand the field of memory, then; it literally requires fieldwork, as memories have to be relocated and thus mediated before they can be recollected.

This point merits a return to the question of *loci*. In a passage from her novel *Beloved* (1987), written a few years before the discourse on post-memory gained momentum, Toni Morrison coined her notion of rememory. Markedly different from the condition of latency and relay that informs post-memory, rememory impels a search for, and a sensuous engagement with, the places of past events. Morrison thus conceives of rememoration as a physical encounter in the present, an event that takes place at the crossroads of site and imagination:

> Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my rememory but out there in the world. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there – you who never was there – if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (Morrison 2007: 43)

There is a slippage in these paragraphs from a place to a picture, at once conjured in the mind and remaining as an afterimage on the site itself. Images are not projected and impressed on space, then, as in the mnemonic architecture

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envisioned by Greco-Roman rhetoricians, or in the collective frameworks described by Halbwachs, but linger there in a state of dormancy. Furthermore, memories do not "appear to my mind only", as Arendt asserts, but are instead summoned to reappear through the stimuli of a bodily sensation, reactivated in the process of being relocated as they are endowed with the concreteness, texture, materiality, and there-ness of place. According to Jean Cayrol, a survivor of the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp, "[m]emories are intransmissible" (quoted in Wilson 2005: 93). For a work of post-memory to commence, then, new memories need to be obtained. The custodian of the traumatic experiences of a former generation thus has to develop a picture of the scene of a crime that took place before his own conscious experience.

The postwar trilogy

The reciprocal process of relocation and recollection outlined above has been pursued in three films made by Daniel Eisenberg between 1981 and 1997. A second-generation survivor of the Second World War, Eisenberg's father spent two and a half years in the Soviet labor camp system, while his mother spent two years in the slave labor and concentration camps. They met by chance at Dachau at the end of the war. Eisenberg has described the evasive and oblique manner in which his parents responded to his inquiries about these experiences as "a screen between memory and its expression" (Eisenberg 2007). While heavily invested in notions of indexicality and site-specificity, Eisenberg's films also suggest that the physical sites are themselves liable to congeal into screen memories, and that events are susceptible to be forgotten on the very sites where they once occurred.

Loosely grouped together as the postwar trilogy, each film in this cycle configures its own particular proximity between

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place, memory, and the medium of cinema. As the trilogy gradually expands in scope and complexity, from the first short film to the last full-length feature, each film also actively disengages itself from the strategy of the previous one in order to mark a new point of departure for yet another foray into the past. Taken together, the art of memory performed between them entails a double strategy of mining the archive and mapping it onto the topography of the present.

The following analysis will address the fundamental duplicity that marks the postwar terrain stalked by Eisenberg, one that alerts us both to the risk of reifying the past, and to the possibility of its redemption. In other words, it aims to shed some light on the manners in which space, the first prosthetic memory according to the ancient *ars memoriae*, may at once serve to cover up and conjure back the past.

Displaced Person

The first film in the series, *Displaced Person* (1981), is comprised from four apparently unrelated sources: newsreel footage from *Die Deutsche Wochenshau* shot during Hitler's visit to Paris on the dawn of June 25, 1940; a sequence of two boys riding a bike in New York taken from an American Newsreel from the 1930s; a radio lecture given by Claude Lévi-Strauss in 1978; and a string quartet by Beethoven. Eisenberg has retraced the original impulse of *Displaced Person* to an unsettling experience of *déjà vu* when attending a screening of Max Ophüls's compilation film *The Sorrow and the Pity* (1969):

> In *Displaced Person*, there is an image early in the film, of Hitler's entry into Paris on June 1940, when he steps out of his limousine and passes the gates of La Madeleine. He momentarily stops and looks up before going forward. When I first saw that image in *The Sorrow and*

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the Pity in a classroom in 1972, a shudder went through me. Not for any remarkable reason, but for the simple fact that just a few months prior to seeing the image I had stopped at that very spot, on my first trip to Europe. […] Seeing that image in the classroom jolted me into a realization of the ghostliness of that European landscape, a place where so many traumatic and historical events occurred that neither the landscape nor the calendar could sufficiently narrativize them without superimposing them, conflating them, or compressing them into an assemblage of ironic details and fragments […] and in some strange way Hitler and I had crossed paths in time. (Eisenberg 2003)

The mnemonic cue that triggers the postwar project, the gesture of pausing before *La Madeleine*, invokes the seminal source for what Proust termed an involuntary memory: the "shudder" that runs through the author of *Remembrance of Things Past* upon tasting the *petite madeleine* (Proust 1989: 48).[1] In *Displaced Person*, this shudder also registers on a formal level. In common with the two films to follow, the film's title conveys a distinct aesthetic strategy for working on memory. It alludes not only to the intersecting paths of the filmmaker and the Führer, but also to the displacements that the viewer and the archival images and sounds are subjected to. Scavenged from an exhibition print of Ophüls's film, Eisenberg has manipulated the German newsreel footage with the aid of an optical printer, repeating the brief fragments of women greeting the Führer at the train station and of his sightseeing tour through the defeated city in different

1 Nora M. Alter also notes this pun in her analysis of the sound score of *Displaced Person*: "Proust's now infamous 'Madeleine' biscuit, the smell or taste of which unleashed memories of a lost time, has transformed into an equally powerful mnemonic device as an architectural structure of La Madeleine. In both instances, the linguistic signifier of the proper name 'Madeleine', whether a cake or a church, serves as a memory trigger. The 'Madeleine' brings back past time, a history, and forces into the present day consciousness" (Alter 2010: 49).

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variations and combinations. Re-cropping the aspect ratio of the original images, pulling the focus, chopping up subtitles, and repeating and interrupting motions and gestures, it is as if the archival footage was itself beset by nervous tics and convulsions.

The particular historical juncture that Eisenberg locates at the gate of *La Madeleine*, and the compulsive reworking of the brief strip of film that it engenders, calls for a closer consideration of the formal relation between memory and cinema. "There is no need to shoot film anymore, just to repeat and stop", Agamben has concluded on the basis of the compilation techniques developed by Guy Debord and Jean-Luc Godard (Agamben 2002: 315). These two interventions also constitute what he describes as the transcendental conditions of montage: stoppage, which obstructs time and pulls the image out of the narrative flow of meaning; and repetition, which restores possibility to the past by repeating it otherwise and thus rendering "it possible anew" (ib.: 316). To interrupt and to repeat thus entails "the power to 'decreate' facts" and to give back possibility to what was (Agamben 2014: 26). For Agamben, this definition applies to memory as well as cinema, as both are able to "transform the real into the possible and the possible into the real" (Agamben 2002: 316). The proximity between cinema and the process of recollection, which actively re-arranges and re-edits impressions of the past, is further highlighted in *Displaced Person* through the ruptures and gaps between the images, as the grainy snippets of newsreel-footage, stopped and repeated in the film, are interspersed with black leader, the strips of opaque emulsion joined to the head or tail of a reel of film.

Splicing the archival footage with black leader not only foregrounds the cuts between images, and hence their un-linking and non-linearity; it also instantiates an open-endedness, a

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reversibility of beginning and end. Such anachronistic breaks and ruptures were a crucial element in the methodology developed by Aby Warburg. It was precisely in this *Zwischenraum*, the interval or interspace facilitated by the black felt-covered panels of the *Mnemosyne*, that the mnestic energies embedded in the images were to be ignited. As Pasi Väliaho has pointed out,

> [o]ne of the Atlas's striking features is that the sphere of potentialities is harnessed in the black intervals […] [t]he black gaps between the actual images become temporally oriented intervals, verging on the abyss of time, which each image emerges from and falls back into. (Väliaho 2010: 155)

This is also where the theory of post-memory intersects with Warburg's *Mnemosyne*. In both cases, the space of potentiality resides in gaps and ruptures, in the lapses of memory and the lacunae between the images. The afterlife of memory is not facilitated by continuity (as in oral tradition, or in established lineages of influence or imitation), but through the construction of new and unexpected pathways in the process of editing disparate elements together.

In an interview with Frances Guerin, Eisenberg has described *Displaced Person* as a deliberate attempt to free images from the discursive constraints of the archive in order to allow us to "enter them through the present, whereas most of the narrative-driven images can be only accessed through a reference to the past" (Guerin 2012: 113). The re-sensing of the archive performed through the loops and repetitions of *Displaced Person* further stands as a counterpoint to the official commemorative architecture surveyed by the Nazi newsreel. Hence the film cautions us about the merging of memory and topography, and about accessing a place in the past tense. As Hitler and his entourage of artists and architects pass from one monument to the next – the Paris Opera, *La Madeleine*, the

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Pantheon, Notre Dame, the Arc de Triomphe, and the Eiffel Tower – the sleeping capital is transformed into what Eisenberg calls "a theme park of Western culture" (Eisenberg 2003). Such "theme parks", or screen memories, will also be traversed in the two films to follow, where the problem of memory more acutely comes to be articulated as a problem of locality.

Cooperation of Parts

Like *Displaced Person*, the second part of the cycle, *Cooperation of Parts* (1987), begins with a train journey. This one, however, marks a gesture of pulling out of the archive. The voiceover describes a black and white photograph of Eisenberg's parents as they board a train out of Germany in 1949, but what we see is instead the exterior platform at Calais/the Gare de Lyon, Paris in the present, shot in color. The photograph described is never shown. In fact, nothing 'personal' is shown. In *Cooperation of Parts*, it is not found footage that will be subjected to displacement, but the filmmaker himself. The film was shot in the spring and summer of 1983 on a journey from Paris and Berlin to his parents' birthplaces in Poland. With two decades of hindsight, Eisenberg has explained this journey as "an attempt to find an image of the past to which I knew full well I had no access" (Eisenberg 2007). *Cooperation of Parts* also transmits images inaccessible to the deportees, locked in boxcars, whose journey it retraces, as in a sequence early in the film shot through the window of a passenger train en route to Dachau. As the train gathers speed, the view of the Polish countryside dissolves into an agitated blur. Eisenberg continues: "My intention in filming was not to recuperate images from my parents' experience, but instead, to establish my own presence in the world, through the inscription of my own body into these spaces" (Eisenberg 2007).

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The gestural and impressionistic camerawork in *Cooperation of Parts* conveys not so much images as a frantic quest for them. Shot with a hand-cranked 16-mm camera that roams across cityscapes and countrysides, it is deliberately "hard on the eyes" (Guerin 2012: 117). While having abandoned the archive, the film, in its gestures of collecting, assembling, observing, and exhibiting, nonetheless appears beset by an "archive fever". As the voiceover declares: "I'm taking this all in. Accumulating evidence, facts, figures. Finally it can be put down in the columns". This obsessive yet random inventory is also a search for a remedy against what the voiceover calls "a phantom pain. Something unseen yet intensely present".

As in *Displaced Person*, the implications of the title *Cooperation of Parts* are at once biographical and formal. On a personal level, it refers to the phantom limbs – echoed in the dismembered figures on ornamental friezes in Berlin – that at once haunt and constitute the autobiography of the second-generation survivor. On the formal level, it invokes the tenuous constellation of fragments whose potential meaning is always elusive, shifting, and polymorphic. Scurrying around at a frantic pace, the camera sometimes shakes uncontrollably, as if afflicted by a kind of tremor that prevents a clear and focused perception. Rather than being monitored by the eye or mind, the camera registers the movements of the body interacting with the site. A corollary to these juddering images is provided by the voiceover, as the filmmaker reflects on the wartime experience of his mother: "It was through her, not through her conscious intention that these things passed. Like a shockwave felt through several generations".

This seismic disturbance is most viscerally conveyed in the sequences filmed at the empty campgrounds at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The scattered views of the fields and fences, the watchtowers and dormitories, the gravel paths, the rails, and

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the row of ovens, seem intent on disturbing the intolerable stillness that now reigns over the sites, once crowded and teeming with activity. In light of the method devised by ancient mnemotechnics, however, the blurry, off-kilter imagery seems foremost to indicate the failure to align an image to a location in order to make it serve as a cue for recollection. The trans-generational "shockwave" indexed by the camera on site further resonates with the discourse of Warburg and the art historian's intuition that dormant memories could be stirred to resurface by wrestling images from their given coordinates in space and time. In common with Warburg, then, the image is not conceived as a fixed and formal unity, but rather as a medium for the transmission of psychic intensities and paroxysms across generations.

In a short essay called "Making it Safe" Eisenberg reflects at length on the fraught relation between site and memory by making a comparison between his visit to the compound at Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1983, which he describes as an experience of intense solitude and austerity, and a more recent return to the site, almost twenty years later. At the time of his revisit, Eisenberg notes, the campground had been transformed into "a theme park" for "the tourism industry" (Eisenberg 2007). The paths had been covered with asphalt, the lake of ashes framed by memorial stones, and the barracks remade into exhibition rooms. In this context, Eisenberg draws extensively on Pierre Nora's critique of how official commemorative culture tends to solidify the past into stable territorial landmarks that premediate our encounter with and response to them. As we turn to the final act of the postwar cycle, made in the aftermath of the breaching of the Berlin Wall as East and West were to reunite into the federal republic of Germany, it is precisely such a process of transforming spaces of historical upheaval into a spectral theme park of memory that is under scrutiny.

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Persistence

The erratic travelogue in *Cooperation of Parts* is supplemented by a stream of proverbs that are scattered throughout the film in subtitles and inter-titles. Two themes gradually emerge from this patchwork of secondhand phrases. The first one is concerned with seeing: "He who sees with other people's eyes is deceived" – "Seeing is believing" – "The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass" – "Truth pricks the eye" – "The odds are against the observed". The second theme concerns ruins: "Perhaps the ruins are necessary. Perhaps only absence has the power to endure" – "You could perceive these things in the ruins […]. The shards tell the story and prefigure the future". These two motifs – perception and ruin – coalesce in the final part of the postwar cycle, *Persistence* (1997), shot in the newly unified capital Berlin. In marked contrast to the free-hand and manual-wind camera in *Cooperation of Parts*, however, the measured pace of the static long takes and searching pans in *Persistence* is more akin to the rigor of a painter's easel, or the automated gaze of a surveillance camera.

The title in full, *Persistence*: *Film in 24 absences/presences/prospects*, highlights the material basis of cinema, since film doesn't capture but *create* movement, twenty-four frames per second. It was long believed that it was through the optical phenomenon known as the *persistence of vision* that the projection rate tricked the brain into reassembling a seamless flow from the flicker of single frames. While the theory of the after-image as the explanation for cinema's illusion of movement has long since been debunked and replaced with what physiological optics names the *phi*-effect, it was the conviction that images lingered across the gaps between discrete and inert frames that propelled the scientific experiments that would lead to the invention of moving pictures.

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Returning once more to his commentary on Warburg, Agamben has extrapolated an analogy between the physiological and the historical afterlife of images; that is, between the persistence of these ghostly traces of light, the afterimages that linger on the retina, and the persistence of the mnestic charge of images:

> The after-life of images is not, in fact, a given but requires an operation and this is the task of the historical subject (just as it can be said that the discovery of the persistence of retinal images calls for cinema, which is able to transform it into movement). By way of this operation, the past—the images passed down from preceding generations—that seemed closed up and inaccessible is reset in motion for us and becomes possible again. (Agamben 2013: 24)

Agamben's key intervention here is to connect what Warburg called *Pathosformeln*, the life and movement that has been petrified as a "moving fossil" or "memory trace" in the image, with Benjamin's concept of the historical index as "a threshold between immobility and movement" (Agamben 2013: 26). Historical materialism, as expounded by Benjamin in his posthumously published "Theses on the Philosophy of History", written in the interim of his release from a French internment camp and his failed flight from the Gestapo, privileges standstill as a mode for seizing the past as it "flashes up" or "flits by" in a moment of danger (Benjamin 1968: theses V-VI). In *Persistence*, Benjamin's notion of dialectics at a standstill is utilized to grasp a historical moment of immobility and indecisiveness, arrested between aftermath and anticipation, lateness and latency.

This influence is made explicit in the opening scene, where Benjamin's ninth thesis is cited as the film's first inter-title:

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"The Angel of History".[2] The quotation is followed by a close-up of the Victory Column in Tiergarten, shot with a telephoto lens from a moving train car in the distance. In an act of *détournement*, the female goddess of victory at the top of the column, originally erected to commemorate the Prussian Wars of Liberation, is turned into Benjamin's male angel who transfixes history's towering heap of debris that accrues before him, intent on extracting from this wreckage the memory not of triumph, but of the nameless and oppressed. In the opening shot of *Persistence*, which will recur as a leitmotif throughout the film, the barren trees in the surrounding park swirl by while the gilded statue remains focalized as the trembling center of the image. Optically processed to emulate the flicker-effect of proto-cinematic devices, the travelling shot establishes a sense of urgency about this particular moment, or breach, in time. In the stroboscopic flashes, the "angel" appears to tremble, as if shaken by the storm that has blasted him out of paradise. From the Victory Column, the film cuts to an airborne view circling above Berlin in 1945. Shot in vivid and saturated Kodachrome color-stock by US Signal Corps cameramen, and retrieved by Eisenberg from the Department of Defense archives, the glacial stillness is interrupted by the sudden appearance of life and movement within

2 Inspired by Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920), a monoprint once owned by Benjamin, his ninth thesis offers the following interpretation: "This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin 1968: 257-258).

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this mortified world. The vertical view of the bombed-out city in color is then followed by a horizontal view in black and white, an extract from Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (1948) in which the boy Edmund explores the same ruins on the ground.

In its acknowledgment of Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history, the imagery compiled in the first few minutes of *Persistence* also anticipates the thesis on "the natural history of destruction" that was developed by the German author W.G. Sebald in a series of lectures held in Zurich in the late autumn of 1997, right after *Persistence* was released. In the concluding paragraphs of the second lecture, which concerns Alexander Kluge's account of the destruction of Halberstadt, Sebald explicitly aligned the firebombing campaigns and the melancholic gaze of Benjamin's angel with a vivid image recalled from his childhood:

> few things were so clearly linked in my mind with the word 'city' as mounds of rubble, cracked walls, and empty windows through which you saw the empty air. (Sebald 2003: 74)

In *Persistence*, this view unfolds in the travelling shots recorded by the Signal Corps on the streets of Berlin: blue sky seen through blasted portals, burned walls, and armature jutting out of mounds of rubble. And, equally surreal, the gestures of everyday life carried out by the workers, children, and women with strollers in the midst of this destruction. The spatial hermeneutics pursued in *Persistence* also shares an affinity with the method of Jacques Austerlitz, the eponymous protagonist of Sebald's last novel, whose compulsive study of urban architecture by proxy is a labor of post-memory, painstakingly seeking to reconstruct his autobiography through traces collected in train stations, former ghettos, and film archives across Europe. In *Persistence*, the filmmaker is no longer concerned

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with the inscription of his body into the spaces he encounters, but with the inscriptions of time on the city and with the afterimages etched on the fabric of the built, and demolished, environment.

The constellation of past and present in *Persistence* converges in the two proclamations of *Stunde Null* in 1945 and 1989. These zero hours were conceived both as low points of history and as new beginnings, based on the bedrock of oblivion. Eisenberg's own predicament – caught between the persistence of his curiosity and his parent's resistance to recall the past – is now played out on the large demolition and construction site of Berlin.[3] This territory, replete with symptoms, déjà vus, and historical ironies, would also become the ground zero of the memory boom in the early nineties. Along these lines, the film develops an analogy between historicization and urban planning as parallel processes of strategic displacements, aimed at manipulating time and our perception of it.

The found and newly filmed footage lingers on the derelict houses and vacant spaces opened up in the urban fabric. Andreas Huyssen has referred to such disused lots, remainders of the Nazi destruction of the city's Jewish community, of the bombing raids in 1944-1945, and of the dismantled Wall, now sold off as souvenirs to tourists, as "the voids of Berlin" (Huyssen 1997). These barren zones also open history up for examination. In a formulation that once more brings Warburg to mind, Eisenberg describes the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe as

3 Along the lines of this spatial metaphor, and drawing on Hayden White's *The Modernist Event*, Eisenberg writes: "Holocausts of one kind or another remain traumatic in public and private memory because they are still sites of contention. And it's because present generations can't agree on the meaning of such events that these historical 'sites of contention' become active construction zones for artists, writers, and filmmakers" (Eisenberg 2003).

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a seismic rearrangement of social, historic, and political forces that allowed subconsciously suppressed memories (historical and personal) to rise to the surface. (Eisenberg 1997)

Such dormant memories seem particularly susceptible to resurfacing from the neglected plots of land sought out by the camera. Over the course of the film, this substrate also begins to impede on the sonic environment. At first, the inventory of Berlin is accompanied by a low ambient soundscape of rustling leaves, chirping birds, footsteps, the murmur of voices, car horns, and trolley cars. As the film progress, however, the timbre and texture of the soundtrack takes on a more menacing drone of industrial white noise, rattling trains, and rumbling jet engines, or maybe of bombing raids in the distance.

The first proper scene in the film was shot in July 1991, showing the *Elisabethkirche* while it still remained in a ruined state after the firebombing. Enveloped in the shades of dense vegetation with its perimeter walls overgrown with ivy, the site conforms to the staple conventions of the picturesque. In keeping with the method of the former films, the narration is displaced over the current images as the voiceover reads a text dating back to May 1983 and the making of *Cooperation of Parts*. *Elisabethkirche* is revisited at the end of the film, now in the process of reconstruction. The postwar trilogy thus ends with Berlin being restored to its pre-war – its pre-socialist and pre-Nazi – condition. Between the ruin and resurrection of *Elisabethkirche*, *Persistence* takes the Grand Tour through the ruins of Berlin, new and old, real and fake: the sea of rubble left after the air raids; the artificial ruins built by Frederick the Great on *Ruinenberg* to grace the view from his summer palace in Potsdam; the dumpsites of abandoned military hardware piled up at former military bases; and the broken mortar and masonry on the city's battered and crumbling facades.

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Approximately one-third into the film, there is a protracted sequence of static shots of half-demolished buildings in Berlin-Mitte, each one being marked by the imprint of a neighboring structure formerly attached to it. Accompanied only by ambient sound and continuing for five minutes, the images foreground the palimpsestic texture of the brickwork, etched with the trace of an erasure reminiscent of the chalk outlining of a victim's body at a crime scene. The facades are not scrutinized only for their forensic value, however, but to ignite a movement at a standstill, summoned through the stubborn persistence of the gaze. On one occasion, the viewfinder remains fixed for several minutes on a tall block across a railway platform as trains arrive and depart and passengers pass in and out of the frame. Recorded with the measured indifference of a surveillance camera, this view, which at first appeared overtly inert, gradually comes to life with ephemeral movement: the branches stirred by the breeze, the leaves trembling, and light and colors changing as the clouds pass, calling to mind D.W. Griffith's elegiac comment near the end of his life that modern cinema had lost "the beauty of moving wind in the trees" (Slide 2012: 217).

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Persistence *(Daniel Eisenberg, 1997). Courtesy of the artist.*

Through its persistence of vision, the film seeks to crystallize the past and the present into a single spatial configuration. In the multiple temporal registers superimposed over the course of the film, like the images of the *Elisabethkirche* which appears first as a picturesque ruin and later as a construction site, time appears to be moving in several, and sometimes opposite, directions. This method further entails a process of sifting through strata of gazes, exploring its various layers as well as the gaps between them. As Eisenberg has remarked, an image not only documents "what is seen, but a way of seeing" (Eisenberg 1997). To remember is thus to enter a field of crossing sightlines. Questioning each image by introducing yet another point of view, *Persistence* brings a host of conflicting vantage points to bear on the collapse of the Eastern block and the disintegration of the GDR. The theme is introduced with the conflation of the elevated viewpoint of the Roman goddess in Tiergarten and Benjamin's angel. It is followed, in turn, by the airborne view of the Signal Corps, the prospect of Ruinenberg set up by Frederick the Great; the

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surveillance machine of the Stasi; and the visionary gaze of the Communist idols, whose monumental heads are the only faces to appear in the film.

This stratification of gazes also comprises the film's own conditions of seeing. Early in the film, we see a man dressed in a trench coat from the viewpoint of a surveillance camera as he enters the Old National Gallery. Once inside, he encounters another displaced person, the famous ruin-gazer of the Nordic sublime, the *Rückenfigur* in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich. While the visitor adopts the posture of a *Rückenfigur* in front of a series of Friedrich's landscapes – "Cross in the Mountain", "Klosterruine Eldena", and "Woman by the Window" – the voiceover reads a transcript from a fictional surveillance file in the Stasi archive. The *mise en abyme* composition that concludes the first sequence from the gallery, where a panning shot directs the gaze of the cinema viewer to glance over the shoulder of the gallery viewer, who in turn attempts to peer over the woman by the window and into the landscape beyond, sets up a series of framing and obstructing devices. While commonly interpreted as a surrogate viewer and as a device to augment our immersion into the pictorial space of the canvas, the figure with their back to us does not, in fact, pull us into the scene but marks our constitutive absence from it. In Joseph Leo Koerner's analysis, the *Rückenfigur* is conceptualized as a kind of a *memento mori*, reminding us that, "we are neither the center nor the origin of our vision" (Koerner 1990: 277). Silently transfixed before the scene he surveys, poised on an edge or a threshold, Friedrich faceless observer conveys the authority of the original witness. Our own act of looking, then, is marked as a following and coming after. Blocking our path of vision, he makes us aware that we have arrived at the scene too late. Hence, the back-turned figure may stand as a cipher for the post-mnemonic

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condition, as a token of the impossibility of transgression and the insurmountable gap between generations.

Persistence *(Daniel Eisenberg, 1997). Courtesy of the artist.*

In a second scene from the gallery, which appears halfway through the film, the camera tries to overcome this condition, tracking from left to right and then back again in an attempt to peer over the shoulder of the *Rückenfigur*. In a graphic match, the film cuts from Friedrich's mist-swept horizon to a rural hamlet filmed by the Signal Corps. And, with merely a slight shift of viewpoint, the scenery changes as the camera tilts down to reveal that the fields and ditches are scattered with dead soldiers. We may recall that it was a similar alignment of gazes that caused the shudder out of which the postwar cycle germinated, the realization that the filmmaker and the Führer had "crossed paths in time". In the German newsreel dissected in *Displaced Person*, the camera follows Hitler close behind, framing him as an imposing *Rückenfigur* whose gaze lays claim to the city's landmarks, one by one.

Following the final shot of the back-turned figure contem-

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plating Friedrich's canvas, *Persistence* ventures into the former Stasi Headquarters on Normannenstraße, introduced by a slow panning shot inspecting the contents of a glass case filled with cameras used by the state security service. The evacuated power centers and memory institutions traversed in the film thus accrue a palimpsest of looking relations that suggest, in turn, that the deposits of succeeding political regimes are also imbricated with the sediments of ensuing scopic regimes. With each passage, a new way of seeing regulating the relation between observer and observed has to be adapted. The inter-titles repeat this theme in a series of variations: "With instructions for viewing" – "The rules of dispassionate observation" – "From the archive of everyday observations" – "From: the Archive of Former Views / To: the Museum of Former Views", and so forth. The former population of the GDR, referred to by the voiceover as an "army of keen but objective observers", is now to be reeducated into tourists of their own recent past.

It is not only the topography and toponyms of Berlin that are in state of flux and redefinition, then, but also the conditions for seeing and remembering. As old sites of memory are dismantled, new ones are established. In a striking reversal, the Stasi headquarters have now become a state museum.[4] Another scene shows the shiny surgical instruments neatly arranged as a still-life in a glass cabinet at the Human Experimentation Laboratory at Sachsenhausen. Thus, former sites of terror are transformed into present sites of culture, and instruments of oppression into souvenirs. Repeatedly in

4 We may recall that it was such an institutional passage that provided the starting point for Jacques Derrida's reflections on the violence of the archive in *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, pondering on the institutional make-over of Freud's house in London into the Freud Archives, also the venue of the conference where Derrida first presented his lecture in 1994 (Derrida 1998).

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these inventories of Berlin's new *lieux de memoire*, the camera tracks into the dark corners of a room where it then remains, as if trapped and unable to find a way out.

Rather than the "measureless plains" of memory once roamed by Augustine (Augustine 2002: 254), the memorials and reconstruction sites examined by the meandering camera in *Persistence* begin to appear as a maze of dead ends. Once more, then, Eisenberg cautions us about the formalization of memory and the risk of reducing history to a series of images fixed in space and frozen in time. Yet, the final act of the postwar trilogy may also be conceived, in common with Warburg's atlas, as both a seismograph and "a belated memory palace" (Johnson 2012: 10), one that seeks to salvage the symptoms and anachronisms that erupt across the postwar terrain before they are covered over and lost in time. As for Benjamin, the image of the past is always in peril, always on the verge of congealing into rigorous forms. And in keeping with Benjamin's notion of memory as the antidote to the sequential accounts of traditional historicism, Eisenberg's art of memory – collecting and conjuring images, inscribing the body, or arresting the gaze – is determined to set spaces in motion. Rather than mooring *imagines* to *loci*, the possibility of memory thus resides in the gaps and fractures that open up between them.

Coda

Persistence concludes at the Marx-Engels-Forum, one of the few monuments to be spared after the reunion. The penultimate image in the film is a frontal view of the authors of the *Communist Manifesto* facing the east, where the parliament of the GDR and the Soviet Union no longer stand. After posing for a group photo, the crowd of tourists clears off and reveals the graffiti spray-painted on the platform: "wir sind

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unschuldig". For the last image, the camera switches position to a counter-shot filmed from the rear, turning the founders of the socialist movement into *Rückenfiguren* overlooking the post-communist cityscape. On the back of the platform there's a second inscription: "Beim nächsten mal wird alles besser" [Next time everything will be better]. The effect is all the more startling since the last shot is also the first counter-shot in the entire film, which up until this moment has unfolded in establishing and exploratory shots. Recalling Marx's famous riff on Hegel's statement that history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce, the image also conveys a more subtle irony, as the two philosophers do not only peer into a future they couldn't foresee (the New Hotel Stadt Berlin in Alexanderplatz) but also straight into the Fernsehturm.[5] In fact, it has been there all along, looming behind the "Angel" in Tiergarten, as if piercing him. *Fernseh*, of course, translates as "far-sight", or tele-vision: the ability to see across distances in time. It's also the medium that transmits, in "real-time", the historical events, and their anniversaries, as they unfold one after the other in an ever-accelerating pace.

Eisenberg's own effort to observe time in *Persistence* is ironically counterpointed on the soundtrack by the repeated announcement of Greenwich Mean Time, the global time

5 In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852), Marx writes that "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce" (Marx 1962: 247). The comment has accrued an additional irony with the passing of the new anti-communist law in Ukraine in 2015, ordering that all communist monuments shall be demolished and 25 cities and 1500 streets renamed. Furthermore, the leader of the Ukraine Institute of National Memory, an amateur historian by name of Volodymyr Vjatrovytj, has officially been appointed to construct a new national history from the sources of the National Archive, including the archive previously belonging to the KGB, now under the custody of the Memory Institute.

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standard reported from the Royal Observatory in London. Whether the Hegelian conception of time as the progressive development of Spirit, where "revolutions are the locomotives of history" (Marx 2003: 102) and the State its true protagonist, or those who hailed the collapse of the wall as the "end of history" and Western liberal democracy as the end station "of mankind's ideological evolution" (Fukuyama 1989: 4), both perpetuate a spatial image of a rectilinear temporality, a time imbued with a goal and direction. The task of an authentic revolution, Benjamin insisted, is instead to estrange time from such teleological accounts of history as merely a means to an end (Agamben 2007: 99). The art of memory performed from *Displaced Person* to *Persistence* actively seeks to de-suture the very form of historical thinking by continually displacing any vantage point from where the past may resolve into a unified view so, as Eisenberg says, "that the past can be read with a very different set of possibilities. The past still has possibilities" (Guerin 2012: 118).

Acknowledgement: I am deeply grateful to Daniel Eisenberg, not only for providing me with copies of his films as well as the illustrations for this essay, but also for graciously taking time to correspond with me and sharing invaluable insights into his work.

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"Magnificent desolation": The Memory of Welfare and the Archeology of Shame in the Novels of Johan Harstad

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The anthropologist and anarchist David Graeber begins his essay "Of Flying Cars and the Declining Rate of Profit" by noting that "[t]here is a secret shame hovering over all of us in the twenty-first century" (Graeber 2015: 105). As he sees it, this embarrassment is "rooted in a profound sense of disappointment about the nature of the world we live in, a sense of broken promise – of a solemn promise we felt we were given as children" (ib.). Graeber's "we" is not as inclusive as it might initially seem: even if this sense of shame, he writes, "affects everyone", it is "particularly acute" for those "in their forties and fifties" – for people like Graeber himself, who was born in 1961, and who was thus, as he notes, "eight years old at the time of the Apollo moon landing" (ib.). To him, then, this sense of shame defines a particular generation, and it is tied to the shared memory of a particular promise that has left this generation disappointed. This disappoint-

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ment concerns, Graeber notes, "the conspicuous absence, in 2015, of flying cars" (ib.) – or, less flippantly, the failure of grandiose technological innovations anticipated in the fifties and sixties to materialize. If people in the sixties still expected to see moon travel, flying cars, antigravity fields, and freely distributed immortality drugs by the turn of the millennium, the desultory mood of cultural production since the seventies has in fact been, Graeber writes, "a prolonged meditation on technological changes that never happened" (ib.: 105-106).

So where did we go wrong? For Graeber, the main agent in the downscaling of the future is the pervasive neoliberalization of life, and the concomitant rise of a computerized bureaucracy that keeps creativity and innovation chained to the cash nexus and barred from dreaming up greater things. In a periodizing gesture that finds confirmation in other recent histories of neoliberalism (cf. Arrighi; Burgin; Harvey; Stedman Jones), Graeber locates a turning point in the early seventies – in the direct aftermath of the moon landing: "There appears to have been a profound shift, beginning in the seventies, from investment in technologies associated with the possibility of alternative futures to investment technologies [*sic*] that furthered labor discipline and social control" (ib.: 118). In the demoralized world of neoliberalism, "administrative imperatives have become not the means, but the end of technological development" (ib.: 140). All that is left is a pervasive sense of shame.

Yet why should this disappointment register as shame? Why be ashamed of a socioeconomic shift Graeber and his generation are not in any strict sense guilty of, neither personally nor collectively? Here it is useful to recall the standard distinction between guilt and shame: according to Ruth Leys, if the former refers to a recognition of personal fault, the latter emerges "when the individual becomes aware of being exposed to the diminishing or disapproving gaze of another"

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(Leys 2009: 10). Shame thus pertains to "your deficiencies and inadequacies as a person as these are revealed to the shaming gaze of the other" (ib.: 11). When Graeber describes his generation's sense of shame as an experience of feeling "embarrassed at our own indignation, ashamed we were ever so silly to believe our elders to begin with" (Graeber 2015: 104), it is not hard to see who provides the shaming gaze here: those who were never so silly, those who never held any hope of a "redemptive future that will be fundamentally different than the world today" (ib.: 128) – those, in other words, who have only ever known a fully neoliberalized world, and do not even remember the promise of an alternative future. These younger generations cannot feel the shame Graeber describes; they can only make Graeber and his generation feel it. Shame, in other words, is rooted in different generational experiences, and therefore in different generational memories: what is shameful is a particular memory of a future that never materialized, and the confrontation with a generation that does *not* remember that abandoned future.

If this lack of memory and therefore shame sounds like a good thing for these younger generations, we need to ask what comes in the place of the previous generation's shame. Indeed, it is possible to consider shame as not an unconditionally bad thing. In their book *In Defense of Shame*, Julien Deonna, Raffaele Rodogno, and Fabrice Teroni argue for a distinction between "episodic" shame, which is typically beset by negative affect, and a more productive form of shame understood as a "disposition", as a longer-term capacity for shame, which is generally considered to be "revelatory of people's integrity" (Deonna et al. 2011: 154); it shows people as "decent, *pudique*, or modest" (ib.: 16). Missing such a disposition is, then, as alienating and disorienting as being afflicted by episodic shame. Indeed, if younger generations are not haunted by the betrayed promise of a better future,

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they do not for all that recover a new sense of direction and of a different future. At least shame preserves the memory of a past when the future could have been different.

If shame is what sets Graeber's generation apart from younger ones, they share a sense that the future is foreclosed. In the study of cultural memory, it has become customary to observe that the "avalanche of memory discourses" since the eighties has overwhelmed "an earlier activist imagination of the future" (Huyssen 2003: 6), or even the hopes and dreams that made people look forward to, say, flying cars. Titles of recent volumes such as *The Future of Memory* (edited by Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland) and *Memory and the Future* (edited by Yifat Gutman, Adam D. Brown, and Amy Sodaro) testify to the tension between memory and desire, between an orientation toward the past and an openness to the future; they signal a worry that the rise of memory – and, in this case, a shame-inducing memory – has come at the expense of an imagining of the future (cf. Vermeulen 2016: 473-79). What Graeber's analysis adds to this diagnosis of contemporary memory culture is the insight that the foreclosure of the future is an effect of the ascendancy of neoliberalism and its downscaling of the imagination.

In her recent book *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown remarks on the rhetoric of diminishment that besets neoliberalism's shift from imaginative expansion to intensified control; neoliberal reason officially (but only officially) promotes *small states*, and disguises its operations under a euphemistic vocabulary of *downsizing*, *wage suppression*, *shared sacrifices*, *"realistic" social demands*, and injunctions to get *lean* and *nimble*. The upshot of this reprogramming, for Brown, is that larger-scale imaginaries become unavailable (Brown 2015: 108). In this essay, I further explore the relation between scale, futurelessness, memory, and shame. More specifically, I read the work of the Norwegian novelist Johan Harstad to trace

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how different generational memories of larger scales and of alternative futures register as different variants of shame. If Harstad's novels do not manage to imagine a livable future, they do present an archeology of the pervasive sense of futurelessness that is the flip-side of a cultural obsession with memory.

Harstad's capitalist realism

The first three novels of the celebrated Norwegian writer Johan Harstad – a fourth novel, *Max, Mischa & Tetoffensiven*, was published in 2015 – offer a sustained engagement with the complex affective disposition of a generation that is too young to remember the promise of an alternative future and yet finds itself incapable of doing without shame and surrendering to a liberating state of shamelessness. Born in 1979, Harstad belongs to a generation that was never silly enough to believe in flying cars; born in Stavanger and now living in Oslo, the generational memory that permeates his writing is that of the gradual unraveling of the welfare state. In Harstad's novels, the aspirations underlying the welfare state are consistently connected to the grandiose ambitions informing the space program (which is not, in Harstad's generational memory, tainted by its association with the Cold War, an aspect that might be inescapable for earlier generations).[1]

The generational memory of this program, or the absence of such a memory, defines the lives of his protagonists. Albert Åberg, the protagonist and narrator of *Hässelby* (2007), is born in Sweden 1965, and admits that he "had believed in [the welfare state] for a while" (Harstad 2007: 19); he copes with

1 For an evocation of the affective life of "the heroic era of spaceflight from 1961 to 1972" (Dean 2015: 8) and the recent end of the second space program, see Dean.

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the shame this brings by projecting it onto his father, who, born in 1928, is characterized as "a man of social democracy" who refuses to renounce the *Folkhemmet* model – the "most powerful metaphor" for the Swedish welfare state (Francis Sejersted qtd in Waage 235n.; Harstad 2007: 19).[2] Mattias, the narrator-protagonist of *Buzz Aldrin, What Happened to You in All the Confusion?* (2005), was born on the night of the moon landing, and is not burdened by the shame of having believed in the promise it embodied; the upshot of this lack of shame is a dearth of ambition and direction that leaves him profoundly depressed (cf. Oxfeldt). Finally, Harstad's Brage Prize-winning young adult novel *172 Hours on the Moon* (2008) looks beyond the alternatives of a demoralizing shamelessness and a shamed memory, and instead imagines an update of the space program. The venture ends disastrously; like *Hässelby*, *172 Hours* ends with the end of the world and leaves no hope for an alternative future.

The novels' focus on disillusionment and shame – two negative affects that the novels consistently connect – and their failure to articulate credible alternative futures undeniably point to a lack of political vision. Still, I want to argue, this limitation is less an imaginative or aesthetic failure than a feature of the world they depict; it is, in a sense, a measure of their *realism*. Especially in *Hässelby* and *Buzz Aldrin*, the tone and texture of Harstad's writing is marked by his fairly naïve, deeply sensitive, and emotionally exuberant male narrators, who grant the reader unrestricted access to their desires, anxieties, and thoughts. His novels are also saturated by references to contemporary popular and indie culture,

2 Quotations are from the English translations for *Buzz Aldrin* and *172 Hours on the Moon*, and from the Norwegian original for *Hässelby*, which has as yet not been translated into English. All other translations from the Norwegian are mine.

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childhood nostalgia (most clearly through the repurposing of Albert Åberg, or Alfie Atkins, an iconic children's book and animated cartoon figure), geeky space science, and *Star Wars*; for all their occasional surrealism, they are eminently *realist* attempts to capture the texture of contemporary life.[3]

Unmoored from the memory of the hope of a world that would be resolutely different from the one that generates his protagonists' discontent, the novels' relentless futurelessness is part of the reality they capture. The double absence of a *remembered* and an *anticipated* alternative to the present points to the way that bureaucratized neoliberalism, as it has been analyzed by Graeber, has saturated the generational experience that Harstad describes; for this generation, to recycle a phrase (incorrectly) attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Fisher 2009: 2). It is perhaps most accurate to describe Harstad's work as an instance of "capitalist realism" as Mark Fisher has influentially defined it: a mode of writing responding to "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (ib.). To the extent that Harstad's writing evokes the affective discontent besetting this imaginative blockage through the articulation of shame and disillusionment, it counts as a work of capitalist realism.[4]

3 The Norwegian critic Bernhard Ellefsen characterizes Harstad's novels as examples of "(neo)realism" (Ellefsen 2009), while Ane Farsethås sees them undertake an "archeology of the present through memory work [*samtidsarkeologisk minnearbeid*]" (Farsethås 2005).

4 Bernhard Ellefsen, who has written the most extensive critique of Harstad's work that I am aware of, reads this imaginative limitation as an aesthetic failure rather than as a mark of its realism: "Harstad's despair over the banality and superficiality of everyday life […] is almost meaningless without a corresponding desire to change the way we apprehend [*erkjennelse*] this life" (Ellefsen 2009). For

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Harstad's work somewhat perversely takes Jameson's and Žižek's observation on the inability to imagine the end of capitalism as an invitation to imagine the end of the world – and to do so without hesitation or consolation. Shifts between scales – the minor scale of personal affect, the vast scale of global apocalypse – are a crucial aspect of his writing. Harstad's literary worlds are organized around the opposition between two scales. On the one hand, there is the middling scale of everyday life, exemplified by Mattias's lack of worldly ambition in *Buzz Aldrin*, by the mundane lives of the three teenagers who will travel to the moon in *172 Hours*, and by the apartment buildings in the eventless and bland Stockholm suburb Hässelby. On the other, there is an imagination that is attracted to a far larger scale; apart from the cosmic catastrophes that end *172 Hours* and *Hässelby*, there are the pervasive themes of climate change and of moon travel, and the attractions of the inhumanly desolate landscapes of the Faroe Islands (where *Buzz Aldrin* is set) and of the moon.[5] Harstad's novels recognize and even indulge the need for something grander than the uneventfulness of everyday life, but they do not offer a coherent alternative to that life; echoing what Wendy Brown and David Graeber analyze as neoliberalism's "downscaling" of

Ellefsen, "[a] literature that wants to do more than gesture toward an exterior must also manifest the way to that exterior" (ib.). My point is that for Harstad, the lack of a coherent alternative is an aspect of the life that his work aims to apprehend.

5 Harstad has called the Faroe Islands "a good stand-in for the moon" (Hovda 2009). See Slettan for an analysis of how the photographs (taken by Harstad himself) featured in the book underscore the association between the island's setting and the moon, especially through their evacuation of human characters (Slettan 2013: 117). Slettan also points to the "NASA-typeface" in the title on *Buzz Aldrin*'s original book cover (ib.: 121). For an account of the role of the novel's setting in its protagonist's melancholia and his artistic development (into the novel's narrator), see Oxfeldt 2013.

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the imagination, they show that this grand scale is today overwhelmingly colonized by a catastrophic imagery, at the expense of a properly political vision.

In this essay, I show that Harstad's three novels present the imaginative and affective blockages that characterize a condition "in which all social and political possibility is seemingly bound up in the economic status quo" (Shonkwiler and La Berge 2014: 2). Via their insistence on the fundamental role of shame in different ways, all three mediate the memory of the space program and the welfare state, and cumulatively, they map the affective and imaginative discontents besetting that memory as variations of shame: the shame of having once believed in greater things (*Hässelby*), the lack of a shameful disposition that, far from liberating younger generations, translates into a lack of orientation and identity (*Buzz Aldrin*), and the attempt to sidestep all forms of embarrassment and believe again in greater things (*172 Hours on the Moon*). Far from resulting in a release from shame, the revamped space program turns out to be deeply implicated in the dynamic of shame that an older generation unleashes on a younger one. One thing Harstad's novels do not imagine, then, is a life liberated from shame.

Generation star wars (Hässelby)

Harstad's *Hässelby* inhabits the unsettling aftermath of an ideal one could properly be ashamed of. The story is set in the Stockholm borough Hässelby, the result of large-scale suburban reorganization in "the optimistic fifties" (Harstad 2007: 222) that now survives as a memorial to its own decline: in 2007, when the novel is set, "the flats, which once seemed so nice, now looked more like forgotten monuments to social democracy" (ib.: 223). If the apartment buildings were once animated by the spirit of the *Folkhemmet* model,

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the latter now only survives as the name of a furniture store (ib.: 14). In 2007, the narrator notes that members of his generation had all "reluctantly and independently from one another" left the *Folkhemmet* "when the concept had already become a parody, an idea that was considered antidemocratic and inhumane" (ib.: 209). The problem the narrator's generation is stuck with is that there is no democratic or humane alternative in sight; and with no alternative ideal to turn to, leaving Hässelby proves difficult.

The novel dramatizes this desolate condition through the remarkable choice of its narrator-protagonist. Albert Åberg is the Norwegian version of Alfons Åberg (or Alfie Atkins), a children's book and animated cartoon character who, since he was invented by Gunilla Bergström in 1972, has become a Swedish icon – and, in the novel's analysis, an agent in the project of turning Sweden into a "nation converted into children's television" (ib.: 19). Demonstrating that a single father can offer his child a fairly normal life, and that the state can step in for an absent mother, Albert and his father, Lars Rune Waage notes, "are representatives of Scandinavian social democracy" (Waage 2015: 234) in the Scandinavian cultural imagination, and are "themselves a core component in the very construction of the welfare state" (ib.: 238).

In Bergström's fictional universe, Albert is perpetually seven years old and lives with his father in a flat, with no mother in sight; *Hässelby* adopts both the flat and the father – as well as Albert's two friends Milla and Viktor – while it adds a back story for the absent mother: on the fourth day of Albert's life, she decides that she is not interested in raising him (Harstad 2007: 183-87). The novel forces Albert and his father to grow up, and to discover that they cannot live without each other. Albert's attempt to break free from Bertil and settle in Paris in 1985 and 1986 ends with his return to Hässelby; it is only in 2006, after his father's

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sudden death in a traffic accident – an event recounted at the beginning of the novel – that he finally has to make do without him. One year later, the world has ended.

If Albert can only survive in the ruins of a welfare state he no longer believes in, his father clings to his old beliefs in order to shield himself from an inimical world. Bertil Åberg stands by the *Folkhemmet* model "as if it were a perfect ideology written down in a party program in a stuffy, hidden office no one had the keys to" (ib.: 19), and he refuses to surrender that perfection: for him, "the eighties ruined everything" (ib.: 21), as they inaugurated a time of fateful mediocrity in which "[n]obody is doing well, nobody is doing badly" and "[e]verybody is doing normally" (ib.: 192). Bertil responds to this diminishment by blaming the world and becoming a "bitter, bitter man who never could escape his own disappointments" (ib.: 22). The household of Bertil and Albert is organized around their differing relations to the ends of the welfare ideal, and more specifically, around *their avoidance of the shame besetting their investments in that ideal*. Bertil clings to his generational memory of that investment, and thus denies the need to feel ashamed for it, while he also hides from a world that would confront him with that shame. Albert, for his part, suppresses his own sense of shame at his generation's short-term belief in the welfare state by casting his father as a preposterous, delusional social democrat who should feel even more ashamed for holding these ideals; cast as a pathetic old fool, Bertil no longer has the power to make his son feel ashamed. Yet this also means that Albert *needs* the father he despises to avoid confronting his own shame.

The first part of the novel is taken up by the recollection of Albert's first attempt to escape from the shameful cohabitation with his father. In 1985, he goes traveling around Europe, only to end up joining a German businessman on a trip

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to Hong Kong in a bid to buy the overstock of *Star Wars* merchandise. The logic behind this investment confirms the futurelessness the novel dramatizes: the businessman speculates that the merchandise and toys, which have gone out of fashion, can now be bought cheaply and later sold at great profit when that fashion will return, as it inevitably will. Nostalgia for the past trumps a vision of the future: all this capitalist surrogate-father can offer Albert is a downscaled scheme based on the assumption of a return of the past rather than on a grandiose new departure – something on the scale, say, of flying cars. Instead of the grand ambitions of space wars, the mundane reality Albert encounters is composed of miniature action figures; when the deal fails, he receives Stormtrooper figures as a farewell gift – "the last soldiers of the universe, thirty in all […] a kind of farewell to arms, you could say" (ib.: 72).

When he later travels on to Paris, this logic of diminished prospects continues as he fails to participate in a major strike and instead cultivates the smaller scale of the Stormtroopers in an art project. He takes close-up pictures of them, making them look gigantic against the background of "a microscopic city" (ib.: 88). In one of the signature elements in Harstad's fiction, characters aim to control scalar shifts to help distract them from the radical scalar diminishments that afflict their fully bureaucratized lives: "in my head the photos had a purpose, no all-encompassing and life-determining purpose, but it was at least my small protest against all of this, my humble contribution to the artistic struggle against a new world war and armageddon" (ib.). The last picture in the project is of the "deformed and broken" dolls that he has dropped from the 200-meter-tall Tour Montparnasse (ib.: 162), as if to underscore that even this artistic attempt to shield himself from destruction cannot but end in violent defeat (cf. Harstad 2007: 86-88). Soon after, Albert returns to his father and to

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Hässelby, only to be met by the news that Olof Palme has just been killed. An attempt later in the eighties to move away from his father to Stockholm's Södermalm neighborhood ends with his return to the father's flat, and an uneventful job in a shopping mall where he consistently refuses all promotions.

The novel casts the desultory period between 1986 and 2006 quite literally as a time between two deaths (a notion most famously theorized by Lacan and Žižek):[6] the symbolic death of the father's ideals with the killing of Olof Palme and the father's own physical death, only a few meters away from the place where Palme was killed. The need for repetition to achieve change – everything has to happen *twice* to really register – is not only an essential aspect of the notion of a life between two deaths (cf. Wegner), but also of the novel's narrative grammar and affective rhythm. The death of his father offers Albert the opportunity to revisit the events and people of 1986. Most notably, it also allows him to reimagine his leaving Paris in 1986. The remarkable thing about this imaginative return is that the counterfactual story does *not*, as one might have expected, offer relief from the disappointing trajectory of his life: it instead recounts his failure to prevent the gang rape of a girl in Paris (Harstad 2007: 272-74). In this way, it merely adds one item to the long list of Albert's failures: his failure to interest his mother in raising him, his failure to anticipate and prevent the suicide of his friend Milla, with whom he was in love, his failure to prevent the disappearance of the German businessman in Hong Kong.

If cohabitation with his father allowed Albert to project his shame onto him (as an unreconstructed believer in the welfare state), the removal of his father forces him to confront his

6 See Wegner 2009 for an analysis of "the long nineties" in light of this notion, and especially pp. 17-42 for an elaboration of Žižek's and Lacan's use of the concept.

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own inadequacy and to assume shamefulness as his proper condition – not, this time, the shame of having once believed in an ideal, but the shame of not even having lived up to expectations (of basic decency, of character, of morality) that are much less than ideal, yet still, it seems, out of his reach. This sense of inadequacy derives from his autobiographical memory but extends to the species as a whole. The inside covers of the book (like all of the books, designed by Harstad himself) reproduce accounts of global warming, genocide, capitalist exploitation, war, and (especially) the human failure to act on these developments. If shame, as Timothy Bewes argues, is "an experience of incommensurability, between the I as experienced by the self and the self as it appears to and is reflected in the eyes of the other" (Bewes 2011: 24), it can in principle be managed by hiding from the eyes of the other, or by getting rid of them; if shame is a general condition, however, this requires getting rid of the whole species.

This is exactly what happens in the last, surreal part of the novel. It turns out that throughout his life, Albert has been followed by a mysterious figure (who, notably, only ever appears when his father is not there). When he sees that figure in the apartment across from his (following his father's death), he decides to break into the apartment, only to discover that the rooms in there do not obey the rules of physics; they are too big for the apartment building to contain them (Harstad 2007: 310). Hässelby's "monuments to social democracy" (ib.: 223) are inhabited by an alternative force that, in the last part of the novel, corrodes them from within: all the apartments will gradually be emptied of people and furniture, and ultimately the whole of Hässelby, and then Stockholm, and then the rest of the world will be flooded. The mysterious figure – who turns out to be one of a legion of demons (reminiscent of the button-molder figure in Henrik Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and of Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal*; cf.

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Waage 2015: 241, 243) – informs Albert that, even though he had been singled out as "the best human being of all" when he was a child, he has "simply not lived up to [the demons'] expectations. None of you" (Harstad 2007: 418). If even the best human being fails, there is no reason to keep the species alive (ib.: 430). The novel's surreal ending, then, underscores what I have called its capitalist realism: it points to an affective and imaginative impasse where shameful memories overwhelm the imagining of a better future, and where the only large-scale event is *not* the advent of a better life but a cataclysm that ends human life altogether.

"The great story of the parentheses" (Buzz Aldrin)

Hässelby's Albert Åberg discovers too late that life on the reduced scale of a demoralized welfare state is, if perhaps not worth living, at least less lethal than abandoning that diminished condition. Harstad's novel *Buzz Aldrin* is an imaginative attempt to test the possibility of sustaining a fully tamed and downscaled life. The test subject is Mattias, the novel's sensitive, slightly naïve, and decidedly underachieving narrator, who models his life after that of Buzz Aldrin – the man who, in spite of his skills and talents, was not interested in becoming the first man on the moon, but instead became "the eternal number two who was barely remembered" (Harstad 2011: 157). Harstad's protagonist renounces his talent as a singer – he is "probably the best singer ever in Norway" (Harstad 2011, "Interview"), yet he refuses to sing in his friends' band. He is born on the night of the first moon landing, and he has taken a lesson from it that is surprisingly appropriate for a downscaled age: Aldrin, not Armstrong; instead of shame over a silly illusion, the unashamed embrace of a life of underachievement.

What accounts for the difference between *Buzz Aldrin*'s

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sensitive, hesitant, and melancholy tone and the more exuberant and aggressive tone of *Hässelby* is that Mattias, unlike Albert, does not need to suppress a sense of shame: never having indulged in illusions of individual grandeur or in large-scale ideals, he does not have to shield himself from a sense of inadequacy and incommensurability. Instead, he assumes Aldrin's lack of ambition as the proper lesson to learn for the aftermath of the space program.[7] Yet for all that, this lack of ideals materializes for most of the novel as a serious depression and keeps the protagonist confined to the Faroe Islands, unable to sustain life in his native Norway. The novel begins with a short flash forward to April 1999, when the almost-thirty-year-old Mattias has seemingly overcome this depression and resumed his old job as a gardener. Crucially, and recalling *Hässelby*'s concern with the photographs of the Stormtroopers, his restored equilibrium depends on his imaginative ability to manage scale so as not to be overwhelmed by the kind of scale shift that ends *Hässelby*.[8] Immediately after the novel's arresting opening line – "The person you love is 72.8 percent water and there's been no rain for weeks" (Harstad 2011: 9) – the novel shows the mature Mattias anticipating change by reducing it to a scale he can control (cf. Dorrian 2015):

> I wait. Stand and wait. And then I see it, somewhere up there, a thousand, perhaps three thousand feet above, the first drop takes shape and falls, releases hold, hurtles toward me, and I stand there, face turned

7 The novel again references 1986 as a crucial year: it refers to Chernobyl, the Challenger explosion, and the killing of Palme (*B* 27-28). References to the 1980 accident with the Alexander Kielland platform tie this wave of disasters more directly to a Norwegian context (2011: 36-37).

8 The novel obsessively refers to climate change and rising sea levels. See 2011: 89, 94-95, 130, 169, 217, 315.

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up, it's about to start raining, in a few seconds it will pour, and never stop, at least that's how it will seem […] and I stare up, a single drop on its way down toward me […] the first drop falls and there I stand motionless, until I feel it hit me in the center of my forehead, exploding outward and splitting into fragments that land on my jacket, on the flowers beneath me, my boots, my gardening gloves. I bow my head. And it begins to rain. (Harstad 2011: 9-10)

Several things are happening in this passage, and they cumulatively cast doubt on the composure that Mattias seems to have achieved. He can only accommodate the intrusion of change through a carefully executed act of anticipation. This act consists in an imaginative zooming gesture, in which a change of weather is bracketed through an imaginative focus on one rain drop – as if to defend against the deluge that ends the world in *Hässelby*, which is there anticipated by a dream in which raindrops change into falling human beings (which in their turn echo the falling Stormtroopers; Harstad 2007: 99). This zooming gesture is one way of asserting "domination and control" over the vast distances ("a thousand, perhaps three thousand feet") Mattias must navigate (Dorrian 2015).

This movement echoes another of the key features in the novel's narrative grammar: a mode of anticipatory memory in which the narrator distances himself from the emotional impact of an event by anticipating its later mediation. When his girlfriend breaks up with him, he avoids a direct response by "puzzl[ing] over who could play her on the TV series" (Harstad 2011: 87); his first encounter with an important character is accompanied by the remark that "[s]omebody should have taken a Polaroid of this moment, should have caught it on tape" (ib.: 107); later on, he imagines his life as a movie being projected, which means that his time in the institution is a screening with a projectionist "who didn't take a break as soon as the film had started to roll, but who stayed

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there, sitting in the control room, just in case" (ib.: 121). This act of preemptive memory cannot prevent the eventuality that at some point, "[t]he tape gets screwed up again" (ib.: 168).[9] Such acts of anticipatory memory reduce the impact of the present by a gesture of "depresentification" that reduces the present to "the object of a future memory" (Currie 2010: 11). It is only after such acts of anticipation or downscaling that the protagonist is ready to return to the scale of everyday life.

The novel's very last pages, set in 2019, return to the question of scale, as they juxtapose the unspectacular particulars of everyday life with the affirmation that "this very moment can be seen, seen from the moon, from outer space" (Harstad 2011: 469), and with the hope "that [we] are visible, that [we] do [our] best, that [our] lives are true and meaningful, that [we] are not alone" (ib.: 471). This emphasis on visibility is remarkable, as Mattias' life plan has consisted in an attempt to achieve, precisely, *invisibility* (cf. Farsethås; Harstad 2011: 315). He spends most of the novel in a halfway house in the Faroes, where one of the other inhabitants is called, he thinks, "Ennen", until he discovers that he has misunderstood the "NN" she uses in order to maintain her anonymity, which thus strengthens the theme of a wished-for invisibility. The engagements with larger scales that open and close the novel intimate that invisibility, and the concomitant absence of shame (as there is no gaze to be shamed by), are somehow insufficient even for a character who is committed to making do with less. What Mattias still craves is a more determinate sense of purpose – a confirmation of a firmer and more definite identity that, as the authors of *In Defense of Shame* show, can be indicated through a disposition for shame. The

9 See Slettan for an account of the novel's "phototextuality", which he sees as more crucial than in the cases of *Hässelby* and *172 Hours on the Moon*, which also contain pictures (Slettan 2013: 134).

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novel shows that the welfare state can no longer provide such purpose, and instead leaves the protagonist adrift without either a shameful memory or a sustaining capacity for shame. What he craves is to be "a smooth running cog in the world" (Harstad 2011: 17), just "a part of a whole" (ib.: 56).

In the fictional world of Harstad's novels, the welfare state once provided such a functioning whole, but *Buzz Aldrin* emphasizes that it no longer affords the combination of purpose and relative invisibility that Mattias craves; instead, it has been reduced to archiving and nurturing the fall-out of its own demise. His mother represents the memory of a functioning welfare state; she "worked in child welfare", and did synchronized swimming, something to which he is deeply attracted for "the way [the swimmers] relied on everyone doing their part" (ib.: 39). His shelter in a halfway house for recovering psychiatric patients may seem like a continuation of child welfare for grown-ups, yet it mainly cares for people whose suffering is caused by neoliberal globalization, a process that also brutally affected the welfare state. Anna, one of the patients, was "at ease with tasks and colleagues" in her first job, a public-office job in the post office, until she was, her file notes, "[a]t 23, laid off without warn. due to restructuring", which starts a lifetime of psychiatric problems (ib.: 213);[10] Sofia's (the girl initially known as "Ennen") problems begin when her father loses his job in Greenland and is forced to relocate to the Faroe Islands, where she suffers "from a sense of being completely forgotten", as "apart from her parents there is nothing around her to confirm her existence" (ib.: 186-87). Such is life in a reduced welfare state whose only remaining mission is to curate its own afterlife.

The halfway house is located in a fish factory that is no

10 The abbreviation is there in the original to mimic the style of a psychiatric report.

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longer in use, as it is no longer profitable in the global market (ib.: 116-20). The institution survives, but without the industrial infrastructure powering it. Instead, the patients spend their time in the "laughable production of model animals" for tourists (ib.: 148); they put on "work clothes" because it gives them "the feeling [they] were running a business, [they] were workers" (ib.: 167). The narrative grammar of *Hässelby* was marked by change through repetition and delay, whereas that of *Buzz Aldrin* consists in repetition *without* variation. While fishing used to sustain a whole way of life, deindustrialization turns the Faroe Islands into "a country in perpetual debt and companies that are closed down and people that are left to their fate without jobs without money without plans or prospects pushed aside forgotten hidden away sent packing on the wind" (ib.: 391). In this state of affairs, Mattias' desire for purpose and affirmation remains unaddressed. It remains unaddressed by a welfare state that has become a monument to itself, and that survives as a mere archive. This is where the novel abandons its test subject: suspended between a vaguely remembered welfare state and a future that fails to attract, and riveted to a downscaled life where no sense of shame can direct him.

Back to the future (172 Hours on the Moon)

Hässelby and *Buzz Aldrin* present two attempts to sound the affective fall-out of the downscaling of human aspirations since the early seventies: in *Hässelby*, disillusionment and the shame-inducing memory of having once believed in an ideal that has rapidly become unthinkable; in *Buzz Aldrin*, the endeavor to imagine a life without such memory and therefore without such shame – an attempt that turns out to be compromised by the continued solicitation by larger forces and grander scales. The request to write a young adult

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novel for Stavanger's time as European Capital of Culture in 2008 offered Harstad the opportunity to boldly imagine such larger dimensions; and even if Harstad describes *172 Hours* as "very, very different from [his] other books" (James 2015), it continues the archeology of shame that marks his first two novels. The novel imagines a resurrection of the space program, and it ties it to a generation that has never even experienced the original version. In order to gain financial and public support, NASA organizes an international lottery aimed at people between 14 and 18; three of them can win a trip to the moon – and more specifically, to DARLAH 2, a moon station constructed between 1974 and 1976, before the project was discontinued for lack of resources. The global lottery for "a glamorous space version of a trip to Disneyland" (Harstad 2012: 7) turns out to be a great success, yet the novel also underlines that the ambition to travel to the moon is as much that of the children's parents and school teachers as of the children themselves; two of the three winners, Norwegian Mia (an unambitious underachiever very much like *Buzz Aldrin*'s Mattias) and French Antoine, are notably lukewarm about the prospect of visiting the moon. Even in this novel that focuses almost exclusively on the three teenagers, it is the psychopathologies of the generation that lived through or just missed the turn of the sixties that animates Harstad's writing; his writing is again essentially concerned with testing the relations between shame, generational memory, and the future (or the lack of it).

Through a number of devices, the novel intimates that the trip to the moon will end badly. There is the character of Mr. Himmelfarb, living out the senile end of his life in an old people's home. He used to work as "a custodian with the highest security clearance at NASA's Goldstone Deep Space Communications Complex" (Harstad 2012: 24), and while he knows the mission is doomed, he has been "reduced to a

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bag with eyes, a box no one really knew where to send", and cannot communicate this knowledge (ib.). Furthermore, the three teenagers all witness and experience mysterious forebodings – a plane crash only one person has seen, an airport terminal that might not exist. Yet the clearest clue to the novel's generational imagination is the prologue, in which a sinister group of powerful men draw up the plan for the lottery as a way to find public and financial support for the reactivation of a space program that has a decidedly military character. It perspires that the earlier space mission in the seventies discovered mysterious beings on the moon who turned out to be *Doppelgängers* of the astronauts; extremely fast and strong and not composed of organic material, the *Doppelgängers* appear intent on the destruction of humankind. Reactivating the space program is an attempt to neutralize this threat; read in conjunction with *Buzz Aldrin*, it also bespeaks an inability to leave nonhuman forces alone – to let the moon be the "magnificent desolation" that Buzz Aldrin called it (Harstad 2011: 160) – and read in light of *Hässelby*, it is unsurprising that this failure will lead to the wholesale destruction of the species.

In *172 Hours on the Moon*'s generational imaginary, the very generation that transformed the dream of a better world into a program of social and military control sacrifices a younger generation for the perpetuation of the regime it inaugurated. That continued control rather than genuine innovation and discovery is the main ambition is clear from the lack of new material – "Everything on this whole expedition is so goddamn antiquated" (Harstad 2012: 241) – and by the telling detail that space debris orbiting the earth has made it very hard to time an escape from the Earth, as if fall-out of the economic dispensation we live in is keeping the species tied to the Earth, foreclosing larger horizons (ib.: 258). Transforming the moon from a site of human aspiration to

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a site of military control keeps human life riveted to a diminished condition that does not satisfy it; it condemns it to shame, if we recall, with Timothy Bewes, that "[s]hame is an event of incommensurability: a profound disorientation of the subject" (Bewes 2011: 3). Shame, for Bewes, "appears when the obligation to inhabit a subject position coexists with the void, the lack, of subjectivity itself" (ib.: 23).

In the novel, this void inhabiting the shamed subject takes shape in the figure of the *Doppelgänger* – "[a]n evil twin that's out to take your life without anyone noticing" (Harstad 2012: 307). This figure emblematizes the destructive logic that underlies the reduction of life; we learn that the DARLAH space station was constructed "to annihilate the entire moon if that became necessary. As a final solution" (ib.: 223). In what seems like a momentous emotional relief for the reader after all the other astronauts (including the teenagers) are killed on the moon, the novel lets one of the travelers, Mia, make it back alive, after an intense struggle with her own *Doppelgänger*. Yet the very last chapter of the novel makes clear that it is, in fact, the *Doppelgänger* who has made it to the earth, and will end up destroying first her family, then New York, and then the rest of humankind.

The novel does not even attempt consolation as it describes a world dying of shame. The awkward and embarrassed teenage love between Mia and Antoine presents the novel's only example of a positive sense of shame – of decency, *pudeur*, and modesty (Deonna et al. 2011: 16). Yet when Mia finds Antoine's corpse, his scorched face is described without mercy: "His eyes were wide open and bloody and halfway out of his head. The dust had dried up his eyeballs" (Harstad 2012: 317). In the novel's last scene, readers only belatedly realize that the scene is focalized through the *Doppelgänger* rather than through Mia, and that they have been seeing the world through the *Doppelgänger*'s eyes; the result is an eerie

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sensation of being estranged from oneself, of being invaded by one's own *Doppelgänger*, and a sense that it is too late to resist this usurpation. Throughout the novel, the omniscient narrator – a marked difference from *Hässelby* and *Buzz Aldrin* – conveys a sense of inevitability. If *172 Hours on the Moon* is an exceptionally shocking and scary book for young adults, it is not only so because of the generic horror elements, but also because of the generational logic it presents to its young target audience: for all their aspirations to decency and purpose, the novel shows that they are bound to remain caught up in the fall-out of the shame of earlier generations. These generations' shameful memories condemn the younger generation to a futurelessness in which the only large-scale imaginary is that of an apocalyptic endgame.

First as horror, then as farce: Space and social security

The space program may not be as dead today as it was when Harstad wrote his three novels, about a decade ago. Today, we know that Elon Musk's SpaceX company (founded in 2002, but increasingly visible only in the last few years) wants to colonize Mars – an enterprise of such ambition that, when the launch of a cargo ship bound for the International Space Station had to be postponed, Musk blamed the moon: he tweeted that the "moon was in the way" (Assis 2015). The object of past ambitions is here an obstacle for an even more spectacular design. In *172 Hours*, it was human debris orbiting the Earth that prevented space flight, and the fantasy of destroying the moon was part of a sinister plot; in Musk's very different imaginary, there is no memory of human depravity, and no debris or design to be ashamed of.

Indeed, Musk sees his revamped space program as a humanitarian initiative: "I think there is a strong humanitarian

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argument for making life multi-planetary […] in order to safeguard the existence of humanity in the event that something catastrophic were to happen, in which case being poor or having a disease would be irrelevant, because humanity would be extinct". In a way that quite spectacularly misremembers the history of the welfare state, and suggests that we have entered an altogether different cultural imaginary than the shameful one that organizes Harstad's work, the colonization of space would then be a form of social security for the whole species – it would be, in the felicitous phrase of one journalist, "Mars colonization as extinction insurance" (Andersen 2015). When thinking on such a grand scale, poverty and disease are only trivial concerns; after all, individuals, or even whole communities, don't go extinct, they just die, as so much collateral damage. Musk has announced that a trip to Mars could become as cheap as $500,000 – not immediately, as the costs are bound to be a lot higher at the beginning, but within a decade after trips begin (Dickson 2015). With such a price tag, it becomes hard to see whether SpaceX's talk of "safeguard[ing] the existence of humanity" wants to insure the species, or only provide the richest members of that species with an alibi to let the rest of the species rot. Here, we have a cultural imaginary that positions itself beyond the different shades of shame that organize Harstad's work; here, finally, is true shamelessness.

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Traumatic Memory, Shame, and the Artistic Representation of the Shoah

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Psychic trauma and memory malfunctioning

In an article appositely entitled "Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Trauma Theory", Roger Luckhurst points to memory malfunctioning as the defining symptom of psychic trauma.[1] As he notes, the birth of psychoanalysis was related to the alarming increase in diseases of the mind in the 1870s and 1880s, which led the medical profession to embark on an unprecedented serious investigation of "a whole new range of [...] *diseases of memory* – mysterious conditions seemingly independent of the physical condition –" (Luckhurst 2006: 498; emphasis in the original). In their 1893 essay, "On the Psychical Mechanism of

1 The research carried out for the writing of this article is part of a project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO) code FFI2015-65775-P. The author is also grateful for the support of the Government of Aragón and the European Social Fund (ESF) code H05.

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Hysterical Phenomena", Freud and Breuer already made the observation that "it is not so much the traumatic event itself as the memory of the trauma that 'acts like an *agent provocateur* in releasing the symptom'" (qtd in ib.: 499). Overwhelmed by the traumatic event or situation, the subject represses the normal emotional response to it and dissociates its awful knowledge to the unconscious, thus failing to accommodate the traumatic experience within the normal memory schemes. Consequently, the symptoms of trauma are manifested in emotional numbing, total or partial amnesia, temporal disorientation, and the compulsion to 'act out' (Janet 1928) or re-live the shocking event or situation in the form of intrusive thoughts, hallucinatory images and/or disturbing dreams. The fact that these "mnemonic residues" (Freud and Breuer 2001: 8) of the trauma are experienced as heavily symbolic sensorial images, instead of words, renders them overwhelming and incomprehensible. Characteristically, then, the process of working through of the trauma requires the transformation of the fragmentary and painful traumatic memories into narrative memories, that is, into temporally ordered and comprehensive, verbalised memories capable of conferring true meaning on the events. Freud and Breuer's "talking cure" was a therapy aimed at facilitating this process of putting traumatic memories into words (ib.: 8-9). But, as Cathy Caruth points out in the introduction to *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), the relation between "The Wound and the Voice" is very complex and the difficulty of putting trauma into words is significant (Caruth 1996: 1-9). In the case of collective traumas like the Shoah, this difficulty is increased by the need to transform into narrative memories not only the traumatic memories of individuals, but also of the sociocultural group.

After his separation from Breuer, Freud returned to the study of neurosis during the First World War in a series of

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essays aimed at demonstrating that "shell shock" was an exclusively psychic disturbance. However, the recognition of war trauma as a psychic wound had to wait until 1980, when the sustained political pressure and the medical evidence provided by Vietnam veterans suffering from war neurosis finally led the American Psychiatric Association to define "post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) as a mental disease and to include it in the diagnostic canon of the medical and psychiatric professions (Whitehead 2004: 4). Though it brought about a radical change in the medical understanding of war trauma, the Vietnam War (1954-1975) was only one among many atrocious armed conflicts brought about by the rising political, ideological, and cultural tensions and the class and racial struggles of the twentieth century, which accompanied the collapse of the British Empire, the birth of the USSR, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the Cold War.

This would explain why, to the generations after the Second World War, the consciousness of living under the paradigm of trauma became widespread (Onega 2014a: 497). The long-term effects of the Second World War were given expression in the boom of literary, testimonial, theatrical, and filmic works on the Shoah that took place in what Andrew Gross and Susanne Rohr have termed "the long 1990s – the period extending from the fall of the Berlin Wall on 11-9-1989 to the attack on the World Trade Centre on 9-11-2001" (Gross and Rohr 2010: 12). The proliferation of these works points to a generalised and ever-more urgent need of Western society to work through and accommodate into the collective memory a historical event of such a colossal traumatising magnitude that it defies assimilation and cultural integration; yet, the fact that this boom materialised in the upsurge of a plethora of new hybrid forms – (pseudo-)autobiographical, testimonial, and generically hybrid or "limit-case" writings (Gilmore 2001: 1) – points to the extraordinary difficulty of putting the

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traumatic memories of the Holocaust into words. Indeed, it was this difficulty that brought about changes in the literary forms themselves, a phenomenon noted by various critics.[2]

For all this, in *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), Michael Rothberg warns readers against the danger of considering the Shoah an exceptional and unique historical event, and argues for the reconsideration not only of our conception of history, but also of the way in which we construct collective memory in relation to group identity. Starting from the premise that we live in a multicultural, globalised society, he goes on to reject the deeply rooted idea that group identity is necessarily based on competitive memory, and proposes instead a transnational and multidisciplinary politics of memory, "based on recognition of the productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance" (Rothberg 2009: 309). In agreement with this, he argues for the establishment of a dialogue between the Shoah and the different histories of oppression and victimisation in our colonial past, so as to bolster their articulation and put an end to the enforced silence and/or erasure exerted on them by the dominant discourse.

The function of the performing arts during and after the Shoah

Rothberg's claim also points to the fact that one of the main functions of art has always been to facilitate the working through of traumatic events or experiences and their assimilation into the collective memory of the social group by presenting them indirectly, through metaphor and myth, thus providing the community with mechanisms of resilience aimed

2 See Rothberg 2000; Gilmore 2001; Onega and Ganteau 2011; Ganteau and Onega 2013; 2014.

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at overcoming the shock, integrating the traumatic memory into the collective memory, and fostering social cohesion.[3]

While all art forms have in principle the capacity for assimilation and cultural integration of shocking and painful, though necessary knowledge, the performing arts in general and theatre in particular have the advantage of a greater immediacy than other art forms to respond to this demand. A telling example of this is provided by the French activist, Charlotte Delbo, in the second work of her three-volume memoir, *Auschwitz and After* (1970), significantly entitled *Useless Knowledge*. Delbo and other Communist women who had been interned in the fort of Romanville, in France, before deportation to Auschwitz, devised an elaborate strategy to mitigate the suffering of the men awaiting execution in the male quarter of the prison. It consisted in assuming an exaggerated carefree air, singing and dancing, and every Sunday performing in the yard a theatrical piece, which the men could watch standing behind the barbed-wire fence separating the male from the female quarters. As Michael Rothberg remarks in *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Delbo's narrator recognises that these performances are "preposterous", but "she also notes that they succeed at times in arousing a theatrical suspension of disbelief and a 'liveliness [that] occasionally seem[s] real'" (Rothberg 2000: 147). Needless to say, the suspension of disbelief brought about by these merry performances, with their assumption of normalcy in the teeth of terror, was an extraordinary source of resilience and social cohesion both for the women performers and for the men watching them.

In January 1944, after Delbo's transference from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück women's camp, the narrator recounts that she

3 See Onega 2010; Onega 2012: 83-90; Onega and Ganteau 2011.

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exchanged a ration of bread with another prisoner against a copy of Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (1666), that she then set to memorise the play, and that she kept it at her breast until the moment of her liberation (ib.: 153). These actions point to the immense value she gave to this token of culture as a source of resilience in the atrocious circumstances of a Nazi concentration camp, where starvation was a routine form of death. Until September 1941, when she decided to return to France in order to join the Resistance, Delbo had been working as an assistant to the theatre director, Louis Jouvet, during a theatrical tour of South America. Her theatrical expertise and the fact that she was a non-Jewish, political prisoner of French nationality granted Delbo a special status even in Auschwitz, where, as Rebecca Rovit explains, she participated in the performance of several French classics, including Molière (Rovit 2014: 3).

Although, as Rovit notes, we lack "tangible evidence of scripts, programs, directors' notes, photographs, or sketches for stage sets" (ib.: 2), there are testimonies of participants and observers that suggest the occurrence of a variety of performing activities at Auschwitz-Birkenau, including theatrical readings, variety shows, musical and choral programmes, the rendition of European hit songs of the 1930s and 1940s, and weekly cabaret programmes for the camp's elite (ib.: 2). While ephemeral forms of artistic expression like singing, or the creation and transmission from mouth to mouth of a politically-charged poem, constituted spontaneous manifestations of sociocultural bonding and resilience, the more accomplished, regular performances, usually meant to entertain the Nazis, were performed by the inmates in exchange for special privileges, such as "receiving an extra piece of bread" (ib.: 1), a sleeping pallet, or less exhausting work.

In the bleak history of the Nazi concentration camps, the one that allowed for the greatest display of creativity as a form

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of communal bonding and resilience was Terezín or Theresienstadt. Terezín was a fortress in what is now the Czech Republic, used between 1942 and 1945 as an enforced-labour ghetto and transit camp for middle-class Jewish families from Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria, before deportation to Treblinka and Auschwitz extermination camps. It differed from other Nazi camps in that it was originally devised by Adolf Eichmann's Central Office for Jewish Emigration as a model ghetto meant to lure affluent Jewish families into taking residence there, and to convince the allied forces of the excellent treatment the Third Reich was bestowing on the Jews. The presence in Terezín of tens of thousands of educated middle-class Jews of various professions, including writers, musicians, and scholars, ensured the development of a rich cultural life in the form of lectures, concerts, theatrical performances, artworks, poetry readings, the composition of musical works, including operas (Peschel 2014), and the creation of a secret literary magazine which was hand-produced and wholly written and illustrated by young boys aged twelve to fifteen, entitled *Vedem* (Czech for *In the Lead*).[4] The magazine, inspired by a teacher, Valtr Eisinger, with its poems, adventure stories, essays, and book reviews, and its joking price written on the cover, like the other artistic enterprises undertaken by the inmates of Terezín, had a vital role in the maintenance of communal cohesion and the preservation of the psychic, spiritual, and moral health of the inmates.

This extraordinary display of artistic creativity provided the Nazis with the factual evidence they needed to launch a propagandistic campaign meant to intoxicate international

4 Its main editor, Petr Ginz (1928-1944), was a fourteen-year-old boy, deported to Auschwitz and gassed at sixteen. Selections from *Vedem*, illustrated by art that appeared in the magazine and which was created by other children in Terezín, are reproduced in Křížková, Kotouč, and Ornest 1995. See also Křížková 2011.

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public opinion and hide the awful reality of the camp. In the summer of 1944, the Nazi government staged a successful hoax on the International Red Cross delegation sent to inspect Terezín. They cleansed and improved the material condition of the barracks, covered up the endemic overpopulation of the camp by deporting numerous inmates to Auschwitz, and arranged for cultural activities to be witnessed by the delegates, thus giving the appearance of a happy, industrious community. The gimmick was so successful that SS commander Hans Günther attempted to expand on it by having Kurt Gerron, a famous Jewish actor-director interned in Terezín, make a short film about the camp intended to show neutral nations like Switzerland, Sweden, and Ireland how well the Jews were living under the Third Reich (Prager 2008: 178).

The footage that Gerron shot was intended to be edited into a film called either *Terezin: A Documentary Film of the Jewish Resettlement* (*Theresienstadt. Ein Dokumentarfilm aus dem jüdischen Siedlungsgebiet*) or *The Führer Gives the Jews a City* (*Der Führer schenkt den Juden eine Stadt*), but the progress of the war made that impossible, so the scenes were used independently (THM 2011: n.p.). In return, the Nazis promised Gerron that he would live. Soon after, however, Gerron and his wife were sent to Auschwitz and gassed immediately upon arrival, along with the film's performing entourage.

While this documentary film provides a striking example of political misappropriation of art, the fact that the most sophisticated and regular performances were aimed at the entertainment of the Nazis and took place against the backdrop of the mass killings routinely carried out in the camps, "inevitably took on [them] a contorted and even depraved form", as Rovit explains:

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> For example, the poet inmate, Krystyna Żywułska, reported on an early 1945 performance for the SS and dignitaries that took place next to the smoking crematoria of Birkenau. There, a Jewish actor delivered a monologue on having to bury his family that same day. Żywułska described an audience reaction of hysterical laughter. (Rovit 2014: 1)

Chilling eye-witness narrations like this show that the Nazis' encouragement of theatrical activities both in transit and extermination camps formed part of a carefully devised plan to achieve total control of the prisoners' bodies, minds, and spirits. Thus, Delbo's narrator recounts how, on the eve of the men's execution at Romanville, the Nazi commanding officer showed the inmates the extent of his discretional power by confining them to their barracks and prohibiting the women from performing the play they had been rehearsing for the occasion. Reflecting on this "ban on representation", Rothberg makes the cautionary remark that "[t]he extremity of cruelty found in the concentrationary universe should not distract from the more subtle shadings of 'life' there – what Levi called, in another context, 'the grey zone'" (Rothberg 2000: 149).

Rothberg is alluding here to "The Gray Zone", the title of the second chapter of *The Drowned and the Saved*, considered to be Primo Levi's last major attempt to come to terms with his experience of the Shoah, first published in Italian in 1986. In this chapter, Levi challenges the tendency to over-simplify and interpret in black-and-white terms the ethicality of the roles enforced on those Jewish prisoners who improved their living conditions and delayed or even avoided death by collaborating with the Nazis in the running of the camps, roles that covered a spectrum from various sorts of useful and harmless menial jobs, to those of the *Kapos* of the labour squads, or *Sonderkommandos*, who according to Levi represent the most sadly ironic extreme case of empty power

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(Levi 1988: 29-34, 34-43). Rothberg's comment suggests that the prisoners' enforced participation in theatrical and musical performances for the entertainment of the Nazis formed part of this general strategy of random privileging and punishing, meant to secure the prisoners' total subservience and destroy their received notions of good and evil, thus creating what Levi calls "the zone of ambiguity [...] based on the combination of terror and obsequiousness" (ib.: 58).

Needless to say, the prisoners' immersion in this grey zone of moral ambiguity had long-lasting traumatic effects on the survivors. Since he was one of those who survived extermination in Auschwitz, Levi was in permanent search of a justification for his survival. After rejecting a friend's suggestion that it had been the work of Providence, Levi describes the difference between "the drowned" and "the saved" in sheer Darwinian terms:

> Preferably, the worst survived, the selfish, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of 'the gray zone,' the spies. [...] I felt innocent, yes, but enrolled among the saved and therefore in permanent search of a justification in my own eyes and those of others. The worst survived, that is, the fittest; the best all died. (ib.: 82)

This comment appears in Chapter 3 of *The Drowned and the Saved*, entitled "Shame". Here, Levi discusses the profound depression, often leading to suicide, experienced by a great number of survivors after their liberation from the camps, and attributes the phenomenon to their strong feeling of shame stemming from the insidious doubt that "each one of us [...] has usurped his neighbor's place and lived in his stead" (ib.: 81-82). It is this survivor shame that made Levi write yet another testimonial book about the Shoah forty years after his liberation from Auschwitz, aimed at understanding an experience that defies interpretation, and knowing all the

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while that the task was impossible and even perhaps ethically wrong, as only the drowned could know the totality of the extermination camp experience.

Psychoanalysis defines shame as "a private moral affect" resulting from "a process of internal self-measurement, a global evaluation wherein the self is adjudged failing or wanting" (Uebel 2013: 481). Understood as "a failure to meet the ego ideal" (ib.: 478), shame is usually expressed in terms of masochism and aggression. As Michael Uebel explains, the shame felt by soldiers suffering from war neurosis triggers off such affects as "fury at having been abandoned to death and destruction by (perhaps punitive) father figures, anger at the loss of friends, and resentment against ineffectual leadership" (ib.: 477). But the shamed usually repress these affects "because of fear of their own aggression and of consequent retaliation", and direct their hostility against themselves (ib.: 477).

In 1945, psychoanalyst Ralph Greenson demonstrated that the masochistic inwardly-turned aggressivity coupled with external passivity, resignation, and submissiveness leading to depression displayed by patients "who had been through intense, usually prolonged deprivation in prisoner of war camps or lonely outposts" invariably stemmed from a strong feeling of "loss of love in all its many equivalents" (Greenson 1945: 196, qtd in Uebel 2013: 479), combined with the harbouring of ambivalent "hostile as well as affectionate feelings toward the same person or group" (Uebel 2013: 480). With these ideas in mind it is easy to see that the shame of Holocaust survivors was the inevitable outcome of the utter lovelessness they experienced in the camps, along with the intolerable realisation that they entertained ambivalent affective feelings for the punitive father figures who had granted them special privileges and permitted them to live.

Yet another element that should be taken into consideration

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when analysing survivor shame is the fact that, as Michael Uebel forcefully argues, "we perceive shame as attached to specific historical contexts – especially those involving profound cultural uncertainties and anxieties" (ib.: 482). Thus, the shame felt by survivors of the Second World War should be considered "within the context of the experience of ambivalence generated by a moral order in transition, in this case, shifting post-war moralities shaped and unshaped by violence and its aftermath" (ib.: 482). According to this, the shame felt by Levi and other Holocaust survivors should be seen as the product both of their private traumatic experiences in the camps and of the public moral uncertainty of a time characterised by the need to justify one's own violence while condemning that of the enemy. As Uebel argues, this public aspect of survivor shame confers on it its "universality and contagious social function": it is universal in the sense that "the liberated prisoners felt shame less on behalf of themselves than on behalf of humanity, of the entire human species" (ib.: 487); and it is socially contagious, in that it "can be experienced as a marker of personhood so intricately woven into the structure of identity that it forms the elemental bond of victim and witness" (ib.: 487).

This potential contagiousness of shame from victim to witness would explain why, while the shamed tend to isolate themselves from the rest of the world, the witnesses feel that "the less one knows or is able to imagine [...] the other's shame, the less access to shame one has" (ib.: 487). Uebel's significant contention is that this fear of contagion lies at the heart of the psychological difficulty of the allied countries in general and the US in particular to imagine and grasp the Nazi atrocities in the aftermath of the Second World War (ib.: 488). Thus, while *The New York Times* and other powerful mass media glaringly failed to provide adequate evidence for the extermination of six million Jews, moviegoers witnessing

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disturbing scenes in documentaries about the liberation of the camps in 1945 "elicited a range of emotional responses, from being sick, to crying, to being simply too stunned to utter any sound" (ib.: 486).

Thus, Alfred Kazin recalls how on seeing the carnage of the Bergen-Belsen camp at a Piccadilly newsreel theatre in April 1945, "[p]eople coughed in embarrassment and in embarrassment many laughed" (Kazin 1962: 160, qtd in Uebel 2013: 486). The embarrassed laughter of this English audience strikingly echoes the hysterical laughter that, according to Krystyna Żywułska, seized the Nazi audience at Auschwitz on listening to a Jewish actor's monologue on having just buried his family (see above). For all the differences in their respective degrees of guilt, the similarity of the two audiences' reactions points to the same uneasy awareness of a moral failure in themselves. As Uebel explains, "[t]he state of embarrassment, closely related to shame, dramatizes the experience of feeling that something, e.g., a moral failure, or uncertainty, has been revealed about oneself, that one would prefer not to be exposed" (ib.: 486). The question that remains to be answered – and one of the seminal research questions in my investigation – is whether this fear of contagion of the survivors' shame can interfere with the artistic representation of the Holocaust by secondary witnesses. As Gary Weissman puts it:

> When representing the Holocaust, how much horror can be shown without repelling viewers? How much horror can be described without alienating readers? How horrific and bleak can the story be without turning audiences away? How *Jewish* can a depiction of the Holocaust be without losing the patronage of an overwhelming non-Jewish audience? (Weissman 2004: 10-11)

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In the pages that follow, I will attempt to answer this question through the analysis of two exemplary texts: Enzo Cormann's *Storm Still* (*Toujours l'orage*, 1997)[5] and Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful* (*La vita è bella*, 1997), a French play and an Italian film released in the same year, which can be seen as representative of two diametrically opposed forms of assimilating and transmitting the traumatic memory of the experience of survival of a Nazi camp by secondary witnesses.

The representation of the Shoah in Enzo Cormann's Storm Still

Enzo Cormann's *Storm Still*, first published in French as *Toujours l'orage*, is a play aimed at representing the psychological and moral effects of the shame experienced by seventy-year-old Theo Steiner, a former inmate of Terezín, who, unlike his parents and tens of thousands of other Jews, avoided deportation to Auschwitz. After the war, Steiner became an internationally acclaimed Shakespearean actor. But in 1971, in the midst of the triumphant success of a *Macbeth* at the Burgtheater in Vienna, he suddenly put an end to his career and, in his own words "melted into the anonymous and silent mass of wanderers" (Cormann 1997: 5), crisscrossing Europe on foot. Thus transformed into a modern version of the archetypal errant Jew, he walked aimlessly for three years until he found a perfect hiding place, an old, solitary farm 150 miles south of Paris. The action is situated at this farm in the play's present, more than fifty years after his internment in Terezín, and

5 I would like to express my deep gratitude to Enzo Cormann for having kindly provided me with the unpublished English version of *Storm Still* and to Arnold Mittelman, the President/Producing Artistic Director of the National Jewish Theater Foundation and the Holocaust Theater International Initiative, for having facilitated contact with Cormann and for his supportive attitude in general.

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twenty-five years after his disappearance from the stage. The setting is a large living room that also doubles as a painter's studio.

The action opens with the unwelcome visit of forty-year-old Nathan Goldring in the middle of a formidable storm, which prevents Steiner from closing the door on him. Thus, the two men initiate an ever-more intense and emotionally charged dialogue, interrupted by spells of dozing and dreaming, that lasts for about two days, while the storm, as in *King Lear*'s climactic Act 3, continues raging outside, echoing the old man's turbulent and aggressive state of mind. In the course of their dialogue we learn that Theodor Steiner was the son of world-famous Austrian-Jewish artists: his father, Isaac, was a virtuoso pianist, and his mother, Elsa, a soprano singer. Theo himself showed an early gift for drawing and he was expected to become an architect.

Like most of their equally famous and talented friends, his parents cared very little for religion. In fact, his father had converted to Catholicism, "certainly not because of any kind of conviction, but because of a tempered hatred of himself" (ib.: 22); and he had a close friendship with other notable assimilated Jewish artists, like the writer and playwright Arthur Schnitzler, who called Semitism "the Jews' newest national illness" (ib.: 22); or the satirist Karl Kraus, who was "Jewish and anti-Semitic – at the very least judeophobic, […] considered Judaism as an 'Asian barbarism' […] and he wasn't very tender towards Zionists either" (ib.: 22). As Steiner makes clear, this judeophobic attitude "was not so rare among Viennese intellectuals at the time" (ib.: 22). The fact that Theo's parents belonged in this privileged sociocultural class and counted among their close friends these and other historically real intellectuals situates the play midway between the imaginary and the testimonial, making Theo Steiner's story representative of the stories of the tens of thousands of real Jews who were

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interned in Terezín between 1942 and 1945 and found their deaths there or in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

The visitor, Nathan Goldring, is the current head of the Neue Bühne in Berlin. As a fifteen-year-old boy he had watched Steiner play Macbeth in Vienna and that performance had left an indelible mark on him. He has spent a lot of energy and time trying to find Steiner's hiding place and has come to the farm in order to ask him to play King Lear for him. But the prospect of performing *King Lear* in a German-speaking country drives Steiner completely mad: "Lear at Terezin, Lear in Berlin, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER (He howls)" (ib.: 25).

Thus, Goldring learns that Steiner had already played *King Lear* in Terezín. After his internment in the camp at the age of twenty-two (ib.: 20), Theo had become the assistant of the famous Czech architect Franz Zelenka,[6] in the creation of the sets for the representation of various performances (ib.: 21). Although he had always detested the theatre because he associated it with his mother's long absences (ib.: 12), he then played a minor role in a cabaret show entitled "Long Life to Life", directed by Terezín's most popular theatre producer, Karel Švenk (ib.: 21). After this he was given the role of Edgar in *King Lear* (ib.: 16). This performance drew the attention, and admiration, of the SS officer in charge of the entertainments, and this fact changed Theo's fate.

The enthusiastic *Untersturmführer* confided to the elated young man that the theatre had always been a great source of joy for him, that he had also acted at university (ib.: 23),

6 Despite his depression, Franz (Frantishek) Zelenka (1904-1944), mounted twenty-five performances in Terezín in the short span of fifteen months before he was killed. He designed sets for Molière, Gogol, Shakespeare, cabaret shows by Karel Švenk, born Schwenk (1907-1945), and Kurt Gerron (1897-1944), among other productions (Garret Stage Magician 2014: n.p.).

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and that he had decided to do him an "exorbitant favour": he could cross off one out of the fifteen thousand Jewish names on the list of those to be deported to Auschwitz in the following convoy. Theo crossed out his own name with the beautiful fountain pen of the SS officer, without even thinking of begging him to let him cross out the names of his mother and father as well (ib.: 24). The episode ended with the *Untersturmführer* countersigning the list with the same fountain pen and telling Theo in a casual tone that "they [were] going to throw a party for the commander's birthday the following week. Free programme, at your convenience, he added, handing [Theo] an anthology of German poets" (ib.: 24). After recounting this crucial episode, Goldring falls asleep and Steiner tries to hang himself but the noise of the shutter buffeted by the storm awakes Goldring in time to save him with the cry: "Hanging's forbidden" (ib.: 27).

This episode is a good example of the moral ambiguity ruling Levi's grey zone. In it, the SS officer appears as the typical punitive father figure, provoking contradictory feelings of love and fear in the Jewish boy through the combination of obsequiousness and terror. When the officer offered him his fountain pen, Theo simply took it and crossed out his name without expressing any emotions. According to psychoanalysis, it is the repression of affects, rather than the extremity of the event itself, that lies at the heart of psychic trauma (Freud and Breuer 2001: 5-6). Consequently, Theo's incapacity to express any affects while he crossed out his name indicates that he was in shock, while the fact that, after the war, he continued working as an actor is proof that he had dissociated the atrocious episode from his conscious memory, repressing it to the unconscious. Furthermore, according to Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* ("belatedness" or "deferred action"), it is only after a second traumatic event takes place that the first is perceived as traumatic by the subject (Laplanche

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2006: 171). In Steiner's case, this second traumatic event, which brought about the end of his selective amnesia, took place precisely on the night after the fourth performance of *Macbeth* in Vienna, when he received the visit of an admirer who turned out to be the SS officer at Terezín. Although he was now shaky and fragile, Steiner immediately recognised his voice and, more crucially, the beautiful fountain pen with the gold and mother-of-pearl cap that he was now offering him to sign the programme with:

> —Beautiful pen, I say.
>
> —My father gave it to me when I turned thirty, he says while I sign the program. I always keep it with me.
>
> —Even in Terezin, in 1944, I say in giving it back to him.
>
> —Even during the next fifteen years, in the prison of Stammheim, he says. And for ten years after that, up until today. Take it, he says, it is yours now. In fact, I came here for that very reason. Then he adds: May God keep you safe Theo Steiner.
>
> I closed my eyes. When I reopened them I was alone again. I remained paralized for a long time, contemplating the pen in my hand and forcing myself to suppress the absurd and weak thank you that came to my lips. Then, I saw what was coming next. I didn't formulate it with words because words frightened me, I only made room for images and let them invade everything […]. (Cormann 1997: 29)

This is the moment of revelation of the true horror of his survival, which Steiner experiences with the full force of the presentness of Freud's *Nachträglichkeit*. It is this unspeakable horror, perceived through emotionally charged images, rather than words, that makes the famous actor abandon the theatre for ever and start walking aimlessly across Europe "fee[ling] the fountain pen in [his] pocket" (ib.: 29), until he stopped at the French farm "after the thousandth day of walking" (ib.: 29). Steiner's self-punishing decision to abandon fame, affluence, and friends for the solitary confinement of the farm, in

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dire contact with nature, together with his irate and abusive behaviour towards Goldring, are clear indications that the old man is still prey to the masochism and aggressiveness symptomatic of survivor shame.

Like Steiner, Goldring is an assimilated Austrian-Jew with a refined education and little faith in religion. His parents married in 1950, and he was born in 1957, so he belongs to a generation that only had an indirect knowledge of the Shoah. In Nathan's case, this knowledge was transmitted to him through the set phrase used to refer to his mother, who had died when he was twelve: "your poor mother lived through the horrors of the camps" (ib.: 19). Just as Theo Steiner dissociated the memory of what happened in Terezín for ten years and, after recovering it, remained silent for forty more, so Nathan Goldring tried to lead a carefree life, refusing to face the horror his mother lived through in the Bergen-Belsen camp. As he tells Steiner: "I'm not ashamed to be Jewish. I just don't practice it […]. It doesn't mean anything to me" (ib.: 18).

However, Goldring admits that his life, especially his relationship with women, has always been conditioned by his fear of losing what he possessed (ib.: 16), a clear indication that he has not overcome the traumatic loss of his mother. And, in a troubled dream in which he addresses his estranged girlfriend Alice, he admits to having seen "the hole from up close" (ib.: 25) and being in desperate need of love: "Alice, how do I know that I exist if nobody touches me? Touch me, so I know for certain that I exist and I will be able to brag that I am loved. Alice, invent us a story, I shall do my best to perform it" (ib.: 26). As the last sentence suggests, Goldring sees the world as a stage and he as an actor in wait of the love script that will allow him to

> turn towards the audience and cry: peace! Peace and live! Peace for the memories and peace for the bodies. […] And this evening on stage, a

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testimony of peace, laughter and tears, vital joy! Are we not living? Have I the right to live, in the end? To live in peace? (ib.: 24)

This is the real question that Goldring expects Steiner to answer, and the final reason for his desire to have him perform the part of King Lear, the maddened old king who eventually learnt humility out of his misfortunes and was redeemed by Cordelia's forgiveness.

After his flight from Vienna, Steiner had attempted to express his Holocaust experience in painting. But all his canvases are variations on an empty stage (ib.: 26) with a smear in the middle, futile attempts at representing the "black nucleus … at the centre of vision – the tiny gaping black hole … where the vision engulfs […] the word … evil" (ib.: 14). Thus, while Goldring believes that he can put an end to his traumatic memory of the Shoah by performing a play of love and peace, Steiner is well aware that "[p]ainting is only a pretext", that there is only "[t]hought of barbarism and thought of submission. Thought of evil and the agreement with evil" (ib.: 30). As these remarks suggest, after fifty years of enduring the agony of survival shame, Steiner has moved from the perception of evil in the world to the universalisation of evil, thus implicitly endorsing Primo Levi's view that the Nazi camps have made us ashamed of being human.[7] In other words, he has elevated the historical evil caused by the Nazis to the metaphysical realm of sublime Evil. And this is the lesson he is at pains to

7 In a private communication (Onega 2014b: n.p.), Enzo Cormann stated that he shared my view that the main purpose of comedy about the Shoah seems to be to avoid experiencing any form of shame, especially Levi's survivor shame as described by Gilles Deleuze: "J'ai été très frappé par toutes les pages de Primo Levi où il explique que les camps nazis ont introduit en nous "la honte d'être un homme"" ("I was very impressed by all the pages of Primo Levi in which he explains that the Nazi camps have introduced in us 'the shame of being a man'" (Deleuze 1990: n.p.; my translation).

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teach Goldring: "You belong to this breed who exterminated six million beings just because they had committed the fault of being born! There you go in the end of ends, what is to be Jewish: exterminated and a member of the exterminating breed" (ib.: 25). As Slavoj Žižek argues, "the elevation of the holocaust into the metaphysical diabolical Evil" amounts to depoliticising it, as it involves reaching

> the ultimate traumatic point at which the objectifying historical knowledge breaks down and has to acknowledge its worthlessness [...], and, simultaneously, the point at which witnesses themselves had to concede that words fail them, that what they can share is ultimately only their silence. (Žižek 1999: par. 4)

Steiner's sublimation of the Holocaust, therefore, is in keeping with the survivors' perception that "it cannot be explained, visualized, represented, transmitted, since it marks the black hole, the implosion of the (narrative) universe" (ib.: par. 4).

It is this perception, synthetically expressed both by Goldring and Steiner in the image of a black hole, which eventually drives the ashamed old man to suicide, thus repeating the gesture of a great number of Holocaust survivors, including Primo Levi, who killed himself one year after completing *The Drowned and the Saved*. And it is the burden of this awful and shameful knowledge that Goldring is unwilling to bear: "But I didn't kill anyone! No one asked me to cross out a name from the list of mortals. [...] I live since I must, I don't walk over any cadavers" (Cormann 1997: 25). The play ends with Goldring and Steiner reaching a minimal truce: Steiner will perhaps play Lear provided that Goldring stops saying that he understands the Holocaust: "Because there is no way of understanding such a disaster" and "[p]retended understanding is in the end only disguised self-pity, which allows young generations to sidestep essential questions" (ib.: 30).

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As Goldring himself suggests, one of the essential questions secondary witnesses like him have to bear in mind is: "To what new barbarism will I be the fool?" (ib.: 30).

In summary, the sublimation of the Holocaust in *Storm Still* grants pathetic dignity to Steiner and Goldring, two tragic characters forced to play their destined roles in history, while the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis remains unexplained. By forcing a dialogue between survivor and witness, Enzo Cormann manages to break the former's awful silence and isolation and allows the latter to establish with him the empathic bond he needs to overcome his fear of contamination and accept his share of responsibility in the keeping and transmitting of the traumatic memory of the Shoah, lest he becomes the fool to a new barbarism. Thus, although the play does not offer any sort of conclusive optimistic solution, it brings to the fore the crucial importance of putting traumatic memories into words as a first step in the move from traumatic re-enactment, or acting out, to the healing phase of working through of both Steiner's survivor shame and Goldring's inherited trauma.

The representation of the Shoah in Roberto Benigni's Life is Beautiful

As a tragedy, *Storm Still* stands in diametrical opposition to the films that proliferated in the transnational popular culture of the 1990s, giving way to what Žižek has described as "the beginning of a new sub-genre or at least a new trend: the holocaust comedy" (Žižek 1999: par. 1). Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1998)[8] belongs in this trend, together with,

8 *Life is Beautiful* was shown at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival, and went on to win the Grand Prix. At the 71st Academy Awards, the film won awards for Best Music, Original Dramatic Score, and Best

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among others, Radu Mihaileanu's *Train of Life* (*Train de vie*, 1998), and Peter Kassovitz's *Jacob the Liar* (1999), an American remake of Frank Beyer's *Jakob der Lügner* (1975), an East German-Czechoslovakian Holocaust film based on the novel of the same title by Jurek Becker. The origins of this sub-genre can be traced back to pre-war films such as *The Great Dictator*, directed by Charlie Chaplin in 1940, and *To Be or Not to Be*, an American comedy directed by Ernst Lubitsch in 1942.

Life is Beautiful shares many traits with *The Great Dictator*, ranging from the personal to the societal, but they differ in the crucial fact that Chaplin's film was released before the Second World War, when the United States was still formally at peace with Nazi Germany and anti-Semitism had not yet materialised into a plan for the annihilation of the Jewish people. The film combines comedy and drama and has a clear political stance in that it satirises Hitler and Mussolini, and warns against the dangers of anti-Semitism. The protagonist is a nameless Jewish barber who fought on the side of the Central Powers in the First World War and lost his memory in a plane accident after having saved the life of Commander Schultz. Thus, when he returns to the Jewish Ghetto after a long internment in hospital, he is completely unaware of the political changes and the anti-Semitic agenda of Adenoid Hynkel (also played by Chaplin), the ruthless dictator of Tomainia.

The source of laughter arises from the behaviour of the purblind and fearless amnesiac Jewish barber, who does not respond according to expectations when he or his neighbours are bullied by storm troopers, while the sting of satire is

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Foreign Language Film, with Benigni winning Best Actor for his role. The film also received Academy Award nominations for Directing, Film Editing, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Picture.

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based on the Jewish barber's striking physical resemblance to the preposterous and stark raving anti-Semitic dictator. The film's political agenda is made explicit in the final scene, when the confusion of their identities allows the barber to usurp the dictator's place and make a rousing speech reversing his anti-Semitic policies and defending democracy and progress. Though sentimental and propagandistic, this speech cancels out the comedy and gives the Jewish barber a dramatic depth and pathetic dignity with which the audience can empathise.

The historical background to *Life is Beautiful* was completely different from this. The film was released five decades after the Second World War and, unlike Chaplin, Roberto Benigni had direct knowledge of the atrocities of the Shoah, as his father survived three years of internment at the Bergen-Belsen camp. For all this, *Life is Beautiful* is a silly comedy devoid of any sort of political agenda. Guido Orefice, the Chaplinesque Jewish-Italian protagonist, is an inveterate optimist, who refuses to read the awe-inspiring signs encroaching on him and the other Jews in his home town, Arezzo, from 1939 onwards, as the Fascist authorities strengthen their alliance with the Nazis and adopt their anti-Semitic measures. Guido has a talent for transforming coincidences into events that seem to happen according to his wishes. He thus wins the love of Dora, the beautiful Gentile school teacher, and when he and their five-year-old son Giosuè are deported to a concentration camp, he convinces the child that it is a game and that, if he obeys all the rules, he will get the first prize: a real tank.

The stuff of comedy is the affirmation of life: the comic hero always survives no matter how catastrophic or dark his predicament. However, as Žižek notes, "the 'life' which survives all predicaments in comedy is precisely NOT the simple biological life, but a fantasmatic ethereal life unencumbered by the constraints of biological reality" (ib.: par. 17; emphasis in the original). This means that Benigni's protective father

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"does NOT protect the son from the harsh reality of the camp, he just provides the symbolic fiction that renders this reality bearable" (ib.: par. 8; emphasis in the original). For all this, however, the demand the film makes is that we believe that Guido's fantasmatic protection in fact had a *real* effect on his son's survival, that, unlike the other Jewish children in the camp, Giosuè did survive extermination, since, at the beginning of the film, we hear the voice of the adult Giosuè presenting the narration as the retrospective account of his fable-like story. It is the absurdity of this demand that renders the film problematic for, as Žižek acutely wonders,

> is it not that in the same way the father within the film constructs a protective fictional shield to render the traumatic reality of the concentration camp bearable, Benigni himself treats the spectators as children to be protected from the horror of the holocaust by a "crazy" sentimental and funny fiction of a father saving his son, the fiction that renders the historical reality of the holocaust somehow bearable? (ib.: par. 9)

Benigni's demand that we take seriously the protective capacity of Guido's silly trick can only be fulfilled if we choose to ignore the atrocity of the concentration-camp universe at its most horrifying, something that is no longer possible in the light of the massive documentary and testimonial evidence available. Thus, while the sublimation of the Shoah in *Storm Still* derives from the impossibility of putting it into adequate images or words, in Benigni's film it is based on the edulcoration and banalisation of its horror. As Žižek reminds us in an article entitled "The Christian-Hegelian Comedy", the comic effect relies on the assumption that when we draw the veil covering the terrifying Thing too traumatic for our gaze, what we encounter, instead of a hidden terrifying secret, is *the same thing* as in front of it (Žižek 2005: par. 8; emphasis in the original).

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Surely, it is this reassuring message that there is no terrifying Thing behind the veil covering the Holocaust – what David Denby acutely describes as "a benign form of Holocaust denial" (Denby 1999: 99)[9] – that ensured the extraordinary popularity and official recognition of Benigni's film, for, if we believe this message, we have no reason to feel shame, or to carry the burden of its traumatic memory onto the next generations. In the last reading, therefore, the comedic turn given to the Shoah in *Life is Beautiful* may be said to provide an outlet for the failure of nerve of secondary witnesses like Nathan Goldring, or the embarrassed Piccadilly audience (see above), who feared contamination of the survivors' shame and wished to turn the page on that gruesome chapter of history. The other element that no doubt contributed to the success of the film in the US is the propagandistic message sent by the film's ending, when the camp is liberated by American troops and an amazingly huge M4 Sherman tank rides up to tiny Giosuè. Then a nice-looking and smiling soldier emerges from it and invites the child for a ride. This triumphalist ending is the only political gesture of the film and one that reinforces the childishness required of its targeted Hollywood-type audience to enjoy it.

Conclusion

Enzo Corman's *Storm Still* and Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* were both produced, the former in France and the second in Italy, in the same year, 1997. Thus, they may be said to form part of the boom of creative works arising in the 1990s in

9 Concurring with Denby, Jonathan Romney compares *Life is Beautiful* to Jerry Lewis' unfinished "tear-jerking comedy about the Holocaust", *The Day the Clown Died*, describing it as "the nearest we'll ever get to that fabled monstrosity" (Romney 1999: n.p.). See also Wright (2000).

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response to the generalised and ever-more urgent need of the Western world to come to terms with the collective trauma of the Shoah. As I hope to have shown, the strikingly divergent ways in which the Shoah is approached in Corman's play and Benigni's film convey different outlooks on it and produce diametrically opposed effects on the viewers.

In Corman's play, the action develops around, and so performs, the necessary indirection and sheer difficulty of breaking the ominous silence engulfing the traumatic experiences of both the direct victim and the second-generation witness of the Shoah, thus suggesting that the only way of filling in the black hole of trauma and shame goes through the endless and strenuous striving to put their traumatic memories into words.

By contrast, in Benigni's film the failure of nerve provoked by the fear of alienating the viewers, pointed out by Gary Weissman (see above), results in an edulcoration and banalisation of the Holocaust that falsifies this historical episode and deprives the collective memory of it of its true horror. Further, the fact that this Italian film was so acclaimed in Hollywood confirms Uebel's contention (see above) that what lies at the heart of the psychological difficulty of the allied countries in general and the US in particular to imagine and grasp the Nazi atrocities is the fear of contagion. In the last reading, therefore, what the analysis of these two texts shows is that, as the Russian Formalists demonstrated once and for all, the rhetorical, stylistic, and formal choices made by authors are never arbitrary and gratuitous, that they are the vehicle for the ideology conveyed by their works.

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PART II: REMEMBRANCE

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Testimony, Documentary, Fiction: The Remediation of Stolen Children

Hans Lauge Hansen, AARHUS UNIVERSITY

In 2006 the Spanish author Benjamin Prado published *Mala gente que camina* (Evil people who walk), a novel on the subject of the so-called "stolen children" in Spain,[1] children abducted from their Republican parents by the Francoist regime and given to Nationalist families. The novel partakes in the public dialogue on the case in the contemporary Spain of the Noughties. How does it relate to the general wave of memory discourses after the turn of the millennium, what role did it actually play in the development of the case of the stolen children, and how does our reading of it inform the

1 Luz Souto, one of the scholars who has worked on this topic most thoroughly, prefers to use the concept "expropriated children" in the Spanish case, because this makes it possible to distinguish between a situation in which children are taken from their parents according to legal regulation, and a situation, as in Argentina, in which they are not (Souto 2014: 73-76 and 2015: 245). In this article I prefer the more colloquial and widespread term "stolen children".

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evaluation of its influence? These are some of the questions examined in this article.

Since the turn of the millennium one of the driving forces of cultural production in Spain has been the question of the so-called "recovery" of the historical memory of the Civil War and its subsequent repression under the Francoist dictatorship. During the last fifteen years hundreds of novels have been published on this topic, film after film has been made, TV documentaries produced *en masse* and numerous newspaper articles have covered the work of the memory organisations, the *Asociación por la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica* (ARMH, Association for the recuperation of the historical memory) and *Foros por la Memoria* (The Memory Forum), both dedicated to the exhumations of the many mass graves throughout the Spanish landscape. In recent years, since the severe impact of the economic crisis made itself felt in terms of massive unemployment and evictions of families because they cannot afford to pay their mortgages, the topic of the Civil War and Francoist repression has lost momentum in public debate, with the exception of one specific field: the case of the "stolen children". This topic is still in 2016 one of the most hotly debated issues in the public sphere in Spain.

Between 1940 and 1941 Franco issued two laws that allowed the Spanish state to take over guardianship of children put into custody in the regime's orphanages of *Auxilio Social* (Public Aid; Souto 2011: 87). An enormous number of children whose mothers had been executed or jailed, or who were simply known as Republicans or "reds", were brought to this institution, where their names were changed and they were adopted by couples trusted by the regime. The children were registered as the biological offspring of their new "parents", no official procedures or controls were necessary, and no protocols were kept on the traffic. During the first fifteen to twenty years, the enterprise was politically and ideologically

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motivated and organised by the state, while after 1960 it became a very lucrative business for private institutions and the Catholic Church.[2] This illegal and highly amoral practice continued until the early 1990s, but it was not until after the turn of the millennium, with the upsurge of the general interest in the consequences of the regime's repression, that it was addressed by public media. It is now publicly recognised that around 30,000 children were abducted between 1944 and 1954, and that around 300,000 were taken from their parents without their consent over the whole period.[3]

In this article I will offer a reading of Benjamín Prado's novel and examine its role in public dialogue through different media concerning the case of the stolen children. This is obviously a case in which "texts" in the broadest sense of the concept, visual as well as printed, books as well as cinema or TV, play a superior role as social agents of cultural or collective memory. According to the American social anthropologist James Wertsch, collective memory consists of processes of communication or, as he calls it, "mediated action": texts are produced, circulated, consumed, and discussed in ongoing social processes. Consequently, cultural memory is disputed or negotiated through dialogue between different social discourses in the public sphere (Wertsch 2002: 13; 2009: 119). Theoretically, Wertsch takes his point of departure in Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic understanding of language, according to which the language in actual communication (discourse) not

2 Estelo Poves (2012) maintains that it is possible to distinguish between two different periods in the development of the abduction of children in Spain: between 1940 and 1960 it must be considered a consequence of the Francoist repression, while the activities in the period between 1960 and 1990 were driven by economic interests (Souto 2013: note 9).

3 See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2011/01/110128_espana_ninos_robados_lr.shtml> (3 March 2017). These numbers are only estimates and have not been confirmed by research.

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only enters into dialogue with other social discourses present at the moment of communication, but also makes references to what has been said about the same topic in the past, as well as being directed towards a possible future answer (Bakhtin 1981: 279-80). This means that the significance of a specific cultural product must be analysed in its temporal flux, in its dialogue with former discourses on the same topic, and as an instigator of new chains of discourse.

Methodologically I will draw upon Astrid Erll's definition of the concept of "remediation", understood as "the ongoing transcription of 'memory matter' into different media" (Erll 2011: 141). By "memory matter" Erll understands those images and narratives of the past which circulate in a given social context. Memory matter is thus to be understood as a transmedial phenomenon which creates a "palimpsestic structure of existent media representations" (ib.: 141).

My reading of Benjamin Prado's novel *Mala gente que camina* examines the novel's characteristics in comparison to the majority of novels published within the same wave of "memory-phoria", and analyses the degree to which the novel itself could be said to unfold as an agent of memory at that particular moment. In order to understand the novel's interaction with former discourses on the topic, I will, in line with Wertsch's understanding of memory as the dialogue of texts in a public space, trace back the dialogic thread of the case of the stolen children to the testimonies of the Republican women prisoners, published in the 1970s and 80s, while the contemporary context of dialogue will consist of the memory culture that has developed after the turn of the century. This memory culture has, on the one hand, been dominated by images of exhumation sites and printed media in the form of newspaper journalism, and on the other by docu-fictional cultural products investigating "authentic" stories of the past. The memory of the stolen children, for its part, has been

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dominated by the pathos of the testimony of the still-living victims (parents as well as children, now grown up), and visual media (TV documentaries and news journalism) have been predominant in the circulation of this memory in the same period.

Mala gente que camina *(2006)*

In Benjamin Prado's novel the intra- and autodiegetic narrator, Juan Urbano, is a Spanish high-school teacher living in Madrid after the turn of the millennium. Urbano has the stated ambition of becoming a literary critic, and when he is invited to the US to give a paper on the Spanish female author Carmen Laforet, famous for her post-war, prize-winning novel *Nada* (Nothing, 1944), he accepts. However, through his mistress, the mother of one of his pupils, Urbano becomes aware of an old, now forgotten novel, *Óxido* (Corrosion), written by his mistress' mother-in-law, Dolores Serma, in 1944, a few copies of which were published in 1962. In the present time of the novel, Dolores Serma, a purely fictional character, is a very old lady who suffers from Alzheimer's, a matter of fact that can only be read as an extended metaphor. However, when Urbano discovers that Serma and Laforet were friends in the early Forties and worked together on their manuscripts in the Atheneum in Madrid, he decides to change the subject of his paper, and he begins an investigation of the case of the forgotten novel.

It turns out that the novel is not only a rich piece of literature, but also a vehement denouncement of the regime's amoral and criminal practice of systematic child abduction. In addition, as a person, Dolores Serma seems to have been quite an ambiguous character: at one and the same time she worked for the director of *Auxilio Social*, the real-life civil servant Mercedes Sanz-Bachiller, socialised with important

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people within the regime, and was a friend of the likewise authentic and famous liberal playwright Antonio Buero Vallejo, mingling with a circle of other liberal authors during the 1940s and 1950s. Confronted with this ambiguity, Urbano's black-and-white image of the past is challenged and he begins to ask himself what kind of woman Dolores Serma "really" was. During his investigations he finds out that after the Civil War, Dolores' sister was incarcerated in the infamous *Ventas* prison, where she had a child. The child disappeared, and when Dolores' sister was released several years later she was hospitalised due to the damages she had suffered. Dolores Serma used her connections to powerful people of the regime's inner circles to find and adopt the boy. She brought him up as her own child, and never told him about his past. In this way it turns out that the husband of Juan Urbano's mistress, in the present a conservative lawyer opposed to the whole project of the recovery of historical memory, is himself one of the "stolen children".

Considered as "mediated action" (Wertsch), Prado's novel belongs to what we might call the Spanish "affiliative memory novel" (Faber 2010: 103). According to Faber, the acts of writing, buying and reading novels on the Civil War and Francoist repression published after the turn of the millennium are acts of affiliative solidarity: Prado's novel is not only a part of this body of novels, but it actually shares most of the formal traits that characterise them. According to the findings of the *Memoria Novelada* (Memory and the Novel) project,[4] the affiliative memory novel is a typical sub-genre of post-memory or inter-generational memory, in that, typically,

4 A collective research project conducted at Aarhus University 2011-2014 on the Spanish novel published after 2000 dedicated to the memory of the Spanish Civil War and Francoist repression, led by the author of this article.

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it is the grandchildren of the victims who write and read these novels (Hansen and Cruz Suárez 2012: 30). As I have argued elsewhere, these texts tend to be characterised by a strong hybridisation of genres in an artistically elaborated discourse that blurs the distinctions between essay, biography and/or autobiography, historiographical discourse, journalism, and novelistic fiction, and in which docu-fiction, auto-fiction, and meta-fictional comments are combined (Hansen and Cruz Suárez 2012). While the pre-2000 memory novels dedicated to the theme of the Civil War were typically written as a mimesis of the processes of individual remembering, many of the novels of the new millennium depict the social processes that contribute to the construction of cultural memory (Hansen 2013a). Their plotlines are often divided into two temporal parts: the world of the past and the world of the present, from which the world of the past is told (Hansen 2013b); and a significant number of novels engage in the deconstruction of the myth of the "two Spains" (Juliá 2004; Hansen 2015) through the application of multi-perspectival enunciation and focalisation of the represented story (Hansen 2011).

This is also a fairly precise description of *Mala gente que camina*: like Prado himself, the narrator was born in 1961, and he claims to be the author of the novel that the reader is holding in his hands (Prado 2006: 460).[5] The plotline is divided between the history of the past and the present investigation of this past, consisting of Urbano's use of all the practices and techniques that characterise the work of cultural memory, and the novel blends passages of fiction with passages replete with historical documentation. The only point of deviation from the general characteristics of many of the

5 As indicated by Gerda Telgenhof, the name Juan Urbano is also the pseudonym used by Benjamín Prado in his columns in *El País* for more than fifteen years, finishing in 2011 (Telgenhof 2013: 28).

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affiliative-memory novels is that *Mala gente*, on a first reading, apparently confirms the division of Spanish cultural history according to the myth of the two Spains. In the many conversations with his mother, Urbano insists on his severe black-and-white critique of the followers of the regime, his own mother included, and he arrogantly sustains his point of view with references to scholarly publications. A reading that takes Urbano's discourse at face value will make sense of the novel's title in the same vein, a verse taken from the poem "He andado muchos caminos" [I have walked many roads] by the Andalusian poet Antonio Machado. Machado was a famous supporter of the Republic and died as a refugee during the escape after the fall of Barcelona in 1939. The poem reads like this:

I have walked many roads,
[…]
Everywhere I have seen
caravans of sadness
arrogants and melancholics
drunk with black shadow,
and half pretending pedants
who watch quietly and think
that they know, because they do not drink
the wine in the taverns.
Evil people who walk
and in walking soil the earth …
And in all the places I have seen
people who dance and play […]
(Machado 1907: 185; my translation)[6]

6 He andado muchos caminos, / […] / En todas partes he visto / caravanas de tristeza, / soberbios y melancólicos / borrachos de sombra negra, / y pedantones al paño / que miran, callan, y piensan / que

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The poem evidently repeats the myth of the "two Spains" (Juliá 2004) with its division between the evil, arrogant, and informed elite and the happy, innocent people, and the two lines *Mala gente que camina / y va apestando la tierra* unmistakably refer to the intellectual followers of the regime. In particular they refer to the historical figure of the psychiatrist Antonio Vallejo-Nájera, who provided the "scientific" legitimation for the practice of mass abduction of children with his theory of the "red gene". Vallejo-Nájera was born in 1889, and lived in Germany between 1917 and 1930, where he became influenced by the racist ideology of the Nazi party. In 1937 Franco made him director of the *El Gabinete de Investigaciones Psicológicas* (Office of Psychological Investigations), a position that placed him in charge of the psychological experiments on Republican soldiers and women imprisoned in jails and camps with the purpose of finding and destroying "the Marxist plague". Large passages of the novel are dedicated to the explanation and documentation of his eugenics, and the novel, considered as an instance of discursive practice, accuses Vallejo-Nájera and the Francoist regime of crimes against humanity directly inspired by Nazi Germany.

What is less clear, however, is how the novel's political statements about the past translate into an evaluation of how this past should be treated in the present. Critics like Jordi Gracia, Sara Santamaría, and Luz Souto have read the voice of the narrator as the expression of a monologic and self-assuring denouncement of the crimes of the past.[7] Gracia

saben, porque no beben / el vino de las tabernas. / Mala gente que camina / y va apestando la tierra … / Y en todas partes he visto / gentes que danzan o juegan […].

7 The concept of "voice" is here used in a Bakhtinian sense as "a way of speaking that can be attributed to one or the other of the agents involved in the narrative process" (Mey 2000, 112 ff).

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describes the character of the narrator as "hard to believe" and writes that, in his view, the argument of the novel only serves as an alibi for the judgement of the Francoist regime (Gracia and Ródenas 2011: 932). Following the same line of reflection, Sara Santamaría writes:

> The relation that the narrator establishes with Dolores Serma is, after all, an asymmetrical one in which he pretends to give voice to a subaltern, while he establishes a relation of subtle superiority, similar to the one described with respect to his mother. In this relation the protagonist gives himself the privilege of representing the correct and adequate perspective on the interpretation of the past against all other voices (Santamaría 2010: 64, my translation).[8]

Such readings require revision if we examine the dynamic development of Urbano as a character and a narrator. At the beginning of the story his voice reveals that he is a disillusioned and cynical person: he lives in his mother's house following a divorce, he manipulates his colleagues, and he always acts exclusively out of self-interest. At a meta-literary level this attitude finds expression through his initial, purely aesthetic criteria for evaluating Dolores Serma's novel *Óxido*: he is only interested in the novel if it is good literature, and if the critical recovery of it can help him to further his own career as a critic:

> Against all odds, I was impressed by Dolores Serma's book. The story seemed to have Kafka's mark on it, and some influences from Gothic

8 "La relación que establece el narrador de la historia con respecto a Dolores Serma es, pese a todo, una relación asimétrica en la cual aquél pretende dar voz a la subalterna y establece con respecto a ella una sutil relación de superioridad, similar a la descrita con respecto a su madre. En ella el protagonista se reserva para sí mismo la correcta y adecuada perspectiva de cara a interpretar el pasado, frente al resto de las voces."

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tales; and for something conceived in 1944 it seemed very modern: this could without any doubt be the beginning of a story by Samuel Beckett or Julio Cortázar. She had the same dry, hypnotic style as Carmen Laforet, and the scenery she created, […] was very efficient, it provided you with an addictive and somewhat nauseating restlessness.

Dolores Serma's prose was very good, and obviously had nothing in common with the reverberating hyperboles of some of the regime's authors. (Prado 2006: 139; my translation)[9]

However, as he reads on he becomes involved not only in the aesthetics of the novel, but also in the investigation of the life story of Dolores Serma. He recognises the possibility of another level of interpretation, the socio-political critique of the regime and the ideology behind the practice of the systematic abduction of children:

How was it possible that the same person could publish *Óxido* and belong to those organisations that in a programmatic way considered that […] they could separate the children of Republicans from their families because of their parents' moral standing? (ib.: 170; my translation)[10]

9 "Contra todo pronóstico, el libro de Dolores Serma me dejó impresionado. Era una historia que parecía tener el sello de Kafka, además de alguna conexión con la literatura gótica; y que, para estar escrita en 1944, resultaba muy moderna: sin duda, ése podría ser indistintamente el comienzo de un relato de Samuel Beckett o de Julio Cortázar. Su estilo era de una sequedad hipnótica, en eso coincidía con Carmen Laforet, y el escenario que creaba […] era muy eficaz, te producía una inquietud adictiva, algo mareante. / Era indiscutible que Dolores Serma tenía buena prosa y, desde luego, nada en común con las retumbantes hipérboles de algunos narradores orgánicos del franquismo."

10 "¿Cómo era posible que una misma persona publicara *Óxido* y, a la vez, perteneciera a aquellas organizaciones que consideraban, de manera programática, que […] a los hijos de los republicanos se les podía separar de sus familias 'en base a las condiciones morales de sus padres'?"

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In the words of the literary critics Soldevila Durante and Prats, the narrator develops from "cinismo" to "civismo" (from cynicism to civility; Soldevila et al. 2006: 11). This means that the arrogant, pretending pedants of Machado's title poem, who think that they just know better than the rest, might be read with a reference not only to the intellectuals associated with the regime (indicated in Prado 2006: 185), but also in a self-referential and ironical manner to the narrator himself. If we take this ironical double-voicedness into consideration, we might reach another interpretation of the figures of Dolores Serma and of the narrator's mother. The awareness of the ironical distance of the narrator necessarily influences the way in which the reader will understand the dialogues between the protagonist and his mother. The son may be right about the historical facts, but it is the mother who has had to endure the experience of the regime, and at the safe distance of 30 or 50 years it is very easy to arrogantly condemn the instinct of survival as passive support for a dictatorial regime (Hansen 2013a: 106-109). When Juan Urbano claims that "[if] there is something that could be as bad as the lies [of the regime], it is the people who are ready to believe them", his mother answers "Don't forget about the fear. The fear can make you do anything" (Prado 2006: 333).[11] And Dolores Serma, who at first seemed to be a solid supporter of the regime, turns out to be a person who has sacrificed her whole life and literary ambition in order to repair the damage caused by the abduction of her nephew – which is to say that it is not always that easy to distinguish the *mala gente* from the good ones.

11 "– […] si hay algo que pueda llegar a ser tan malo como las mentiras, son las personas dispuestas a creerla [Juan Urbano]. – No olvides el miedo. El miedo te puede hacer creer cualquier cosa [la madre]."

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Applying Svend Erik Larsen's distinction between two interrelated layers of textual performance, the performance *in* the text and the performance *of* the text (Larsen 2014: 69), I would claim that *Mala gente* displays two different kinds of performance *in* the text, and that the interaction or dialogisation of these internal acts of performance put the performance *of* the text into perspective. The first kind of internal performance is of course Juan Urbano's performance as a detective: he investigates the case of the forgotten novel and discovers the crime of the stolen children. At this level the novel makes a mimesis of the performance of the genre to which it belongs, the affiliative memory novel. The second kind of internal performance is related to Juan Urbano's frequent meta-commentaries to his readers, in which he comments upon what he has just been talking about, anticipates later developments, and at the end of the novel explains why he chose to turn what was at first thought of as an essay on literary history into a novel. At this level the novel makes a mimesis of the novel's own interaction with its audience, but given the fact that the voice belongs to a fictional character, we are still at the level of performance in the text.

At the level of the performance *of* the text, the novel is *not* a denunciation of a specific case of a stolen child because the case in question is fiction. On a more general level, the performance *of* the novel is of course a contribution to the recognition of the crimes committed by the regime and the sufferings of the victims, and through the thick descriptions of these sufferings the novel generates what Dominick LaCapra calls a certain emotional "sensibility" that is very difficult to achieve by strictly documentalist means (LaCapra 2005: 38). Yet this is not all. Through the ironical distance with which the auto-diegetic narrator is described at the beginning of the text and the development of his character

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throughout the book, the novel obliges the reader to reflect upon the ways in which we approach the past, and with what means. At this level the reader is brought to understand the virtue of humility in the treatment of historical sources, and to appreciate the power of literary discourse – at least in case of a felicitous fulfilment of the model reader's requirements.

According to this reading, *Mala gente* not only inscribes itself into the group of affiliative memory novels dedicated to the recognition of the sufferings caused by the Francoist regime's violence and repression, it also turns out to be an interesting contribution to the public dialogue about how this unsettled past should be approached today. The novel engages in this discussion with an aesthetically elaborated discourse open to the reader's interpretation, and it points meta-fictionally to the importance of artistic discourse and fiction for the recognition of the past's importance in the present.

Given the fact that the novel had a somewhat mixed reception, partly due to some of the – in my view – mistaken readings, and an acceptable but not in any way overwhelming commercial success (it was re-edited once in 2007), I think that it is fair to say that it has played an important although not decisive role in the development of the case of the stolen children. Still, having said this, we still need to find out how the novel situates itself within this dialogic thread of social discourses related to the same topic. Among the overt references to earlier contributions to the same case we should mention the references to the 2002 Catalan documentary *Els nens perduts del franquisme* (The stolen children of Franquism) and its subsequent publication as a book (Armengou and Belis 2002: 215, 396, 427, 429, 437), and the many references to the testimonies of women in Francoist prisons, in particular those of Carlota O'Neil,

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Juana Doña, and Tomasa Cuevas (see e.g. ib.: 374, 376, 377, 379, 391, 392, 395, 430, 432, 437, 445).

The "mediated action" on memory of the abducted children

The testimonies that still resound in Prado's novel were written by female communist ex-convicts in the period just before and after the death of the dictator in 1975, and their discourse is heavily influenced by the expanding feminist movement of that time. The first testimony is Carlota O'Neil's autobiographic *Una mujer en la guerra de España* (A woman in the Spanish war; 1964), in which she tells the story of how her children were taken from her and adopted by a family trusted by the regime, when she was sent to prison for political reasons during the Civil War. The book was published in Mexico, where she fled once she came out of jail, but it did not have an impact on Spain until several years later. The manuscript for Juana Doña Jiménez's testimonial novel *Desde la noche y la niebla (mujeres en las cárceles franquistas)* (From night and mist. Women in Franco's prisons; 1978) was finished in 1967, but she was not able to publish the book until ten years later, due to censorship by the regime. The most influential of these testimonies is Tomasa Cuevas' *Cárcel de mujeres* (The women's prison; 1985). During the 1970s Cuevas travelled around Spain and collected the oral history of her former fellow inmates. These testimonies were published and republished in various editions, and helped turn the *Ventas* prison for women in Madrid into what Ulrich Winter has called a "site of recognition" (Winter 2005).

The *Ventas* prison, in which Dolores Serma's sister was confined (Winter 2005: 224), was paradoxically built by the Second Republic in 1931 as a prison dedicated to the reintegration of female criminals into society. Even the mod-

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ern functionalist architecture revealed the progressive ideas behind the project. The building was originally designed for 450 inmates, but from 1939, when the Nationalists took power in Madrid, it was converted into a human storage room for up to 4,000 women (their children not included). It was almost exclusively used for female political prisoners, who were harassed, tortured, raped, and executed in massive numbers. Tomasa Cuevas' recording and subsequent publication of her fellow inmates' testimonies have made it into a symbol of repression and a virtual site of recognition, as the buildings were demolished in 1967.

After this early wave of testimonies, we have to wait until after the turn of the century in order to find a renewed public interest in the question of the stolen children. The "mediated action" (Wertsch) related to this topic after 2000 will in the following be divided into two different, yet narrowly intertwined parts: one part concerning the abductions of the early period from 1940 until around 1960 driven by the regime's ideological intentions, and the other related to the abductions of a later period from 1960 until 1990, mainly powered by economic interests.

The public discussion of the case of the stolen children starts with the transmission of the first of Montserrat Armengou and Ricard Belis' two parts of *Els nens perduts del franquisme* on the Catalan channel TV3 at the beginning of February 2002 (Armengou and Belis 2002).The documentary begins with a re-enacted scene with Antonio Vallejo-Nájera and a voice-over reading Franco's official letter giving him authority to investigate the "biological and psychical roots of Marxism". From this point of departure the documentary sets off to present a collage of voiced-over general information about the case, testimonies of former female inmates, analysis by history experts in the field, and even an interview with the former director of *Auxilio Social*, Mercedes

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Sanz-Bachiller. As stated by Enric Castelló, this victim-oriented perspective and the complex dialogue structure challenges the hegemonic and apolitical discourse regarding the Civil War that dominated the former documentaries from the national Spanish television company, RTVE, and as a discursive strategy it presents memory as an act of justice in itself (Castelló 2014: 228-29).

Of special interest is the participation of the historian Ricard Vinyes, who at the moment of recording was working on his *Irredentas. Las presas políticas y sus hijos en las cárceles de Franco* (Unredeemed. The political victims and their children in Franco's prisons), published later the same year (Vinyes 2002). The documentary created a heated public discussion, and a book version was published by Armengou, Belis, and Vinyes together later the same year (Armengou, Belis, and Vinyes 2002). In 2004 Vinyes continued the investigation of the case with *El daño y la memoria. Las prisiones de María Salvo* (Pain and memory. The chains of María Salvo; Vinyes 2004), while Eduard Pons published *Los niños republicanos en la Guerra de España* (The Republican children in the Spanish War) about the children in the custody of the institutions of the *Auxilio Social* (Pons 2004). In 2005, two different initiatives within the scenic arts appeared, which both drew heavily on the historical material from the Catalan documentary: on the one hand, Laila Ripoll and the *Micomicón* group staged the play *Los niños perdidos* (The stolen children) in the prestigious Madrilenian Princesa Theatre; and on the other, *Presas* (Victims), written by Ignacio del Moral, was staged by Verónica Fernández in the *Real Escuela Superior de Arte Dramático* (RESAD) and in the *Centro Dramático Nacional*, also in Madrid.[12]

12 For a description of these plays, see Souto 2014: 86-89.

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Finally, Benjamín Prado published his novel in 2006, in which he made explicit reference to the early testimonies and to Armengou and Belis's documentary. One might say that the novel was published at the end of a four-year period of intense public dialogue on the early phase of abductions, initiated by Armengou and Belis's documentary, and it culminated when Gracia Morales received the prestigious SGAE prize for her staging of the play *NN12*, a fantasmagoric representation of the lost identities of a mother and her son (Souto 2014: 77, 88). However, instead of putting the question to rest, the case escalated dramatically when it was revealed that the illegal traffic had continued for commercial reasons into the early 1990s, primarily organised by Catholic institutions. From this moment on, the state and civil society became directly involved and social practices took over.

In 2008 Judge Baltasar Garzón declared the crimes committed by the Francoist regime during and after the war crimes against humanity because of their systematic character. This meant that they were not covered by the 1977 Amnesty Act, which granted impunity for all crimes committed before 1975, including crimes committed by the regime. Furthermore, in 2009 Garzón gave instructions to the local authorities in Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Burgos, Málaga, and Zaragoza to investigate the responsibilities in connection with the systematic abduction of children. Garzón's case rested upon documentation from Vinyes' investigation, and in consonance with this initiative Miguel Ángel Rodríguez published *El caso de los niños perdidos del Franquismo. Crimen contra la Humanidad* (The case of the stolen children under Franco. Crimes against humanity) in October 2008, in which he described in detail the parallels between the crimes of the Nazis in Germany and the same practices in Franco's Spain. Although Garzón's initiative was effectively blocked later in 2009 because of the extreme Right's accusations against him for prevarication,

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leading to his suspension in 2012, the initiative in the case of the stolen children was taken over by civil society, popular movements, and the news media.

One might say that if cultural products like books and TV documentaries played an important role in the public dialogue about the memory of the abductions of the early period from 1940 until around 1960, social practices took over the initiative, effectively communicated through news spots on all important channels.[13] Popular movements like *Plataforma Afectados Clínicas de toda España – Causa Niños Robados* (Platform for the clinics all over Spain working on the case of the stolen children),[14] and the *Asociación Nacional de Afectados por Adoptaciónes Irregulares* (The national association of victims of illegal adoptions; ANADIR)[15] were created; both were organised for and run by people who were presumed to be involved as victims in the business of the stolen children, either as parents or as children. Later, in 2011, *SOS bebés robados* (SOS stolen babies) was created.[16] These associations assist the victims with information and practical issues related to the search for relatives and questions like how to raise a lawsuit.

A decisive moment in the development of the case of the recent abductions was January 2011, when ANADIR presented 261 lawsuits of suspected forced abductions in all of Spain's regions, the major centres being Madrid, Cataluña, Andalucía,

13 See e.g. the RTVE documentary <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/informe-semanal/informe-semanal-ninos-robados-del-franquismo-reclaman-su-memoria/356136/>.

14 <http://plataformacausabebesrobados.hostinazo.com/index.php/quienes-somos>.

15 <http://anadir-es.blogspot.dk/p/e -somos.html>.

16 <http://buscoserqueridobio.es/bsqb_03_html/bsqb_03_ht_02_menusup_inicio_contac_info_asoci_medios_descar/bsqb_03_ht_02_menusup_02_asocia_webs/bsqb_03_ht_02_menusup_asocia_webs_01.html>.

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and the Basque Country. The initiative hit the public sphere like a bomb, and less than a month later the number of cases had increased to 747. In March 2011 Armengou and Belis completed the coverage of the case with the transmission of their TV documentary *Devolvédme a mi hijo* (Give me my child), which focused on the second period of abductions (Armengou and Belis 2011). After this moment the case of the stolen children became one of the most widely discussed political issues, only second to the financial scandals of the governing *Partido Popular* (People's Party) and the legitimation crisis of the Spanish parliamentary system. The TV channel Antena 3 has an archive of 28 TV programmes broadcast between February 2012 and October 2014,[17] while the Spanish state television RTVE has a total of 368 programmes and/or news clips, the vast majority of which belong to the same period.[18] In this later phase several cultural products have used fiction, including five novels,[19] two television series,[20] one TV film,[21] one film for the cinema,[22] and one play.[23] The table below shows the lines of intertextual dialogue and remediation, with the single-arrow lines indicating direct and acknowledged influences, while double-arrowed lines indicate

17 See <http://www.antena3.com/especiales/noticias/bebes-robados/>.
18 See <http://www.rtve.es/buscador/ "niños robados">.
19 Ana Cañil, *Si en tres años no he vuelto* (If I have not returned in three years; 2011), Clara Sánchez, *Entra en mi vida* (Come into my life; 2012), Daniel Segovia, *Los niños de la Encarnación* (Children of incarnation; 2012), José Luís Gordillo, *Yo te quiero* (I love you; 2012), Inma Chacón, *Mientras pueda pensarte* (While I can still think of you; 2013).
20 *Vidas robadas* (Stolen lives; TV3, 2011) and *Niños robados* (Stolen children; Telecinco, 2013).
21 *Historias robadas* (Stolen histories; Antena 3, 2012, basada en el libro del mismo nombre de Enrique Vila, 2011).
22 Ana Murugarren, *Tres mentiras* (Three lies; 2014).
23 Rubén Buren, *La sonrisa del caudillo* (The Caudillo's smile), published in *Kamchatka* 3, 2014.

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mutual interdependence as in the case of the collaboration between Viñyes writing *Irredentas* and Armengou and Belis working on *Els nens perduts*, or between written and electronic news media.

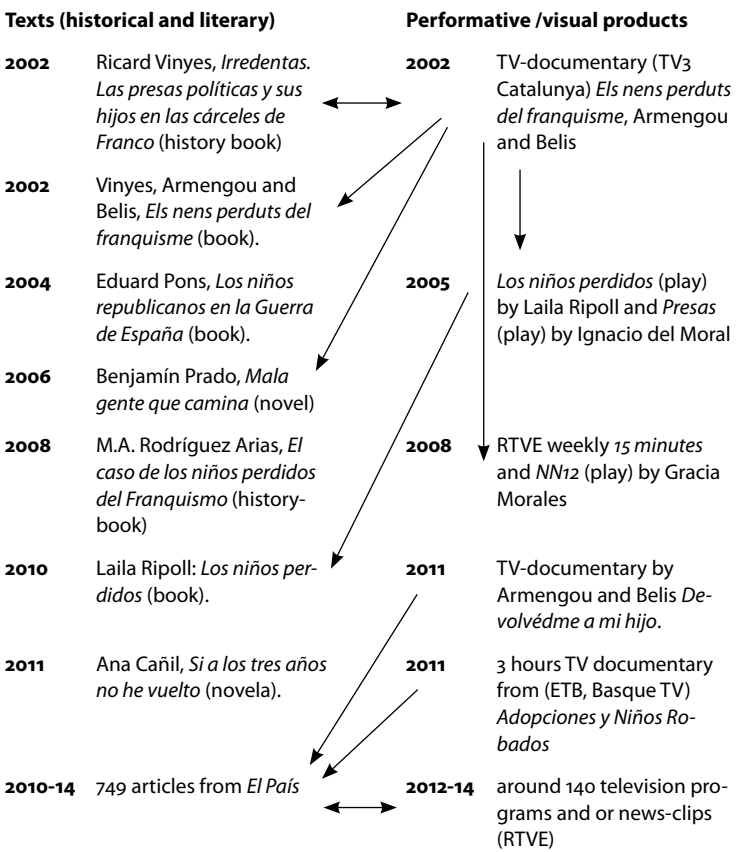

Fig. 1. The stolen children across the media.

To summarise, we might say that due to the topicality and fast-evolving nature of the case, TV documentaries, and newspapers have played a dominant role in the remediation of

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the memory matter of the stolen children. In the first part of the period (2002-2006), the case was driven by the discursive practices of texts in the broadest sense, and the single most influential cultural product was Armengou and Belis's first documentary *Els nens perduts* from 2002, which has been a constant point of reference in this thread, *Mala gente* included. Cultural products of literary fiction, cinema, and theatre have played a more modest role; yet towards the end of the early period, around 2005 and 2006, two plays were staged and a novel published on the topic. In this sense *Mala gente* must be recognised as an early contribution, as a kind of precursor. When the case of the abductions belonging to the later phase after 1960 hit the public sphere in 2008-2009, public agencies, popular movements, and new journalism entered the arena, and social practices took over, although the influence of Armengou and Belis's second documentary, *Devolvédme a mi hijo*, should not be ignored. It is, however, not until after this moment that a new and strong wave of fiction appeared.

Concluding remarks

The many docu-fictional novels dedicated to the Civil War and post-war repression published after the turn of the millennium have tried to read history against the grain by digging out real people's individual stories from the archives, stories about mass atrocities and systematic genocide, in order to provide the victims with a human face and a destiny. By including testimonial matter and other kinds of historical traces like photos and facsimiles of private letters and/or official documents, docu-fiction aspires to acquire authenticity and historical credibility. At the same time, TV documentaries have intensified the "fictionalisation" processes, using oral testimony, re-enactments of dramatised

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scenes, and music and computer-enhanced images in order to achieve maximum identification with the case from the audience (Castelló 2014: 224). In this sense there is a tendency for mainstream fictional texts and TV documentaries to merge into a common endeavour dedicated to making the past present in the form of a concrete experience for the audience.

Although *Mala gente* does not include docu-fictional material, the novel engages in direct dialogue with the documentary and testimonial genres and presupposes the knowledge provided by these "texts" in James Wertsch' broad sense: knowledge of the role of the Ventas prison, of the fate of the imprisoned women and children, and so on. One of the novel's important aesthetic tensions consists of the fact that the reader is continuously challenged on the question of whether or to what extent this is fiction. Many of these texts have given voice to forgotten or unheard memories of victims, and, according to John Torpey, this kind of attentiveness to the voices of the previously voiceless can be understood as an act of restorative justice in itself (Torpey 2003: 25). *Mala gente* does not, however, contribute to restorative justice in this sense, or at least it only does so in an indirect manner. Instead, the novel asks how and on what terms we should engage in the discussion about the past in the present, although a series of misreadings by critics seems to have blurred the picture.

Whereas the literary discourse and the genre of the novel seem to be very important in the general movement of the recuperation of historical memory, the discourse on the case of the stolen children is dominated by TV documentaries and newspaper journalism. The TV medium is very suitable for dealing with communicative memory, as the images of contemporary victims' testimonies invite the viewer to identify spontaneously with the victims' suffering, and TV as well

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as newspaper journalism are fast media which are able to intervene directly in political matters and news.

Mala gente was published in 2006, at a moment when discursive practices were the driving force of the case, and when the first wave of cultural products following the Catalan documentary *Els nens perduts* (2002) was being circulated. At that time it was the only novel to address the issue of the stolen children and it was in this sense a precursor. Later, when public institutions, popular movements, and news journalism became the driving forces in the development of the memory of the second period of abductions (1960-1990), the novel disappeared from the central focus of the case. However, its detailed documentation of Vallejo-Nájera's ideological practice and the regime's decisions about the systematic elimination of an important part of the population for ideological reasons will stand.

The novel's most important practice or performance as a text lies in another field, however. The strength of the novel, like all good literary fiction, consists of the combination of linguistic artifice and the reader's investment of personal imagery in the reading process, providing the reading process with existential depth and making the reader "live" the experience partly as his or her own. At the same time, the novel's ironical attitude and meta-fictional comments create the necessary distance for second-order reflections about the relations between art, social discourse, and cultural memory.

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Remembering Ceylon: Leonard Woolf's Colony in the Age of Extremism

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Memory is a form of work that happens in the present, "a set of practices and interventions" that is "embedded in social action", write Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche in *The Work of Memory* (Confino and Fritzsche 2002: 11). Their words seem particularly apposite to the mnemonic practices of the writer and political activist Leonard Woolf, husband of Virginia and a core member of the liberal artistic and intellectual elite that is now most often referred to simply (and somewhat misleadingly) as "the Bloomsbury Set". Confino and Fritzsche's conception of memory would apply to Woolf's five volumes of autobiography as well as to his early, autobiographically informed fiction, narratives attempting to make sense, among other things, of what was to his mind an essentially schizophrenic experience: his years as a colonial administrator in the British civil service. Less predictably, perhaps, memory as work and social action is also a constitutive element of many of Woolf's historical, political, and polemical texts: his three-volume study of communal psychology, *After the Del-*

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uge (1918-53), and his anti-war writings from the 1930s, *Quack, Quack* (1935) and *Barbarians at the Gate* (1939).

A salient feature of this use of memory is the representative status Woolf assigns to it. Made to serve in an ongoing historiographical and political enterprise, memory is given heuristic, essayistic, and polemical form. One critic makes the point about *After the Deluge* that Woolf offers his own life as template, providing reference points in a process of understanding the social psychology of modern authoritarianism (Herz 2007). This observation also applies to the autobiography, where the self he presents is less a figure in a continuous personal narrative than the intersection of a set of cultural and historical coordinates. More often than not, events, persons, and places are representative rather than singular; aspects of an argument, they make social and historical rather than personal claims. Just as often, the memory Woolf mobilises is cultural as much as personal: an archive of canonised texts familiar from the liberal-humanist training of the British middle-class male, which he draws upon for examples of discursive formations and reference points in discussions of Western values and assumptions.

My focus in this essay will be on the work of memory in Woolf's thinking – during the decade leading up to the Second World War – on what we may call with Hannah Arendt "the origins of totalitarianism" (Arendt 1976), especially the mnemonic coordinates set up between the emergence of totalitarianism in Europe in the 1930s and European imperialism in Africa and Asia as its condition of possibility. Over half this decade, Woolf's anti-war pamphlets mobilise the archives of cultural and personal memory, including memories of colonialism, to examine what he perceives as a present state of de-civilisation within the European space. Reading these pamphlets today, especially *Barbarians at the Gate*, it appears that the events of the 1930s spur an almost compulsive historicism,

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a didactic political project that leads in different ways back to the history of European imperialism and to Woolf's own colonial encounter: his years as a colonial administrator in Ceylon between 1904 and 1911.

To some extent mappings, or projections, of patterns of repetition and return in communal psychology, Woolf's historicism takes at least two forms: on the one hand, painstakingly constructed cause-to-effect narratives detailing how totalitarian regimes gained footholds in twentieth-century Europe; on the other, a modernist historiography of association and montage suggesting the Benjaminean constellation, bringing together different mnemonic and historical coordinates in a manner that opens up for connections beyond the linear. One way in which this is achieved is through a strategic deployment of different forms of memory. Significantly, his 1913 novel *The Village in the Jungle* figures prominently in this process, qualitatively if not quantitatively, supplying one of its fundamental cognitive tropes: that of the hybrid.

There is something both prescient and familiar in Woolf's mobilisation of colonial memory in these texts. Not only is there a clear resemblance to – and anticipation of – Hannah Arendt's postwar analysis in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which also reads European totalitarianism in light of colonial history. More generally, and strikingly, Woolf's method of connecting different temporal and geographical coordinates is highly resonant of current transnational thinking in the humanities, not least its recent manifestation in memory studies with Michael Rothberg's term "multidirectional memory", which, as we shall see, thinks of the formation of cultural memory in spatial/horizontal as much as temporal/vertical terms (Rothberg 2009). Since the 1990s, the transnational turn has led to a perception in many disciplines of entangled histories and narratives, and of the importance of comparison and framing across temporal and spatial bound-

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aries. In the field of historical studies, "entangled histories", "*histoire croisée*", "*geteilte*", or "*verwobene Geschichte*" have become key concepts, reflecting an interest in processes of mutual influencing across borders, including entangled processes of national, ethnic, and cultural memory-formation (Kocka 2003).

Related to this development is a growing interest in the global refractions of what were once seen as historically and geopolitically discrete events. A case in point is the renewed currency of Hannah Arendt's so-called boomerang thesis in globally oriented studies of European totalitarianism and genocide (Grosse 2006; King and Stone 2007).[1] Considered as an attempt to locate the rise of "totalitarianism" – a new form of state power embodied in the Nazi and Stalinist regimes – within an expansive global geography inclusive of colonial Africa and Asia, Arendt's thesis prefigures contemporary research that has sought to readdress the mutually constitutive relationship between Europe and its colonies (King and Stone 2007: 70).

Similar ideas of entangled histories have been taken up in the field of cultural memory studies, where Michael Rothberg has attempted to counter what he perceives as a "competition" of memories, especially in the narratives of oppression and suffering of different minority and subaltern groups, by introducing a concept of "multidirectional" memory. For Rothberg this entails an understanding of memory work as a productive, intercultural dynamic of ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing, with the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice out

1 The boomerang thesis applies to Arendt's argument about the decivilising effects of the colonial project; the idea is that the development in the colonies of racialised thinking as well as the bureaucratic procedures necessary to institutionalise it was the condition of possibility for practices of genocidal regimes in Europe.

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of the specificities, overlaps, and echoes of different historical experiences (Rothberg 2009: 5). In his exposition of the term, and the methodology it entails, Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* emerges as an early instance of multidirectional thought. Rather than focus on the absences, lacunae, or lack of causal links in the argument for which her thesis has been criticised, Rothberg looks for the insights and the ethical potential available in analogies and constellations. He also looks for the points of contradiction and breakage, however: the points where a multidirectional narrative gives way to a progressivist one, where Europe is the telos of development and totalitarianism appears as a form of phylogenetic regression (ib.: 33-65).

Rothberg's multidirectional memory gestures at the ethical necessity of a transnational mode of reading attentive to global connections that may emerge between different histories and cultural memory formations, connections that, however fragmentary and localised, speak nonetheless to mutual experiences of suffering and oppression. Leonard Woolf's work of memory is informed by a similar necessity, I propose, though one that is political as much as ethical in its nature, framed in anti-imperialist and Marxist terms – and yet, like Arendt's, it founders in moments of slippage and contradiction. Differently from Arendt, Woolf writes of European totalitarianism not through the perspective of the concentration camps, but from the stance of a political commentator and activist before the war. Significantly, he also writes on the basis of his recollections as a servant and observer of colonial bureaucracy, informed by a genuine commitment to reading histories of oppression in tandem rather than in isolation.

However, memory, as we know, is a fickle friend, defined by limits, replete with contradictions and betrayals. It is hardly surprising, then, that Woolf's memories of Ceylon should reappear in his writing against totalitarianism in different

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guises, at once defining and betraying the ethico-political project. In what follows, it is some of these guises I want to pursue, tracing how they enter into and perform the work of analysis and argument; how they are mediated and translated from one rhetorical context to the next; and, in the final part of my discussion – through a departure from textual media to the medium of sound – how Woolf is himself transposed by memory.

The Village in the Jungle: *The colony and the trope of the hybrid*

Woolf's recollections of his time as colonial administrator in Ceylon between 1904 and 1911 are significant, to my mind, for several reasons: because Woolf himself describes them as foundational; because they are articulated and reworked in various genres; and, as I have suggested, because of their recurrence – intended and unintended – in other texts and contexts. *Growing* (1961), the volume of his autobiography dedicated to his years in Ceylon, describes his time in colonial service as deeply traumatic, an impression that is also borne out by the striking contrasts between the Official Diary and Woolf's letters home, especially to Cambridge friends. His years in the colony appear fraught with an almost schizophrenic sense of dividedness and contradiction. At the same time they are foundational in shaping Leonard Woolf the anti-imperialist and interwar activist, who argued against empire as an economic and moral-political construct in several major works: *Empire and Commerce in Africa* (1920), *Economic Imperialism* (1920), and *Imperialism and Civilization* (1928):

> Travelling to Jaffna in January 1905, I was a very innocent, unconscious imperialist […] I certainly, all through my time in Ceylon, enjoyed my position and the flattery of being the great man and the father of the

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people. That is why, as time went on, I became more and more ambivalent, politically schizophrenic, and an anti-imperialist who enjoyed the fleshpots of imperialism, loved the subject peoples and their way of life, and knew from the inside how evil the system was beneath the surface for ordinary men and women. (Woolf 1961: 25, 142)

Where in the Official Diary he was obliged to keep details of the routine duties of the administrator, his letters home give us the voice of alienation, giving vent to self-loathing and despair through satire of colonial life. Ethnographic vignettes, some of them reproduced in the autobiography, show a mind split between sympathy with the indigenous population and abject disgust. Sublime or abject, "either gods or animals" (Woolf 1992: 69), the Sinhalese and Tamil people of Ceylon appear in perplexing spectacles of exoticism or abjection with Woolf himself as observer and agent, witness and perpetrator, in the endless series of degradations that is colonial life. "Some of the inhabitants of this place are scarcely human", he writes in a letter to his friend Saxon Sydney-Turner in October 1908:

Every male between the ages of 18 & 55 in Ceylon is liable to a road tax of rs 1.50; if he does not pay by March 31st he is liable to a fine of rs 10 or in default a month's imprisonment. At every place I stop, crowds of these defaulters are brought up to me by the headmen for trial & sentence. They bring down to me wild savages from the hills, spectacles incredible to anyone who has not seen them. Naked except for a foul rag round their loins, limbs which are mere bones, stomachs distended with enormously enlarged spleens […] or else wild apelike creatures with masses of tangled hair falling over their shoulders, their black bodies covered with white scales of parangi scab hobbling along on legs enormous from elephantitis. (Woolf 1992: 140-141)

This, as Douglas Kerr phrases it, is "the orient as the spectacle of abjection" (Kerr 1998), placing the "me" – the "I" of the

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letters – in the position of the spectator in a thwarted narrative of impotence, insufficiency, and disgust.

The fiction written after Woolf's return to London – *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) and *Stories of the East* (1921) – sets out to process as well as mediate the experience to a metropolitan audience. *The Village in the Jungle*, his first novel, stages the familiar contradictions of a modernity espousing universal humanism and the rights of man while denying others the same humanity, attempting to create a space for non-Western subjectivities through experiments with forms of narration. A third-person narrative focalised through indigenous characters records life in a Sinhalese jungle village without an observing colonial presence, revealing how colonial bureaucracy and structures of power intervene in traditional forms of life, gradually unsettling and destroying a community.

The novel incorporates indigenous beliefs, customs, and tales, as well as oral forms and modes of address that imitate the local Sinhalese idiom, while also describing the limits and failures of a colonial system that is all-pervasive yet impotent and out of place. The narrative is based on what Woolf had himself observed travelling around the region in his capacity as administrator, adjudicator, and magistrate, as well as on his studies of the languages and customs of the different ethnic and religious groups. Since its "rediscovery" in the 1960s, the novel has been regarded as a seminal text by South Asian scholars – the first novel in English to describe imperialism in Sri Lanka, and a significant social document about colonial Ceylon (Gooneratne 2004; Goonetilleke 2007). At the same time, Woolf's attempt to read cultural difference from within has also attracted considerable criticism as a colonial "fantasy of omniscience", compensating for an experience of disorientation and perplexity – the partial vision and thwarted narratives of the letters – through omniscient

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narrative discourse and the stance of Orientalist anthropology (Kerr 1998: 270). For Woolf himself, however, the novel is inscribed with anti-imperialist intent. This is how he phrases it in the autobiography:

> The jungle and the people who lived in the Sinhalese jungle villages fascinated, almost obsessed me in Ceylon. They continued to obsess me in London [...]. *The Village in the Jungle* was a novel in which I tried vicariously to live their lives. It was also, in some curious way, the symbol of the anti-imperialism which had been growing upon me more and more in my last years in Ceylon. (Woolf 1964: 47)

In a recent reading of the novel, Janice Ho acknowledges its critique of colonialism, arguing moreover that Woolf's representations of and solidarity with the colonial other are inseparably bound up with his Jewishness, the awareness of being part of a minority population in Britain that was systematically discriminated against. Ho proposes this reading within a transnational interpretive framework, drawing attention to the methodological implications involved. It is not simply Woolf's interior consciousness but the representational practices of European anti-Semitism, such as racial stereotypes of the hypersexual and degenerate Jewish body, which mediate the novel's depiction of the indigenous population (Ho 2013: 715). Further, as Ho demonstrates, Woolf draws attention to colonial repression by deploying the trope of the unjustly persecuted and suffering Jew in his depiction of Silindu, the outcast protagonist, whose victimisation at the hands of colonial law allows Woolf to interrogate the structures of authority instituted by an imperial government. For Janice Ho, the transposition of representational practices from the European to the colonial space has broader methodological implications in so far as it "yokes together, however briefly and indirectly, domestic discrimination and

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foreign domination", indicating the global connections among histories of oppression (ib.: 719).

While Janice Ho is unquestionably right in pointing to the connection between Woolf's Jewish experience and the novel's transnational, ethical stance, I want to draw attention to the trope of the hybrid as central to *The Village in the Jungle* both in its sense-making project and as anti-colonial critique. The novel's depiction of a hybrid community is the dominant vehicle for critique. The trope is familiar from colonial discourse, notably Lord Cromer's (British Consul General of Egypt 1883-1907) description of British rule in Egypt as "a hybrid form of government to which no name can be given and for which there is no precedent" (cited in Arendt 1976: 213). Arendt borrows the term from Lord Cromer because it captures "the peculiar state form that imperialism inaugurated, specifically the double-sided nature of local rule: its combination of contingent and absolute power – of 'despotism and arbitrariness' – that reflected neither popular will nor the interests of the metropole entirely" (Lee 2008: 71). Arendt uses it to describe the marriage between race and bureaucracy that characterised overseas imperialism and that she thinks of as a condition of possibility for European totalitarianism and racial genocide. In Woolf's usage, the trope signifies the ruinous presence of the out-of-synch and the out-of-place in a narrative where images of modernity and empire coexist with a pre-modern world ruled by superstition, fatalism, and tradition, and where modern utilitarian rationality and capitalist economy function as ineffectual and violent impositions that rip apart the fabric of village life.

At the centre of *The Village in the Jungle* are Silindu and his daughters, bound by mysterious ties to the jungle, marginal to a village life that is increasingly marred by the institutionalised power of colonial bureaucracy. Life in Beddegama turns upon a system of credit, debt, and exploitation instituted

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and sanctioned by colonial authority. The local headmen and moneylenders, whose power derives from their place in the colonial system, giving them the right to issue taxes and licences for cultivation of crops, gun licences for hunting, etc., exercise control through a system of debt management. The narrative turns on Silindu's encounter with local and government authority, including the white magistrate – a figure with a clear resemblance to Woolf himself – who represents the legal apparatus of the colonial state. The encounters show the British administrative and legal system subverted by the manipulation and corruption of native officials, though fundamentally by its own incomprehension, irrelevance, and impotence. The jungle, a primal force at once abundantly generative and ruthlessly destructive, seems to embody the aspects of the indigenous world that Woolf found most fascinating and at the same time most impenetrable to Western understanding. A numinous presence throughout the narrative, it relentlessly extends its domain in tandem with the destruction of indigenous civilisation, finally obliterating the village despite the "Government's" presiding authority.

Where Cromer came to accept the hybrid condition, for Woolf it is fundamentally destructive of civilised life. This is how it figures in his subsequent work, when he thinks about European totalitarianism through the analysis of *The Village in the Jungle* and the trope of the hybrid that arose from the colonial encounter.

Totalitarianism and colonialism: Multidirectional memory

From one perspective, Woolf's writing against totalitarianism in the 1930s constructs a narrative that in many respects anticipates that of Arendt in identifying the origins of European totalitarian regimes in European racialism and imperi-

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alism. The historiography he constructs over the latter half of the 1930s mobilises historical and communal memory of colonialism in a manner that invites transnational readings, implies an understanding of entangled histories and global connections, and is suggestive of the kind of memory-work Rothberg designates as multidirectional.

The prominent text in this historiography, *Barbarians at the Gate* (1939), styles itself as a jeremiad, "the lament for a lost civilization, the denunciation of barbarism" (Woolf 1939: 9-10) in the manner of the Old Testament prototype. For the ancient Greeks, as David Spurr reminds us in his catalogue of colonial discourses (Spurr 1993), the barbarous, or barbarian, was literally one who babbled, who did not speak the language of civilised humanity. The incoherence of barbarians was linked to their lawlessness and lack of a "naturally ruling element" to master the instincts and passions of the body. For this reason, Aristotle compares them to slaves in the *Politics*, adding: "This is why the poets say 'it is fitting for Greeks to rule barbarians,' the assumption being that barbarian and slave are by nature the same thing" (cited in Spurr 1993: 103). If this is an early example of colonial discourse, as Spurr has it, Woolf's usage surely qualifies as anti-colonial. Drawing upon Marxist and Freudian discourse, he understands barbarian as part social structure, part individual and group psychology. The barbarian, in this narrative, is not the other at the gates; it is the other within. "The control or sublimation of instincts is always an essential part of civilization", writes Woolf, with reference to *Civilization and its Discontents*: "The immediate satisfaction of the simple and primitive instincts is characteristic of those forms of society which are the antithesis of civilization and which we may call barbarism. The barbarian is, therefore […] always within. In times of storm and stress his appeal is particularly strong" (Woolf 1939: 83). In Woolf's Marxist discourse, "barbarian"

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designates the master–slave society: the society that defines some as less than human and that is ruled on principles of blind obedience, fear, and persecution.

Constructing a narrative of European culture as always already inhabited by the barbarian, he urges the reader to recall historical examples of societies that have rested upon and included within themselves large populations of "uncivilized beings", "savage animals – and yet men": the nineteenth-century urban hordes, the medieval serfs, and so on (Woolf 1939: 85). Further, he presents samplings from the cultural archive to unsettle binaries and make his point, a historiography of montage and the constellation that involves reading Alfred Tennyson's Victorian war poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade", against Pericles's epitaph for the Athenians killed in battle, as a case of the psychology and language of slavery.

For Woolf, both types of barbarism – psychological and social – were given free rein, indeed a new lease of life, with European imperialism. Recounting the history of violence, like the atrocities of Denshawai and Congo,[2] perpetrated by states and individuals in the name of imperialism, he reads jingoism and imperialism in Freudian terms as a failure to sublimate primitive instincts; as the psychology of persecution founded upon hatred and the inferiority complex. At the same time, he takes pains to construct a narrative establishing causalities

2 For many European contemporaries, the names Denshawai and Congo conjured all the worst horrors of colonialism. The first refers to a violent confrontation in 1906 between residents of the Egyptian village and British military officers, to which the British responded with harsh exemplary measures. Following a summary trial, unusually cruel sentences of public hanging, flogging, and hard labour were inflicted, leading to a public outcry at home. The well-documented atrocities committed under Belgian rule in the Congo Free State were often referred to by European contemporaries as the "Congo Horrors".

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that largely concur with the Marxist view: that economic imperialism, and the nationalist and social Darwinist sentiments associated with it, caused World War I and the further descent into barbarian behaviour it represented. From this point on, however, Woolf's historiography departs from, or in his own terms attempts to correct, the dominant Marxist one. Where the official Marxist narrative of the rise of fascism reads it as a stage in the class war, Woolf urges that we supplement the Marxist insistence on economic causes with an understanding of the socio-political mechanisms that permitted the change in Germany from a civilised to a brutalised society. What he wants to understand are the conditions that allowed Hitler to take power and that transformed Germany from a civilized into a barbarian nation. He does that by analogising different kinds of violent incursion into a social order. Strikingly, in this argument, the colony – his recollections of Ceylon as well as the analysis of the hybrid community he presents in *The Village in the Jungle* – appears as a heuristic device: a small-scale model that allows him to demonstrate the effects of such a violent incursion.

In order to understand the "delusions of the civilized" that has caused the rise of fascism, Woolf proposes to take a brief look at the anatomy of a "primitive" society. A principle of civilised community, he points out, is that the happinesses of the individual and of all are mutually dependent. In this sense, tribal society is democratic; it may be founded upon superstition and magic, but the rights of the individual and his influence upon power are safeguarded by tribal public opinion. Imperialism intervened into this balance in indigenous society, destroying tribal opinion by imposition of European standards of value, producing a society of contradictions ruled by relations of masters and slaves. The hybrid world Woolf depicts in *Village* and again in *Barbarians* represents a stage in this destruction of society:

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I have myself watched this phase of individual and social psychology, and the dislocation of communal life accompanying it, in remote villages scattered through the jungles of Ceylon; no one who has observed it carefully could doubt that ideas, unconnected with power and economics, can have a profound effect upon the structure and working of a simple society. (ib.: 114)

For Woolf the use of brute force towards Germany by the allies, evidenced in the Versailles Treaty and post-war policies, should be understood as analogous to their violent incursions into subject countries, and as key to the change in Germany from a civilised to a hybrid and brutalised society. Similarly, he argues, the seizure of power by Hitler and the Nazis was initially "just like" the violent incursion of a European state into African or Asian territory; "a transaction in direct communal power" (ib.: 119). The hybrid condition that ensues is evidenced, for instance, in the German economic system, which "today is no longer capitalist but a hybrid economic system: capitalism and state socialism blended to serve non-economic objects in a master–slave society" (ib.: 137).

One may object to the empirical gaps and lacunae in Woolf's argument both here and elsewhere. What is more interesting than the ins and outs of the narrative is the extent to which it realises a transnational project of multidirectional memory. There can be little doubt that the comparison with the colony arises from a genuine wish to see one situation, one history of violent intervention and repression, in light of another. Different from Arendt's boomerang thesis, Woolf's story is not so much about the de-civilising effects of the colonial enterprise as about the inherent barbarism of Western culture; the failure of repression and sublimation that causes the hybrid master–slave societies of imperialism and Nazi Germany alike. In that respect it is an act of memory that locates the rise of "totalitarianism" within a global geography

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that recalls the mutually constitutive relationship between Europe and its colonies.

The tom-toms in the present: The transpositions of memory

Michael Rothberg has shown how Arendt's project – multidirectional and ethical at the outset – founders on contradictions, describing a historiography of constellations overtaken by a progressivist narrative in which Europe figures as the telos of civilisation, and totalitarianism as a moment of regression within the bounds of a civilised world. It is not difficult to point to similar contradictions and slippages in Woolf's discourse. Such slippage becomes particularly evident at moments when the colonial Other comes to figure the barbarian, and where tropes from the colonial imaginary – the jungle, the tiger, the tom-tom, the witchdoctor – come into play in a phylogenetic narrative of regression and reversion to savagery. By way of a conclusion to the present discussion, I want to take a closer look at how this plays itself out at a particular moment and through a particular medium, that of the radio broadcast – or the wireless as it was then called. The example I have in mind depicts a moment when Woolf is overtaken and moved by memory – translated and transposed in time and space – as he listens to a broadcast of the Nuremberg rally. What occurs here is interesting because it seems to depart from the conscious and strategic *work* of memory that dominates the historiographical project. Instead, connections are set up between the metonymic transpositions that define the medium and what we may call the *workings* of memory – given that we think of memory not in Confino and Fritzsche's terms, but in the way Marcel Proust and other moderns have taught us: as a half-conscious and involuntary process of associations and displacements.

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Writing in 1935, Woolf recalls listening to a broadcast of the Nuremberg rally in September of the previous year. For two or three hours, he recalls, he listened to the transmission "from Germany of the parade in which 52,000 labour volunteers goose-stepped before Herr Hitler". The "loud thud of human boots upon the earth", accompanied by "the perpetual beating of a drum",

> carried me back to the everlasting tap of the tom-tom in a jungle village of Ceylon […] But the most remarkable thing was the voice of the announcer, its tones explained everything and showed that there was no question of mere interest or entertainment. It was the voice of a man […] participating in a religious ceremony, a ritual dance of his tribe in the primeval jungle before his God incarnate in the person of his Chief. (Woolf 1935: 48-49)

What Woolf is recollecting here is in part the condition of blindness and isolation that defines wireless listening: the aural experience of disembodied sound. Moreover, it is the sound of bodies that have ceased to be human, metonymically reduced to the instruments of their ruler. Language is no longer verbal, but simply sound, voice, rhythm, and modulation; the senseless ciphers of irrationality and unreason, bypassing the mind, impacting the senses and emotions. The effect is hypnotic and instinctive, a movement out of oneself. Woolf's response and his decision to include his recollection of it in the 1935 text need to be understood in the context of his concerns about the enhanced possibilities of propaganda represented by wireless technology, which in turn relates to a broader analysis of the psychology and technology of obedience: the role of modern mass media in producing a hybrid culture of technological modernity combined with what he calls "the flag-waving, incantation, medicine-man frame of mind" (ib.: 35). Once more, what is in play is the trope of the ruinous

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hybrid of mismatched temporalities: the out-of-synch and the out-of-place, of which the "political magic" of the fascist grand spectacle is the most frightening example.

It is this medium, then, that sets in motion the workings of Woolf's memory, transporting him back to the tom-tom of the jungle village. Strikingly, however, this is a primeval village, not the one he saw as he "tried vicariously to live their lives" (Woolf 1964: 47), not the hybrid culture or the remnants of a tribal democracy he had observed and grasped through the lens of fiction. The place to which his memory has transposed him is that of a colonial imaginary, the spectacles of the "barely human", the jungle, the rites, the witchdoctor. Memory has carried him back to his own fear and incomprehension, to the 'I' of the letters, to the trauma of alienation and abjection unfolding itself all over again.

There are certain recurring tropes in Woolf's thought. I have pointed to that of the hybrid, which can be traced from its inception in *The Village in the Jungle* through its different guises in the historiography of the 1930s. But, as we have seen, there are others, equally prominent: the jungle, the tom-tom, the witchdoctor. "The jungle and the people […] in the Sinhalese jungle villages fascinated, almost obsessed me in Ceylon. They continued to obsess me in London" (ib.: 47). That obsession, I would argue, is key to many of the contradictions this essay has tried to illuminate, and to the breakdown in what is in its ethical intentions a transnational, multidirectional project.

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Textual Memory: Preservation and Loss in *To the Lighthouse*

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If the brooch was there, it would still be there in the morning, they assured her, but Minta still sobbed, all the way up to the top of the cliff. It was her grandmother's brooch; she would rather have lost anything but that, and yet Nancy felt, it might be true that she minded losing her brooch, but she wasn't crying only for that. She was crying for something else. (Woolf 2000: 85)

As much as *To the Lighthouse* (1927) was Virginia Woolf's attempt at coming to terms with the memory and loss of her parents,[1] a similar attempt at reconciliation is enacted by several of the characters in the novel. While Mr. Ramsay laments the fact that he won't be remembered as a great philosopher, Lily Briscoe struggles to complete a painting begun ten years

1 Woolf states in her diary that she "used to think of him [father] & mother daily; but writing The Lighthouse, laid them in my mind" (Woolf 1973: 135), and in her short memoir text "A Sketch of the Past" (1939) that she was "obsessed" by her mother until she wrote *To the Lighthouse* and thereby "did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients" (Woolf 1978: 94).

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earlier, concerned that there is "something perhaps wrong with the design" (Woolf 2000: 209).[2] Both of them consult types of media (writing, painting) while being conflicted by a notion of memory that no longer holds any ground, resulting in confused feelings of loss. In this article, I claim that the confused nature of these conflicts is the result of badly posed questions – false problems. Furthermore, I propose that the problems can be restated through a processual notion of memory with aid from Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory* (1896), to show how the novel deals with time in various and even opposed ways, both thematically and textually. As soon as we reach an understanding of what the real problems are, I will show how, by means of repetition, Woolf's novel already treats memory as a process and thereby establishes a mode of thought that can be harnessed in exploring additional textual layers. While a processual notion of memory lets us reformulate the problem of preserving/losing memory, it also allows for a reinterpretation of "Time Passes" and review of a (seemingly less significant) scene in which the character Minta Doyle loses her brooch.

To the Lighthouse was first published in the aftermath of a philosophical reconsideration of time that began with the publication of Henri Bergson's process-oriented *Time and Free Will* (1889). The ground-breaking impact of this treatise is summarised by Mary Ann Gillies as "both a challenge that takes aim at the heart of Western intellectual tradition and a model of how we might reshape that tradition" (Gillies 2013: 11). Bergson's tradition reshaping consists of an attack on Kantian dualism, a new conception of time, and a novel attention to inner states, among many other things. In his subsequent work *Matter and Memory*, Bergson "affirms

2 Quotations referred to only by page number in the following are from Woolf 2000.

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the reality of spirit and the reality of matter, and tries to determine the relation of the one to the other by the study of a definite example, that of memory" (Bergson 2004: vii). The feat of this work is not only how memory abridges the former ontological gap between interior and exterior reality, but how that bridge also provides a model for distinguishing between real and false problems, thereby laying the ground for further philosophical development.

Many of the main issues Bergson addressed throughout his career are clearly in touch with those Virginia Woolf formulated in her fiction – especially in the novel in question, as has been discussed by several Woolf scholars, including Mary Ann Gillies in her book *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (1996).[3] More recently, however, the long-discussed similarities between Woolf and Bergson were criticised by Ann Banfield, who argued that Woolf was more heavily influenced by Bertrand Russell than by Bergson, and "[i]f Woolf knew Bergson, it was through Cambridge thinking on time" (Banfield 2000: 45). As I see it, even though Woolf and Bloomsbury were presumably more directly engaged with the Cambridge school of thought regarding temporality, this does not mean that Bergsonian ideas cannot help shed further light on *To the Lighthouse*. As a reviewer of Banfield's book on *To the Lighthouse*'s temporality has rightly pointed out, "[t]o discount this [Bergsonian] aspect of her thought seems to restrict Woolf to a British tradition to which she had a deeply conflicted relationship" (Berman 2001: 538), a point which I will also touch upon in discussing Mr. Ramsay.

More importantly, in the following I will argue that there are narrative aspects of *To the Lighthouse* that only a Bergsonian approach can help us untangle, particularly with re-

3 See the chapter entitled "Virginia Woolf: Experiments in Representation and Consciousness".

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gard to the portrayal of memory. In any case, a Bergsonian reading of memory in *To the Lighthouse* does not reduce the novel to a metaphysical battle arena between the empiricism-versus-rationalism-tradition and the new process philosophy of Bergson. Through subtle devices of narration and repetition, Woolf displays not only how the past and the present are configured by memory, but also how and why confusions of time/space occur and often prevail in social and mental life as well as intellectual debates. Woolf both discusses and transcends the break from the old to the new, as a misunderstanding of memory in fact proves to be quite fertile ground for discussion.

Rethinking memory

Alongside the concept of *durée* and his criticism of spatialised time, the function of *memory* is among the most original and important in Bergsonian theory. If subjective experience is the real marker of the passage of time, how does one reconcile that experience with a seemingly independent, material reality? Memory is the answer, and Bergson distinguishes between two kinds of memory. *Habitual memory*, bound to the body and its motor mechanisms, is central to immediate, unpremeditated action and decision-making. The sensory organs perform a reductive task in mediating only as much information as is needed for a quick response to be executed, while the rest of reality passes by. Habit is the energy-efficient kind of memory, so to speak, which lets us perform daily routines without much consciousness effort; consciousness is barely needed in automatic behaviour. The second kind of memory is the *independent recollection*, which is the mind's conscious attempt at remembering particularities. As a mode of contemplation, this kind of memory may be less centred on action than the former kind, as it seeks into the totality of

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recollections in order to create an image of the past. Independent recollections are intellectual and creative efforts which reshape and perhaps add significance to the present, but are still reductive in mediating the continuous flow of reality, as will later be shown in discussing Lily Briscoe's attempt to complete her painting.[4]

Thus memory only allows a small amount of material reality to reach through perception, so that one may be fit for action and survival rather than being stupefied by matter in its overwhelming infinitude; memory is "continually pressing forward, so as to insert the largest possible part of itself into the present action" (Bergson 2004: 219). This again attributes two modes to memory in relation to matter; the first one in which memory is a *virtual* continuation of matter, a living reservoir of everything that has ever happened – the "survival of the past". Secondly, memory becomes *actualised* as it again coincides with the present through action; memory actualises and re-actualises itself as real action on matter. In this respect, our body is an active manifestation of matter that seeks only to continue realising itself in a reality of incessant movement and change. Memory conditions the genuine novelty and continuity of each instant in time, as it adds to an ever-growing past.

In asking if memories are preserved, one would presuppose that memory has a spatial rather than a temporal nature. Such a view would render memory static and dismiss its actual presence, leaving us with nostalgic distance rather than continuous, lived experience. Bergson treats the problem of the preservation of memories as false when he says

4 As a testament to Bergson's influence, the two types of memory are still to be found in contemporary psychology, namely in Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), where the distinction is made between the so-called System 1 (thinking fast) and System 2 (thinking slow).

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"[t]he fundamental illusion consists in transferring to duration itself, in its continuous flow, the form of the instantaneous sections which we make in it" (ib.: 193). The flaw of spatialised time confuses container and content, making us unable to account for movement and change. Time is always in the making as a process of qualitative differentiation, and in *To the Lighthouse* any real progress is actually only process.

Though memory and the importance of the past constitute recurring themes and motifs in Woolf's novels, they are especially crucial in *To the Lighthouse*. The novel deals with time, perception, memory, and creativity with an open approach, constantly reworking these as a continuous stream of sensations and cognitions. The characters also actively rework their recollections to the point that they feel at a loss as to true insight into what happened in the past, thereby also losing insight into their current situations.

Even the title *To the Lighthouse* seems to typify that ambiguous, open-ended stance in regard to issues of spatiality and temporality, and may be read in several ways. As an address, written on an envelope, the title presupposes a spatially fixed location towards which its contents may be sent, as if to give the reader a sense of direction before departing into the narrative. Yet such a reading proves too static, determined, and spatially positioned to account for the novel's mosaic contents. On the other hand, the title may be a movement, not a goal but the advancement and progress towards a goal; the journey to the lighthouse *per se*, as the prefix "to" suggests. In either case, the ambiguity rests in reading the title's "To", read as a preposition foregrounding a fixed location in the former case, or as one highlighting the very movement towards an aim in the latter. Rather than simply calling it "The Lighthouse" (which was instead used as a title for the last of the novel's three subordinated

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sections), Woolf ensured that the novel's philosophical ambition would remain mediated even in the words printed on its cover.

It might be fairer to avoid vouching decisively neither for a spatial nor a processual reading of the title. If the title is read as a promise, such as the one Mrs. Ramsay makes to her son James in the opening paragraph – that they shall venture out to the lighthouse – the promise must be of maintaining a discourse between both possibilities, of both staying and moving on, paying attention to discrete events as well as larger processes. Yet it becomes evident early on in the novel that the prominent journey is a movement of inner experience rather than between spatially positioned coordinates. Not only does the novel explore this as a theme, it also uses it as a device. In the following analysis it will be shown how Mr. Ramsay becomes "stuck" in a static discourse, while Lily Briscoe eventually overcomes the problem by redesigning it.

Reaching R

What is it exactly that bothers Mr. Ramsay to the extent that it dominates both his own interior monologues and the other characters' perception of him? The problem is two-fold. First, he has engaged in a long career of philosophy which seems to be slowly burning out. In his early years, he had perhaps a handful of immensely successful publications; now, however, he has still not produced that *magnum opus* which should secure his everlasting legacy. The problem is strictly that he cannot progress enough intellectually. Secondly, his real concern is precisely the preservation of his legacy, or the memory of him carried by his achievements. While the once young Ramsay's promise of progression is faltering, the present Ramsay is caught up in anxiety of being forgotten. Perhaps it is his past self speaking to his present self each time

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he confusedly and somewhat involuntarily (yet accusingly) repeats, "[s]omeone had blundered" (Woolf 2000: 23, 30, 35, 38). As he becomes tired of thinking, his thoughts become tired, and thus he confuses himself into a meta-problem that cannot progress.

But how does Mr. Ramsay express this problem himself, lacking in self-awareness as he is? He explains it by way of an analogy that is apt in logic and wanting in charm, just enough to convey his rigid mindset, when he asserts that "thought is like the keyboard on the piano, divided into so many notes, or like the alphabet is ranged in twenty-six letters all in order" (ib.: 39). Clearly a reductively linear and insufficient model of the mind, the piano/alphabet is emblematic of how spatial thinking pervades his logic. Having articulated this confused perspective, he immediately falls into its trap, admitting that "He reached Q. […] He would never reach R. […] he stuck at Q. […] he would die standing. He would never reach R" (ib.: 39-40). The metaphor of being "stuck" elicits a claustrophobically reduced mobility in between metaphysical clauses. Ironically speaking, Mr. Ramsay gives a very clear expression to a very opaque situation. Even men of "genius" reach blind alleys, but the manner in which Mr. Ramsay explicates his defeat reinforces his own metaphysical trap, situating himself within a system where one must be either static or progressive, ultimately always caught in cerebral and logical dilemma. The absence of free movement has fostered a dry mantra of trying and failing to "reach R […] reach R […] reach R" (ib.: 39-40), which produces an almost obsessive repetition that is disruptive of rhythm and flow, a staccato refrain reminiscent of insanity. Mr. Ramsay's self-entanglement is a neatly constructed emblem of the false problems rooted in the system to which he has succumbed.

J. Hillis Miller maintains that the basis of this system is "of course those eighteenth-century philosophers, Locke, Berkeley,

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and Hume" (Miller 1983: 179), alluding to Woolf's father Leslie Stephens, who published works on the aforementioned philosophers and on whom the character of Mr. Ramsay "of course" is based. But while the specific content of Leslie Stephens' academic career is likely to have influenced Woolf when she portrayed her father, the system of thought as it appears in the novel (given only short definitions or brief commentary by the characters Charles Tansley, Andrew Ramsay, and Mr. Ramsay himself) is expressed in too few and too general terms to be confined within a single philosophical movement. Regardless of whether Miller is correct in that Mr. Ramsay is predominantly interested in what is immediately available to the senses, it is not empiricism alone that is at stake with him – an entire metaphysical tradition is crumbling away under the weight of this old and stubborn character, who laments how the memory of him will fade, how the world will outlive his memory, how a rock will outlive the memory of Shakespeare (Woolf 2000: 41). Without being overly specific about philosophical orientation, Woolf rejects a larger tradition of thought, precisely because of the entrapment that tradition has led to. What is at stake here is both the memory of someone who represents tradition, as well as the terms and values belonging to that tradition. The many farewell processes of *To the Lighthouse* – of personal memories, conservative values, and metaphysical traditions, all at once – are accompanied by a shift towards art and intuition. Having seen that Mr. Ramsay succumbs to a spatialised conception of time, one may then ask if Lily, through her turn to art, might expose the false problems by thinking within a different paradigm.

Painting a problem

While Mr. Ramsay's confusion, melancholy, and self-pity constitute one of the novel's central inner conflicts, Lily Briscoe's

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artistic ambitions account for another. Especially in the third and last section, entitled "The Lighthouse", Lily's struggle is more intense than any of the other ongoing narrative developments, both in psychological and philosophical terms. Mrs. Ramsay, "having died rather suddenly" (Woolf 2000: 140) in "Time Passes", fills the last section with a confrontational absence which further presses both Lily and Mr. Ramsay to come to terms with their own confused fear of becoming lost – as well as the pain of losing Mrs. Ramsay, who is now only a memory. In confronting her painting and her confusion, Lily again illustrates the idea that self-realisation, whether as philosopher or artist, may be a means of creating or becoming memory. The futility of that idea becomes evident, however, when seeking independent recollections of the past in order to complete the picture.

> For whatever reason she could not achieve that razor edge of balance between two opposite forces; Mr. Ramsay and the picture; which was necessary. There was something perhaps wrong with the design? […] What was the problem then? (ib.: 209)

While the canvas rests on her easel, Lily stands back in tension, far from at ease, trying to rethink the design until it expresses her idea clearly. The *tableau*-like situation of Lily Briscoe's endeavour to capture the Ramsay's summer holiday presents the novel's main problem very clearly. Lily knows that her painting will nevertheless end up stowed away in the attic and forgotten, and she is clearly bothered by that knowledge. The problem of memory, then again, is how to contain it by way of a medium, whether that medium be Mr. Ramsay's treatise or Lily's painting. By continuing to struggle, both Mr. Ramsay and Lily reaffirm the boundaries of that struggle – the only way out of a false problem is by changing the entire foundation of the problem.

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Is it fair to regard Lily's and Mr. Ramsay's internal conflicts as similar, if not equal? Wouldn't art traditionally have some privileged access to the conflicts that logic can't solve? Can Lily's picture handle that inevitable "razor-edge of balance" any differently from a treatise on "the nature of reality" (Woolf 2000: 28) would? The conflicts in question appear to differ only in degree, merely maintaining different methods to handle the same problem. Mr. Ramsay and Lily both pursue media as a means of securing their legacy, working towards a way in which they may themselves be remembered. The question of 'containing' memory is merely projected onto different media, presupposing a given medium as capable of storage, and memory as capable of being stored.

To contrast, measure, and balance the inner conflicts of Lily and Mr. Ramsay more effectively, a difference in kind is needed, for if there is a centre of balance in this story, it is of course the balance that Mrs. Ramsay was living to create. In fact, Mrs. Ramsay's view of memory is radically different from her husband's and Lily's. Lily's aversion to traditional family values results in or stems from a confused view of Mrs. Ramsay's actual project. Mrs. Ramsay thinks of herself and other things not so much as soon-to-be contained memories, but rather as surviving through memory. She doesn't see her children as contained memories, but as actual manifestations of memory, acting out and living memory. Therefore she wishes to give all her guests and family a perfect holiday for them to remember all their lives. When the dinner party turns out a success, Mrs. Ramsay reaches a self-realisation not achieved by the others because she is more attentive to the present, treating the present not as wanting, but as a whole. A Bergsonian view would characterise this insight as being aware not of how the present differs from the past, but of how the present differs from the present: how time causes each thing to differ from itself.

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At the very end of the novel, Lily's triumph is having gained this insight, a recognition of the entire memory problem as a false one:

> There it was – her picture. Yes, with all its greens and blues, its lines running up and across, its attempt at something. It would be hung in the attic, she thought; it would be destroyed. But what did that matter? she asked herself, taking up her brush again. (Woolf 2000: 226)

The ending leaves an ambiguity as to whether Lily succeeds in transcending the limits of representation, or whether her painting is dismissed altogether, and in doing so the ending locates the real triumph in actual, lived life. Certainly some progress must have happened as Lily declares herself finished with the painting – but how can we reach a conclusion in regard to the possibilities of painting the problem, the possibility of mediating memory? In the absence of a clear answer, we must reach for the narratological level of the text, not in the hope of finding a positive or a negative solution, but to observe how the text facilitates the memorial experience itself.

Narrating a problem

Narration proves a salient medium for presenting problems both real and false while it intermittently oscillates "between opposing forces" (Woolf 2000: 209). These are not merely "Mr. Ramsay and the picture" (ib.: 209), i.e. portrait versus landscape. The opposing energies comprise the entire character triad of (1) the philosophical traditionalist Mr. Ramsay, (2) his value-traditionalist wife, and (3) the progressive artist Lily.

Having recounted some of the blind alleys that Lily and Mr. Ramsay have lost themselves in, it is crucial to remember that the narrative itself is in fact mediating their problems quite successfully, or else we wouldn't have a fair basis for

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discussing them. No matter how dry Mr. Ramsay's alphabet metaphor seems, or how disempowered Lily feels as a painter, the textual representation of their frustrations is clear and sharp. Mr. Ramsay's frustrations are revealed through staccato repetition ("reach R", "blunder"), like a sort of textual limp, while Lily's problems are rendered through a stream-of-consciousness current pulling between different characters, ambitions, and decades. Form and content are finely attuned in a narrative that not only wishes to present problems, but also to partake in them. One could say that narration in *To the Lighthouse* progresses from being to becoming.

By suggesting that there is "something wrong perhaps with the design"(Woolf 2000: 209), the text is asking, doubting, and creating confusion, consequently giving off something like a character development of its own. It implies doubt as to whether this is the right way to portray characters, to ask questions, to delineate actions, and to mediate dialogue. The situation Lily faces in front of her easel mirrors the situation of the reader in front of the novel: is the narrative remembering things correctly for us, or are we the unaware readers or spectators of a carefully construed device that confusedly omits one thing while stressing another? There is no reason to assume that the narrative has bigger pretensions of being a correct representation than Lily's painting. By way of questioning and doubting, the text directs attention to its own design, introducing suspicion that it has no better capacities of thought, expression, representation, or memory than the characters do, leaving the reader to ponder. Furthermore, the proposed uncertainty of expression lays the ground bare for the narrative to facilitate the experience of confronting frustrating and confused problems, so that the reader may have an experiential share in the inner lives of the characters. We become both observers and partakers in the metaphysical conflicts. This force of literature is what Bergson celebrated

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as its unique capacity for conveying lived reality: "[artists] contrive to make us see something of what they have seen: by rhythmical arrangement of words, which thus become organised and animated with a life of their own, they tell us – or rather suggest – things that speech was not calculated to express" (Bergson 2005: 76-77).

A self-conscious, self-critical text presents new opportunities and possibilities for reading. Not only the suggestion that a certain kind of reading may be less sufficient than another, but more importantly, that an entirely other mode of reading may be eligible. We are given a new means of exploring the literary universe, instead of merely further possible solutions to the same problem. On the one hand, the possibilities of sharing the text's "inside" by exposing the reader to similar problems as the characters, allows for a reading that calls for a different kind of analysis, one which seeks to identify what factors convey the experience of the characters' inner lives in a seemingly less construed, objectified way. On the other hand, what is the relation of this mode to a processual notion of memory? Posing one last question, we should seek to establish a theoretical foundation for how reading, being a temporal and qualitative experience, integrates a kind of textual memory as the condition of new insight. The ever-advancing present of the reader who makes her progress through the pages in the novel somewhat resembles, perhaps even parallels, the experiences and insights of the characters themselves. In reading, there may be a possibility for insight that transcends the boundaries of discourse which seem to constrain the characters.

As much as reading is an attempt at understanding, *To the Lighthouse* is one of those novels that give the reader a distinct feeling of being offered a certain, overarching meaning, a universal key which could unlock its mystery. Its early reception confirmed this in readings that spanned from the entirely bio-

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graphical approach, to the entirely Christian allegory, entirely mythopoetic, Freudian, feminist re-contextualisation, and so on.[5] This flexibility of interpretation can be thought of as the novel's interpretative axis; it is a story about reaching understanding, about getting the perspective right, about asking the right questions and sweeping the confused ones under the rug.

To broaden our perspective on the problem of memory, we may go far in an analysis of the triangular tension represented by Lily, Mr. Ramsay, and Mrs. Ramsay, and yet the problem seems inexhaustible – as if there is always another layer to uncover. As much as Lily and Mr. Ramsay may feel themselves to be acting in a drama of "opposing forces", rendering the problem both personal and metaphysical, the next stage of my discussion will show that the problem is enacted by another character as well, who at first seems less central to the story, yet later appears to have become an intermediate between the level of the story and the level of the text. The experience of personal loss is again inevitably processed within the bounds of a metaphysical confusion, while at the same time this experience is absorbed and actively re-enacted through textual repetition, creating a new type of textual memory.

Material memory loss

There is a particular scene in the novel's first section which to a large extent has been overlooked by the critical tradition – an incident that takes place right before the climactic dinner party. The scene eventually focuses on Minta Doyle, a very attractive young woman described as independent and tomboyish, ridiculed by Mr. Ramsay for her carelessness yet

5 See Janet Winston's *Woolf's* To the Lighthouse. *A Reader's Guide* (2009) for a thoroughly detailed chapter devoted to the many critical tendencies of the novel's reception.

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slightly envied by Mrs. Ramsay for her power over men. Minta has gone for a walk on the beach with her soon-to-be husband Paul Rayley and two of the Ramsay children, Andrew and Nancy. While they all casually joke, play, sing, and explore the numerous rock pools along the shore, panic breaks out as Minta discovers that she has lost a brooch she had inherited from her grandmother, and they all search frantically only to be interrupted by the rising tide. As we see how each person reacts individually to the lost brooch, the scene may simply be read as adding nuances to the characters, the interpersonal relations, and the overall atmosphere – as a sort of aesthetic polish that is typical for the novelistic genre – neither superfluous, nor particularly significant. The characters' eager interaction with the beach environment additionally expands the spatial boundaries of the topography established so far in the novel. But a closer look at the scene reveals that the object of action – the lost brooch – also relates to the overarching problem of memory.

It was not until they had climbed right up on to the top of the cliff again that Minta cried out that she had lost her grandmother's brooch – her grandmother's brooch, the sole ornament she possessed – a weeping willow, it was (they must remember it) set in pearls. They must have seen it, she said, with the tears running down her cheeks, the brooch which her grandmother had fastened her cap with till the last day of her life. Now she had lost it. She would rather have lost anything than that! She would go back and look for it. They all went back. They poked and peered and looked. They kept their heads very low, and said things shortly and gruffly. Paul Rayley searched like a madman all about the rock where they had been sitting. All this pother about a brooch really didn't do at all, Andrew thought, as Paul told him to make a "thorough search between this point and that." The tide was coming in fast. The sea would cover the place where they had sat in a minute. There was not a ghost of a chance of their finding it now. "We shall be cut off!" Minta shrieked, suddenly terrified. (Woolf 2000: 84)

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Minta's dramatic exclamations and repetitions in speech emphasize the emotional value invested in the brooch, a one-of-a-kind inherited artefact which is not only a token of her late grandmother, but also "the sole ornament she possessed". She acts as though she has lost both a jewel and a memory at once, the jewel being the container of the memory.

It might well be easy to agree with Andrew when he thinks the whole drama to be exaggerated. But is Minta being melodramatic, or is the sorrow of her loss justified? Apart from Andrew, the other characters seem quite distressed too, as they search the beach in panic before being literally and figuratively "cut off". If justified, Minta's loss is not predominantly of a material kind. By lamenting the lost brooch, Minta expresses the loss of a material object which belonged to her late grandmother and which actually comprises her grandmother's entire life, as she suggests when she stresses that her grandmother "fastened her cap with it till the last day of her life" (ib.: 84). In the beach scene, we again encounter another instance of frustration caused by memory-confusion – this time perhaps the most explicitly presented confusion, of mistaking matter (the brooch) for memory. In Minta's view, the memory is lost with the brooch. There are several repetitions later that stress Minta's loss, as they walk back to the house:

> If the brooch was there, it would still be there in the morning, they assured her, but Minta still sobbed, all the way up to the top of the cliff. It was her grandmother's brooch; she would rather have lost anything but that, and yet Nancy felt, it might be true that she minded losing her brooch, but she wasn't crying only for that. She was crying for something else. We might all sit down and cry, she felt. But she did not know what for. (Woolf 2000: 85)

Nancy doesn't quite follow Minta's perspective when it comes to this loss, having trouble pinning down an exact reason

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for Minta's crying. Then what was lost? Once arrived at the dinner party, loss continues to take a toll on both Minta and Paul, though the significance of the loss has still not taken on any clear shape. At the party, the gradually solidifying social context of this loss could seem to be an almost superstitious belief that inherited jewels possess a form of genealogical enchantment that preserve a person's memory as they are passed on to new bearers of their evocative, memorial power. Apart from Nancy's comment rendered in free indirect dicsourse, there is not much commentary to be found when it comes to Minta's loss, both in the novel and its reception. While Mr. Ramsay, upon hearing of the lost brooch, finds it quite silly (ib.: 107), one critic has remarked that "[t]he brooch represents both female family tradition and Minta's virginity – jewels she loses by her alliance with a man" (Westling 1985: 74). Whatever Minta may or may not have lost, Nancy is precise in remarking that we still don't know what the loss is about. It is as if the loss needs to be rethought, or re-felt.

Evoking Bergson's notion of habitual memory may recontextualise the significance of this particular loss. Obviously, inherited jewellery serves a memorial purpose to its owners while costing them very little conscious effort to do so. Having seen the same brooch every day for a long time, its meaning is crystallised to its bearer. Minta's brooch is quite useful in that her reactions to it have formed a habit – a nostalgic habit which perhaps pleases her. The automatism of habitual memory endows the brooch with a specific function in Minta's life, and having lost that medium of memories, Minta has no other choice but to rethink the memory of her grandmother if this recollection is not to become lost as well.

It becomes ironically evident how the concept of memory preservation implies a spatial disjunction, a distance between oneself and one's memory, and as the brooch is swallowed up by the waves, Minta is horrified to be "cut off" from the

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memory she supposes that the brooch contains. In this respect it is noteworthy how the waves physically "cut off" the characters from continuing their search on the beach, climactically enveloping the scene with a significance that makes it stand out as another emblem of the whole novel: a search party of mixed individuals who, confused by a sense of loss, scan their natural proximity for something which cannot be physically located.

"Time Passes": Textually generated memory

The processual nature of memory and its potential for bringing clarity to confusion becomes even more crucial when we pay attention to the part of *To the Lighthouse* that stands out on so many levels. While the characters disappear and the summer house itself becomes a sort of protagonist in an entirely new kind of narrative, the second section "Time Passes" constitutes such a stylistic break in the middle of the novel that it hardly seems to be incorporated with the rest – yet nor can it be overlooked. Despite the vast number of intricate goings on in this section, our discussion will be limited to identifying a singular (re-)appearance by close reading an excerpt which shows how figures of interpretation are presented and enacted in relation to the episode of Minta's lost brooch. The following quotation is found in one of the most lyrical portions of "Time Passes", Chapter 6, shortly after the deaths of Prue and Andrew have been announced, and right before that of Mrs. Ramsay. The inhabitants of the summer house are all sleeping, and perhaps all contributing to a sort of collective consciousness that surges with more or less recognisable elements from the day just passed.

In those mirrors, the minds of men, in those pools of uneasy water, in which clouds for ever turn and shadows form, dreams persisted, and it

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was impossible to resist the strange intimation which every gull, flower, tree, man and woman, and the white earth itself seemed to declare (but if questioned at once to withdraw) that good triumphs, happiness prevails, order rules; or to resist the extraordinary stimulus to range hither and thither in search of some absolute good, some crystal of intensity, remote from the known pleasures and familiar virtues, something alien to the processes of domestic life, single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand, which would render the possessor secure. (Woolf 2000: 144)

The idiosyncratic Woolfian length, taxonomy, punctuation, and rhythm of this sentence indeed conjures up a battery of dream-like imagery. In attempting to group the number of motifs, one may note a somewhat blurred division between the workings of nature and the workings of the human mind. The cognitive weight of the "minds of men" is melted into reflecting "pools of uneasy water", a liquifying of cognition and intellectual activity in some kind of memory-well. Thought itself is described as an "uneasy", restless motion, covered by or perhaps consisting of "clouds" and "shadows" so as to denote confusion. If one were to seek a consciousness in this passage, it would seem more of a nocturnal mind than the logical thought of daily life. The slow pace and incomplete shapes suggest a barely active consciousness, perhaps a sleeping hive mind of the house's inhabitants whose dreams aren't yet creating a linear narrative, merely producing sensory output and subliminal disorder.

Rhythm is impossible without fluctuation however, and of course there is a gesture towards (even a yearning for) order, clarity, and familiarity. Contrasting the darkness, there is talk of an irresistible urge to "search" for a goodness beyond domesticity, something clear, crystallised, solid, and safe. Is it here possible, again, to recognise a variation of the novel's main problem: the understanding of remembrance?

In addition to the theme, a number of motifs may be

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recognised. The spatial environment, however blurred and confused, does resemble the beach of Minta's lost brooch. "Pools", "clouds", "gulls", and the "sand" evoke this topography. Moreover, there is a "search" taking place here, and it seems to be positively directed ("happiness", "absolute good") towards a concrete object: "some crystal of intensity […] single, hard, bright, like a diamond in the sand", the possession of which will "render the possessor secure" (ib.: 144). In the course of some sixty pages, Minta's pearl brooch seems to have been transformed into a diamond. No material is more solid, but this diamond is enclosed or buried in pulverised rocks, grains of sand – which, like diamonds, have been formed over time of an incomprehensible *durée*. Diamonds and sand constitute differing material tokens of a duration, a time span characterised by its qualitative rather than its quantitative progression. In its similarity to Minta's brooch, the diamond proposes a memory-conditioned cosmology, a material world where even the most solid shapes are gradually distorted, and obscure images likewise attain clear expression.

But should these poetic images, appearing amongst a crowd of other images in "Time Passes" like shifting clouds in a storm, be related to Minta's lost brooch? And should such a whirlpool of imagery be ascribed to the memories of Minta alone? The recognised relation is indeed possible, though it may seem purely associative – yet what does purely associative mean? It would mean that there is a sudden likeness, relation, or identification that seems incidental and even insignificant. Then the text has somehow abridged two items that may or may not be the same, yet co-participate in analogy (as result of re-creation) or metonymy (as result of re-association); in short, the text is behaving like memory. The episode depicting Minta's loss in "The Window" was too dramatically intensive to be ruled out as insignificant. The "diamond in the sand"

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appears at the end of a particularly memorable paragraph in "Time Passes". The two text excerpts can't be determined within the same spatio-temporal setting, though they create and make use of similar topographies – a beach. I have suggested that the reader's recognition of a relation here is conditioned by three things: the reappearance of a topography, the re-enactment of a search, and the repeated manifestation of a jewel-like artefact designated by certain qualities. Missing out on this relation doesn't mean that it is lost, and the fact that it is textually mediated does not mean that it is preserved; the relation has the characteristic of memory that is either obscure or coherent, yet always present.

What we have found in this excerpt from "Time Passes" is a movement from confusion to clarity similar to that we have seen enacted by Mr. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe. Losing or preserving is only a question posed by beings who think themselves capable of preservation and loss – a question of humanity. "Time Passes" surpasses the limits of human individuality and brings light to processes that occur continuously and independently, processes that seem reminiscent of remembering. Bergson proposed that we remember, that we "reach" the past (just as Mr. Ramsay wants to "reach" R) by recognising how we are already placed within it: "Essentially virtual, it [the past] cannot be known as something past unless we follow and adopt the movements by which it expands into a present image, thus emerging from obscurity into the light of day" (Bergson 2004: 173). Perhaps one of Woolf's achievements in "Time Passes" is this subtle showcase of minds, objects, and environments merged by the process of memory.

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Is the sense of loss now rethought, re-felt? A brooch may appear to be acting as a medium of memory if we perceive ourselves as moving and acting freely through space. Closer to the truth is the notion that the brooch and the diamond aren't different containers of memory, but different shapes of memory. The feeling of (memory-)loss accompanied by the gradually clarifying images are parallel to, perhaps fuelled by, the notion of memory as a process. Here, memory ceases to be merely subjectively situated experience, and expands to the cosmic rhythm that "Time Passes" seeks to exhibit, similar to the condition of freedom and movement that Bergson postulated. Texts may act as a remarkable medium of such a rhythm without succumbing to the role of container or content. "Time Passes" demonstrates that texts too are processes which rhythmically mimic memory in a way that evades simplifying dichotomies that may create confusion only as the complementary colour of clarity.

Having seen the portrayal, practice, and rejection of an intellectual tradition, where and how might the novel be positioned in this regard? Woolf employs the novel as a textual medium of memory on two levels. On the level of the story, memorial processes are established in dialogue, characters, interpersonal relations, action, and narrative discourse. This is the most direct, immediate, and comprehensible level, which may be literally *read*. On the level of the text, memory is generated progressively through a process of repetition, amongst which are repetitions of particular phrases, poetic images, spatial proximities, and material objects. For a mind accustomed to spatial thinking, this level tends towards confusion and obscurity, but is no less real or open to possibility, and may be read and recognised through intuition, experience, and feeling. The text thus succeeds in mediating an inner experience of

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memory, allowing the reader to share or reproduce something reminiscent of the characters' inner experiences, such as loss, confusion, recognition, etc. A tension between association, similarity, and identification operates on both levels, as shown in cases where identical phrases gather new connotations by repetition, and where different objects develop similarity to each other by proximity (analogy and metonymy). Both levels also appropriate the idea of progression as a qualitative rather than a quantitative/spatially-determined condition.

The reader is given an active role, not a privileged status, but a decisive and active role in experiencing and thus creating the processes which the text facilitates. To rephrase the problem, we shall not speak of the novel as a living memory to be read, but of memory as a predominant way of living and reading. Perhaps Woolf shows not only how to think about memory, but how memory itself is a mode of thinking. It then becomes possible to conceive a novel which contains a confused problem while dealing with that problem in a clear way, a novel in which lies the possibility of reading more clearly and remembering more clearly.

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"Murdered and so discreetly bound in linens": Djuna Barnes' *Ryder* and the (W)hole in Weaving Memory

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In Paris, 1927, Djuna Barnes had to edit her new novel *Ryder* (1928) to appease US obscenity laws. Passages deemed too obscene for circulation in her home country needed to be revised, and Barnes placed asterisks in their place, "making it matter for no speculation where sense, continuity, and beauty have been damaged" (Barnes 2010: vii).[1] The damaged continuity that Barnes speaks of is a critique of judicial and editorial interference, but the asterisks also point to another concern: the sanitization and repackaging of culture that occur in the selection of topics and communication of ideas. Arguably, if the novel's "main idea" can be edited without affecting the plot, can the same be said of *how* these stories are told? *Ryder* is a satirized family chronicle, following four generations of the Ryder clan, written in a mixture of literary

1 Quotations referred to only by page number in the following are from Barnes 2010.

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styles. The Ryder family consists of the polygamous Wendell Ryder, who is obsessed with spreading his seed, his wife Amelia and their eight children, and one of his mistresses, Kate Careless, who also has her own chapter. The exploitation of these women is depicted through the difficulties and dangers of childbirth, manipulation in the form of the social status of the wife/mother, and a chapter on a voiceless victim of rape. The bawdy mock-Elizabethan and Chaucerian styles also elevate mundane everyday activities, such as using a chamberpot, "into the realm of the sublime" (9).

While the ideas in the novel, of oppressive patriarchy, religion, and domesticity, are seemingly not affected by censure of explicit scatology, Barnes points out that regulation of content directly affects the imagination. Limiting literary discourse, or outright dismissing certain phrases and words, also underlines the fact that there are many ways to tell the same story, and that the language we use to tell it is part of a cultural framework. To claim that ideas remain the same regardless of the language used to communicate them creates a public that is, according to Barnes, ignorant that that "which they took for an original was indeed a reconstruction" (vii), and a language that is not scrutinized for its exclusion of people and reinscription of events. Barnes points to the importance of the language one uses to recall and communicate ideas and experiences, our cultural heritage and bias, and the inevitable reinscription that follows as the thing or event is situated within a framework of conceptual phrases and symbolism.

Throughout Barnes' authorship, textiles, weaving, stitching, and other forms of production allude to societal values that hold the community together and work as metaphors for experiences and possible threats to the fabric of society. In *Ryder*, these appear both as thematic elements in the stories and stylistic markers, through the use of different literary

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styles and forms. Many Barnes scholars refer to the author's style as "weaving", either directly or by citing others. For example, Frances M. Doughy calls the stylistic experiments in *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack* "an intricate weave of borrowed styles" (Doughy 1991: 137). However, as intricate as this weave may appear stylistically, this article proposes that in the context of cultural memory and the characters that simultaneously follow and diverge from the cultural and religious norms, Barnes' "weaving" in *Ryder* is also thematic.

To think of memory as weaving emphasizes it as a continuous process, as James Olney writes in *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*, "if the operation of memory is, like weaving, not archaeological but processual, then it will bring forth ever different memorial configurations" (Olney 1998: 20). In other words, it is not a search for one specific origin, truth or explanation of *a* memory, but allows us to think of memory as malleable. This article will argue that Barnes takes weaving as a characteristic metaphor for memory (ib.: 20), and in the context of cultural memory shows how the malleable property of memory functions in specific language usage and storytelling.

As the concept of weaving is introduced "as text" and in the text, and not just a description of Barnes' method, I will examine how it plays with and problematizes weaving memory as an aspect of telling marginal stories in cultural memory at large. "Weaving memory" as a process in *Ryder* points, I will propose, to two specific concerns: firstly, how does Barnes' use of intertextuality and the materiality of text comment on the readers' experience and reflection of what it is that they are reading; and secondly, how does Barnes' repetitive use of "weaving" in relation to memory comment on the place of marginal stories in the cultural context at large? Barnes creates a continuous movement of the weaving metaphor, from veiling, repackaging, and presentation to the

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threat of ripping, holes, and gaps that necessitate a never-ending process of producing such fabric, namely weaving and stitching. While repetitions would seem to strengthen their meaning through ubiquitous use, the reuse also introduces an instability that creates tension in the novel between preservation and tearing, the interior and the exterior, vision and the body.

Bound in linen – stitched in time: Creation and preservation

Mediation of cultural memory is an integral part of Barnes' concerns with the mediation of fiction; almost expecting to be misunderstood, the author took to cautionary prefaces in her works, disclosing her distrust to publishers, editors, and the reading public. Barnes put great demands on her readers and saw that both the prefaces and her characters point out the readers' power and ignorance. For example, the doctor who appears in both *Ryder* and *Nightwood* asks in the latter: "And must I, perchance, like careful writers, guard myself against the conclusions of my readers?" (Barnes 2013: 101). Weaving memory is a textual creation that is always sliding towards loss, as concepts may lose their meaning in cacophony and repetition. However, it is also an act of reading in which the content and the readers' reflections together create new stories.

To read *Ryder* necessitates attention to the limits and borders of fiction, as its publication history has literally left marks in text. Censorship is the most immediate form of controlling cultural memory, as it regulates what the public will be exposed to. If a book has been censored, this act must become part of the story and of its history, otherwise the reading public will not be aware that they are "offered literature only after it was no longer literature. Or so murdered

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and so discreetly bound in linens that those regarding it have seldom, if ever, been aware, or discovered, that that which they took for an original was indeed a reconstruction" (vii). Barnes refused to restore the original text when she was approached with this opportunity for the 1979 reprint. One should thus not mistake her lamenting the situation for nostalgia over her lost text, or an unmitigated faith in the "original". Neither do the asterisks left to show where censorship made its mark dominate the novel or render the passages incomprehensible.

This has made some critics refer to the asterisks as "Miss Barnes [...] merely thumbing an uptilted nose at censorial obtuseness" and "refusing to behave" (Calhoun, ref. in Caselli 2009: 209), diminishing their importance. The decision to leave asterisks as marks in the text points to an act enforced by the law at the time (also refusing to forget that such language was censored, and that one might never know which other works have been edited in such a manner) and the refusal of outright erasure. Although the passages could easily be strung together as if nothing were missing, the marks deny an oblique forgetfulness that occurs when rejecting certain passages, certain stories, and retelling them as if nothing has been forcefully expurgated.

Barnes' literary corpse, "murdered and so discreetly bound in linens", has been described as "mummified" (ib.: 209; "act of mummification", Sánchez-Pardo 2003: 309). Like the archive, this suggests preservation and containment, although the body will shrivel up and dry out, emptied of bodily fluids.[2] Barnes, however, makes no such conflation of body and shroud ("mummification") in her introduction, but insists on the separation of her work from censorship. Her work has

2 Descriptions of bodily fluids also characterizing, in fact, the passages that were replaced by asterisks.

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been murdered by censorship, and the acerbic preface refers to sacred actions of "clean[ing] up" obscenities, and preparing and veiling the body.

However, in doing so she claims the law killed her novel, turning the idea of censorship as a law that shields the public from obscenity into that of an enforcer of violent acts. Barnes' authorship shows a consistent emphasis on this refusal to conflate body and idea, experience and ideology. She reacted with great dismay to T.S. Eliot's preface to her novel *Nightwood*, claiming that he made the text "so tailored to a jacket that so resembles a shroud" (Parsons 2003: 85), again conjuring the image of a corpse and the "form" of death. Eliot justified the wordiness of *Nightwood* with its overall "meaning": "It took me, with this book, some time to come to an appreciation of its meaning as a whole" (Barnes 2013: "Preface"). However, this justification obscures Barnes' emphasis on language, repetition, and ambiguity, which Eliot sees as sheer wordiness. To excuse the language used (Barnes' text and stylistic choices) with a totality of meaning (idea in general) becomes another form of censorship, as it effectively veils the linguistic choices made by the author. In the chapter "Three Great Moments of History" in *Ryder*, Dr Matthews argues that "One wrapping should not cover all that is a man; the swaddling gown should not be a shroud, for a man of parts should have two wrappings, the one that shakes him out and the one that gathers him" (233). In other words, the narrative fabric presents two possibilities, one that makes life possible and one where death looms and only preservation is left.

In the first chapter, "Jesus Mundane", the title already points to the Rabelaisian carnivalesque, upside-down prospect of the novel, where all that is sacred will be brought to earth, as well as making Wendell Ryder, who is obsessed with spreading his seed and secure his genealogy, into the parody

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Jesus Mundane. The Decalogue is an extensive admonition in Biblical language that warns against sacred symbolism:

> Neither shalt thou have gossip with martyrs and saints and cherubim, nor with their lilies and their lambs and their upgoings. For some is the image, and for some the Thing, and for others the Thing that even the Thing knows naught of; and for one only the meaning of That beyond That. (4)

Upward movement and revelatory imagery is denounced in favor of lesser men, of laughter and weeping and the physical body. Barnes shows that this chronicle will leak the non-systematic bodily needs and urges, an eruption that disturbs respected values.

Attempting to decode *Ryder* to find facts or insights, retrieving anything, or relying on symbols to achieve cohesion is warned against here, as meaning is confused with "truth". The chapter ends with: "These things are as the back of thy head to thee. Thou hast not seen them" (5). Both "vision" in a historical sense, as being tied to the ubiquitous position that it has posed in Western tradition, from visual metaphors to conveyor of emotions and truth (Jay 1994: 4-10), and "vision" in a religious sense as conveying revelation, are dismissed. The chronicle as a narrative of self, as life-writing, or, as the reading public at the time expected, an insight into Barnes' unconventional upbringing, is rejected.

While Barnes was writing *Ryder* in Paris in the 1920s, there were many artists that recognized and experimented with the ubiquity of visual metaphors, such as the Surrealists photographing themselves with their eyes closed (1928), and Luis Buñuel's opening scene of the eye being slit in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). The French thinker and literary figure Georges Bataille vehemently rejected the primacy of vision and, like Barnes, experimented with language, emphasizing

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bodily needs and fluids, focusing on base matter as a disruption of what is considered high and low.[3] In *Ryder*, the act of seeing is continually undermined, or warned to be treacherous, as in the Decalogue. Many Barnes scholars have focused on hidden references in her texts or personal secrets in the stories relating to the author's life, reading memory as an archaeological operation, rather than as processual, to use Olney's terms. As mentioned earlier, Barnes alludes to the futility of reading for the sake of finding such truths; however, there is a larger concern with denouncing vision in this context. In relation to weaving memory, what one chooses to "see" or to focus on is also shaped by our language and the words we possess to express what we are observing. As mentioned earlier, Barnes expresses distrust in her readers' ability to recognize this. Bataille expands on this reliance of vision and points to the consequences of how we position ourselves in society and our ability to reflect on the matter:

> A car and man enter the village. I do not *see* either, only the tissue woven by an activity of which I am part. There where I think I *see* 'what is' I see the *link subordinating* what is there to this activity. I do not see: I am in a tissue of knowledge, reducing the liberty of what is (that is, the initial sovereignty and non-subordination) to itself and its servitude. This world of objects, which transcend me, (in so far as it is empty within me) and encloses me in its sphere of transcendence encloses me in some way in my exteriority, weaving a web of *exterior-*

3 The latter, in his texts on base materialism, develops this concept around the foot as the origin of (hu)man accomplishments, or specifically, the big toe. Similarly, Barnes uses the example of the foot to make the same point in *Ryder*, but expands it to include gender differences. This is pointed out in the section "Homophony and discursive polyphony – towards glissement".

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ity inside me. My own activity thereby annihilates me, introduces an emptiness into me *to which I am subordinate*.

(Bataille 1998: 149)[4]

In recognizing what is happening around him, he is nevertheless dependent on the existing knowledge of what is, and its proper names, which tie him obliquely to the "web of exteriority". In this tie to the exterior world, he also experiences a sense of loss. In Barnes' play with various discourses, characters are frequently tied up in the same web of exteriority, and the conveying of their inner experiences as "pure reflection" of subjectivity and interiority is an impossibility of language. The web of exteriority is an aspect of memory weaving that is highlighted and problematized in *Ryder*, a novel told through literary references. Therefore, it is less about the separate characters' memories, as their personal stories, and more about how their identities are situated in the larger cultural context, as well as questions about the possibility of storytelling and problems of reception.

Problems of weaving memory

In *Nightwood* (1936), Barnes writes that "History and destiny are untidy; we fear the memory of that disorder" (Barnes 2013: 161). *Ryder* performs this chaos with inconclusive sentences, ambiguity, homophones, idioms, and axioms weaved together in various styles that show the intricate entanglements that make up our stories. The metaphor of writing as "weaving" and text as "web" are popular descriptions of

4 In "The Legendary Topography", Maurice Halbwachs explains how fixed frameworks and beliefs not only influence our ability to interpret what we are seeing (through ready concepts) but also in a sense direct what we are seeing (Halbwachs 1992: 205).

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Barnes' works and method, and also occurs in memory studies to characterize the malleable property of memory. In *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing*, Olney traces its use back to Augustine and his development of weaving as a metaphor for memory, and he also argues that Samuel Beckett's writing of memories into narrative is a double act of composition and decomposition, likening it to Penelope's continuous act in the *Odyssey* of weaving and undoing the shroud for Laertes (Olney 1998: 21). Walter Benjamin uses "weaving" to describe Proust's involuntary memory as a Penelopeian work of remembrance, which is also a focus on memory as a process, but one of forgetting as much as recalling (Benjamin 1999: 237-249).

The loss in *Ryder* is focused on what happens to one's own story in reception. It might not be a personal loss, but it is out of the characters' own control. Therefore, weaving memory is also a process where experiences and impressions are translated into words to be communicated to an audience and thereby meet their cultural reception. Barnes puts the question of the possibility of communicating marginal stories in the context of the larger cultural memory. As Jan Assmann points out in his article "Communicative and Cultural Memory", cultural memory depends on "the characteristic store of repeatedly used texts, images and rituals in the cultivation of which each society and epoch stabilizes and imports its self-image; a collectively shared knowledge [...] on which a group bases its awareness of unity and character" (Assman 1995: 132-133). In this collective effort, where do the marginal stories fit in, and how are they communicated? Barnes' intertextuality performs this myriad of text and images that creates an uneasy setting for many of her abject characters. The uneasiness comes from how Barnes depicts the larger masses' reaction to stories that threaten their collective sense of unity and character. This puts the question

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of the possibility of communicating memory in a complex setting of production and loss, control and dispossession. Even writing marginal stories takes place within the larger cultural memory. It influences how stories are written, how we interpret them, how they are positioned within a communal context, and consequently the ability to "break out" of a web of referents.

In *Ryder*, chapters change styles throughout; stories are told in different styles and sometimes lack an identifiable voice entirely. As a chronicle and an "origins" story, its sheer wordiness and ambiguity replicate the uncertainty and multiplicity in such stories. It plays with the literary canon through Biblical admonitions, Chaucerian bawdiness, and the rhythm of Elizabethan song, to mention a few, where the Ryder family disclose everything from questionable heritage, infidelity, rape, and misgivings in a miasma of dominant religious and sociopolitical discourses. While the chronicle genre usually compiles various sources from official records to personal letters in order to create a cohesive story, the story is here both replicated and disturbed by giving chapters different literary styles, yet rejecting any structural continuity. As their stories are written, they are also being inscribed and reinscribed in and through a cultural framework that values and devalues their experience.

Barnes' archaisms have been recognized as producing "a language which is worn out, used, and never innocent" and "does not aim at mastering tradition but at exposing its impure history" (Caselli 2009: 3). This impurity in *Ryder* is generated by the ambiguous and associative factors that occur in Barnes' chaotic arrangement of discourses and homophonic play. It creates ruptures in seemingly cohesive patterns and linguistic inconsistencies that question the seemingly common sources of reference and context. In the constant repetition of "whole" and "hole", their meaning collapses and

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takes up space in each other through homophony. Bataille calls the unstable element of archaisms and classical concepts *glissement* and the words *mots glissants* (slippery words), in which knowledge undermines itself (Bataille 1998: 179; 2014: 22-23). Barnes uses different literary references, archaic words, and styles to challenge concepts (often presented as capitalized words or phrases). This happens specifically through repetition, where the significance becomes unstable, yet still retains two meanings at work simultaneously.[5]

Homophony and discursive polyphony: Towards glissement

Within the literary tradition of Romantic irony, homophony plays a role as "concealment" and "displaying or concealing the author's strict control of the text" (Spiridon 2008: 435). Barnes' text offers no disclosure of meaning as derived from textual encoding and its unraveling. Rather, by pitting discourses against each other, from religious dogma to philistine philosophical musings and echos of social norms, she creates a narrative polyphony. The words are denied an absolute self-signifying value, and consequently any notion of subjectivity is caught between contrasting meanings. In Barnes, the homophonic quality of whole/hole is invested in relation to writing as weaving and to its attempt and failure to convey revelatory meaning and encapsulate experience, yet it also points to other instances in the text. In relation to writing the marginal, Barnes writes in *Ladies Almanack*: "Why, does

5 Importantly, this is not the same effect as erasure of signifiers; the concepts lose their own meaning through writing. Jacques Derrida refers to this as a "writing that folds itself in order to link up with classical concepts – insofar as they are inevitable […] while relating themselves, at a certain point, to the moment of sovereignty, to their absolute loss of their meaning" (Derrida 1978: 267-268).

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not Nature, that old Trot, weave Day and Night the Threads of human Destiny where to these Damsels hold, Chin and Shank, sky-swimming up the Tree that has plotted an hundred Years to coffin her!" (Barnes 1993: 51). The threads of human destiny do not reach these women and the metaphor fails to "weave" it all together. As explained in the Decalogue: "Thy rendevouz is not with the Last Station, but with small comforts, like apples in the hand, and small cups quenching, and *words that go neither here nor there*, but traffic with the outer ear, and gossip at the gates of thy insufficient agony" (3; my emphasis). The movement of these words never reaches inner experience, as inner experience itself is *glissement*, which can only be hinted at, but not gathered or made to stand as identity.

In the chapter "Portrait of Amelia's Beginning", Sophia tells her daughter-in-law Amelia that because the girl has read very little she therefore does not know "what is in a foot. Running and tapping, lying and standing, the foot has been much overlooked. Large feet and small feet have played a great part in the history of man. On tip-toes went Peeping Tom. Would he be a by-word now, had he walked flat, and saved not the shanks of his boots? [...] Does not the past sound with feet flying to doom?" (34-35). On the one hand, Sophia's perspective ties in with the critique of heterosexual dynamics, where women's bodies are reduced to childbirth and time's decay unless elevated to saint's status, which makes the female body a site for the grotesque in the novel (Taylor 2012: 91). Yet, on the other hand, Sophia also points to the unawareness of men that they are indeed fettered to the same corporeality, and that their accomplishments are not just ideal and elevated, but dependent on the foot, the original reason for (hu)man's accomplishments (Bataille 1995).

However, when Amelia explains this to her sister Ann, she attempts to repeat, but misconstrues Sophia's "smart tongue":

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"Why, destiny is in a foot, said Amelia, and by the footfall, she did affirm, you can tell the whole of a character, light or loud, soft or strong, on tip-toes or well on the flat" (48). Amelia's definition of character is here literally by the footprints they leave. She has not come to this conclusion by reading books and reflecting on the matter, but merely attempts to repeat Sophia's words from memory. Repetition without understanding creates an inane simplification. This does not negate the inclusion of upside-down elements in the novel, as Sophia's dexterous explanation shows. However, it warns of a mere substitution that still perpetuates the same structure, only in reverse: "when the foot lifts up to become 'all sole' and deliver the revelation, sole and soul fuse through homophony, to further deflate the earnest intensity of revelatory discourse" (Warren 2008: 70). As with the murdered corpse, a simplification of "mummification" cannot be an effective synthesis that works in place of the image of the murdered corpse bound in linen. It loses the tension and the dependence between interiority and exteriority, and corporeality and ideas.

The mere repetition of texts is explored in yet another way as the novel plays with multiple narratives at once, and shows the force of cultural memory. The movement from inscription to rescription is depicted in the chapter "Rape and Repining", which is made up of disembodied voices that comment on a rape that just happened in their community. It is narrated in a common communal language, instead of the violated girl narrating her own experience.

The chapter opens with pastoral imagery in the tone and rhythm of Elizabethan song. The new day, not yet dawning, has been disturbed by an event that threatens the fabric of society:

What ho! Spring again! Rape again, and the Cock not yet at his Crowing! Fie, alack! 'Tis rape, yea, Rape it is, and the Hay-shock left a-lean-

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ing! Ah, dilly, dilly, dilly, hath Tittencote brought forth a girl once again, no longer what she should be, but forever and forever of To-morrow and yet another day! (21)

The serene scene is disturbed by the somewhat jarring introduction of the word "rape" and the chapter continues in various styles of discourse, in a choir of condemnation of the raped girl, whose mere existence now threatens all the foundational principles of society: "Have not all Philosophies of Avoidance been Penned for you? Do not Mathematics, take them where you will, prove there is always a Deviation that brings down a Marvellously Different Total and you had wished?" (26). With the entanglement of authoritative interpretations of the Bible, references to Seneca and Plato, and the appropriation of the sciences, the chapter is such a canonical Body where rape is an element that all discourses and their agents struggle to integrate into the existing exegeses: "All the World knows no thing so Mad, so Daft, so Poisonous, so Balmy Glut of all Ill Luck. Doth not the Shudder of it crack the Paint of Historic Beds?" (24). While *Ryder* arguably is the family chronicle that tells the stories that never made it into history, which might be expected to emphasize subjective accounts, one of Barnes' most volatile chapters is that in which cultural memory is made to expose itself.

The rape is mostly referred to in terms ranging from impurity to animality: "Soiled! Despoiled! Handled! Mauled! Rumpled! Rummaged! Ransacked! No purer than Fish in Sea, no sweeter than Bird on Wing, no better than Beast of Earth", and outwardly victim-blaming: "Have you not taken that which Better Women have refused, and in so doing, been most unmannerly?" (26). The capitalized words in this chapter, mimicking old capitalization rules, but used liberally here, highlight the conceptual phrases shrouding the event. As Barnes chooses this style to convey the condemnation of rape,

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she makes the indebtedness to a cultural language painfully obvious in the Good Wives' version of the event. There is no perspective from the girl's side, and the disembodied voices spring forth in rapid succession like gossip in a small town, chattering like only they know how: "Ear to the Ground, my Gossips! […] This way, good Wives!" (24).

While the perspective of the Good Wives is strung together by various discourses, as they dig firmly into history against their own betterment, another perspective is also offered – that of the larger Council of Women:

> Shall not a Council of Women, such as we, make clear to you in a Sitting that had you a Vocabulary of Movement the Case had been a Riddle still and not a certainty. Must we send our Girls to School so that they may learn how to say "No!" with Fitting Intonation, both for Dish of Porridge and for Dish of Love? There is a 'No' with a 'Yes' wrapped up in it, and there is a 'No' enough in the Weave, and we have been sorry amiss that our Girls have not learned of it. (26)

There is a No enough/Know enough in the weave, that yet again fails to make any difference. The reference to "fitting intonation" also points to the homophonic quality of the text, and to a Riddle of language that is the only means of upsetting the discourse that is already pre-set. As mentioned earlier, the novel was censored for its depiction of bodily fluids, yet the rape narrative was not challenged, which "highlight[s] the limits of discourse and insinuates that whenever we talk about rape and sexual abuse, we 'plunge headlong' […] into a prepatterned, codified textual universe that prevents us from thinking, perceiving, speaking rape anew" (Sielke 2002: 85-86). This prepatterned textual universe and its way of "opening" up for marginal narratives is not an opening, as Barnes continually reminds us. It is a shroud that preserves and protects dominant discourse from any permeation that

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will unravel its cohesion. Had the chapter been told from the girl's side, it would be at the mercy of another aspect of identity performance: the sympathy of the community is contingent on the victim's ability to appeal to a collective idea of "victimhood", and she would stand as an example of a "raped woman". Barnes' non-vocal, absent rape victim, however, is completely dispossessed. Instead of giving an embodied experience of rape, the author points to the reception of rape stories and the dual context that arises in which there is a complete disappearance of the subject while she remains the essential person to blame. Experiences of rape, when told, are often challenged on the basis of not conforming to certain ideas of what constitutes rape, but also for being too individual, too bodily specific. Consequently, victims' testimonies are blamed, when "the fault lies in discourses that refuse the significance of anything not rational, not abstract, not universal, that is, anything bodily or sexually specific" (Cahill 2001: 111). Barnes reverses the focus, so that when discussing the scene in "Rape and Repining", it is the community and its response that is scrutinized, and she emphasizes how the victim's body disappears in prepatterned discourse.

The textual universe is integral to the temporal one as Barnes presents an economy of labor where deviance threatens the narratives not only of the past, but also of the future. The raped girl is accused of creating chaos in an otherwise sensible and structured timeline: "You have stolen Time […]. Time made stout by Good Wives stitching, and washing, baking and praying […]. You have bent Time with the Tooth of Lust, torn the hem of Righteousness, and the Wind may enter and the Cyclone follow" (27). The chapter satirizes uncritical faith in historical progress and the condemnation of those who may disturb the order that has been carefully stitched out over centuries, so that "his Whole life may not shrivel into naught" (27). Progress is conflated with the desirable

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continuation of the community, which amounts merely to a replication of the past, not development.

The organizing principles are structured around a fidelity to idealist concepts, into which generations have dutifully invested their time and labor. The Good Wives lay the foundation of narrative time with their consistent productivity, and any deviation will necessarily threaten the consistency required for the progression of the community. The girl has committed an absolute crime, that of a "Wanton act" which threatens to "corrupt a Whole Body" (27) for transgressing the limits. The idea of the "Whole body" is protected by the transgression of rape. While labelled as transgression, it only fortifies the limits of the body and reinforces it as taboo; as transgression is the complement of taboo, it is a part of the social order, the expected opposition (Bataille 1986: 65). Hence, the chapter on rape was not censored, and would not be because it seemingly only confirmed its stance as a taboo subject in the chapter's discourses. The subject itself does not challenge that order, but Barnes shows that repetition can nevertheless destabilize the dominant discourses, to the effect that they expose themselves. By conflating the body with wholeness, it is always threatened by holes that are caused by rifts and breaks in the pattern. Wholeness in Barnes' writing is a feature that always reveals its own inability to encompass everything and, hence, the concept of being "whole" always struggles against its homophonic relative "hole" as it continually slides towards its own disentanglement – its destruction.

Shattered surfaces: Memorial objects

Sophia, mother of Wendell, is given much attention in the novel. She is an enigmatic and humorous character, by "'humorous' is meant the ability to […] push the ridiculous into the very arms of the sublime" (9). Her memories are reflected

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in objects and surfaces, but their reflections and patterns distort rather than illuminate her memories. She creates a tribute to the memory of her father's episode of consternation after the birth of her child when he urinated in a Flowing Bowl (night vase), by ordering five chamber-pots with gilded inscriptions: "Needs there are many,/ Comforts are few,/ Do what you will/ Tis more than I do" (9). Only later in the chapter is there revealed an "Amen" at the end. Barnes mocks the Puritan act of decorating chamber-pots to the level of small thrones while simultaneously keeping their purpose hidden and shameful. The inscription mimics something that would normally be embroidered on a pillow or a piece of cloth and framed to showcase the skills of the lady of the house. However, Sophia does not participate in this exercise, and is described as being of "the type in women, who gave no parole to a single stitch in that whole, magnificent fabric, the wardrobe". She claims the title "Mother" in front of those she meets because she knows "a mother might be condemned, but never quite cast out" (12). Society depends on mothers, but those who do not conform to the values of the community will be condemned.

As usage wears out the chamber-pots, they are left with three lines: "Needs there are many,/ Do what you will,/ Amen", whereas the heavier girl Kate has erased all lines but "Amen". Sophia notes that nothing good can come after "Amen" because she has never heard of anything that comes after that word. Notably, the erasure of "Amen" is ominous as it frames all Biblical explanations of things and events, and thereby seemingly encapsulates all experience. In this episode, however, the corporeal triumphs over the divine, as heavy buttocks wear down the words after *repeated* use, first creating holes in the text and finally threatening to erase the Biblical conclusion. The conflation of the abstract and the sacred, the corporeal and the sacrilegious are notable themes in Barnes'

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writing. If we return to the devaluation of vision discussed earlier in this article, visual objects themselves appear to be inadequate representations of an abstract value system that is simply and outrightly mocked. Subversion is only possible in *Ryder* when the repeated violence of the body threatens the separation of the corporeal and the textual.

Unsurprisingly then, references to memory come to pass in descriptions of Sophia's body and surroundings, an amalgamation of cultural impressions as somewhat separated from mental activity, yet always latent. She dresses herself in the title "Mother" and relies on the fact that "upon this fabric she had leaned for the courage to renounce herself" (16), as her poverty "bedraggled her salon, nibbled at the grandeur and, sitting like a bird of prey above her solitary splendour, shed his droppings upon her felicity, her memories and her spirit, with implacable mutation" (14). Her social standing degrades her memories and soul, and she gives it up to be devoured as something greater than herself: "Beggar at the gates, to be queen at home" (16). The only thing more valued than a mother is, according to Wendell, a woman dying in childbirth, because then she is elevated to saint status (202). Titles function as symbolism as they come with ready-made stories, which arguably can be used to one's advantage in social standing, yet also subject the person to meanings beyond their individual control. As the notion of the Saint evokes the completely selfless Mother, it still perpetuates the idea of suffering as meaningful, and this meaning becomes women's destiny.

Barnes maintains a preference for fractured surfaces in her writing. From *Nightwood*'s "The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a 'picture' forever arranged, is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger" (Barnes 2013: 41), to, in a letter to her friend, "There is always more surface to a shattered object than a whole" (qtd in Barnes 2003: xi).

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In *Ryder*, Sophia keeps a commemorative wall of everything that both inspires and repulses her. Unsystematic and non-hierarchal, its topography still commemorates the passage of time:

> Indeed, Sophia's walls, like the telltale rings of the oak, gave up her conditions, as anyone might have discovered an [*sic*] they had taken a bucket of water to it, for she never removed, she covered over. At forty these pictures were an inch deep, at sixty a good two inches from the wall: the originals were, as she herself was, nothing erased but much submerged. (13)

The impossibility of complete erasure resists the comparison to a traditional palimpsest, and the collage quality of the wall makes it more of a polyphonic palimpsest (Warren 2008: 57). Sophia's reluctance to remove the previous images before she puts up new ones invokes a certain sentimentality, for things she both likes and abhors, but also gives a tactility and continual movement to her memories. They are representative of her, but their arrangement is volatile, malleable, and temporal, not "forever arranged". Rather, the fleeting surfaces emphasize an instability and multiplicity of meaning. The pictures also alter the topography of the room, now measuring a "good two inches from the wall". It is not only our memories that are malleable; our surroundings and how we relate to our surroundings are also affected by the past.

Later in the novel this scene is mirrored in Amelia's discovery that "Sophia, under her increasing flesh, kept memories of what that flesh now covered" (34). Memory occupies the ambiguous space of text and body, and consequently becomes seemingly static and referential when put into words. When Sophia tells her stories to the other characters, she has to participate in the common referential framework. Halbwachs posits that "it is in society that people normally acquire, rec-

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ognize, and localize their memories […] we appeal to our memory only in order to answer questions which others have asked us, or that we suppose they could have asked us" (Halbwachs 1992: 38). Halbwachs' approach has been called "presentist" in that the concerns of the present shape our past. If that view is taken to its extreme, it undermines historical continuity, and the malleability of memory (Schwartz, in Halbwachs 1992: 26). However, if we reconsider Sophia in *Ryder*, we see that she is performing this externalization in dialogue, where she appeals to the nomer of Mother because she knows what kind of social standing that earns her. While she is a mother, the designation of Mother is given to her by society with all the recognitions that entails. Sophia does not disclose memories more "personal" than exactly what is relevant at that given moment. Her personal memories are connected to her flesh and the walls of her house, and the reader does not have unmitigated access to them. It is important to note that Sophia does this to ease her social standing, and by extension her family, so although her personal stories could contribute to greater diversity (if we are talking generally), she would not survive socially.

The rearrangement of form, like articles of different media (Sophia's lithographs and drawings, the chamber-pot treated as artwork) that are rearranged and changed, is linked to gender concerns, which, according to Amelia, are in dire need of the metaphorical Cyclone the Good Wives fear will upset their order. In the chapter "Tears, Idle Tears", Amelia's sister Ann expresses her concern that Amelia will leave for America to marry the dubious Wendell Ryder, a man known for his polygamous inclinations. The boat trip to America is especially a cause of concern for Ann. The departing sea will leave Amelia with less control, as "no one can be sure of anything on board of a ship, it pitches and plunges to that extent, and everything is upside-down most of the time, and

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what chance has woman to keep what belongs to her, when everything else is where it shouldn't be?" (44). The arguably naïve Amelia nevertheless acutely answers that "a place for everything and everything in its place! 'Tis what has ruined the lives of all women since the first came up out of a man with his rib sticking in her side!" (44). Barnes points to the rebuttal of social order in the novel, and significantly poses the woman as an image of man with a difference, conjuring the grotesque body "with his rib sticking in her side". Woman then, is also a site of the impossibility of perfect cohesion and continuation.

Conclusion: The (im)possibility of a future

There is a disconnection between the history of man and the women in the novel who attempt to carve out their own experiences. A new knowledge and a new notion of arrangement is needed, as "there were much books in a wall shelf, on the history of mankind, to remind her the way she had come and the way she must go" (98). Again the packaging of culture creates meaning that is conflated with destiny. Whether we shape cultural memory or are shaped by it, the repetition of common references through communication shields us from history's disorder – this disorder that Barnes points out in *Nightwood* as being a memory that people collectively fear (Barnes 2013: 161). In *Ryder*, there are examples of how society attempts to counteract a sense of disorder, which consequently restricts plurality. As previously mentioned, Assmann points out that groups of people base their sense of unity on collectively shared knowledge (Assmann 1995: 132-133). If this knowledge is upset, it can also upset the sense of unity. *Ryder* problematizes the consequences of this and how it restricts storytelling.

Several of Barnes' novels were censored before they reached

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print, mostly due to explicit homosexual content. *Ryder* takes issue with how dominant discourses inscribe and reinscribe deviance in their exegeses and reinforce it as transgression, thereby making it a part of cultural memory but ultimately tailored to its needs. In other words, it does not allow for unproductivity, excess, or waste.

Barnes performs a linguistic experiment with these marginal stories, where the characters and their experiences are caught up in, wrapped, and rewrapped in a weaving of cultural memory. Metaphors of weaving texture, fabric, threads, and stories are popularly used to describe the multifaceted and intertwining stories that make up our cultural memory. Barnes' repetitions, however, focus on the ongoing process and production of cultural interpretations as a weave that the act of storytelling always threatens to rip apart. The connection between weaving, industriousness, and productivity becomes clear when stories that do not uphold, or blatantly contradict, the social status quo face both disapproval and outright attack. Consequently, marginal stories are not ascribed the same value as social consensus; Barnes demonstrates how they are viewed as threats to the very fabric of society. While a supposed binary of weavers and unravelers posits the former as a positive, productive force and the latter as merely a destructive force, the experimental prose in *Ryder* shows the effects of marginal stories as co-opted by cultural language, and suggests that there are problems beyond merely "accepting" a plurality of stories.

Weaving memory is an act of textual creation that is always sliding towards loss, but this loss in Barnes is personal because it is cultural. Concepts may lose their meaning in cacophony and repetition, and an act that takes place through reading and reflection, as seen in Amelia's attempt at repeating Sophia's words. Weaving cultural memory does not in itself allow for new narratives that will not be subsumed and re-

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inscribed in dominant discourse. In today's media landscape, multiple platforms function as outlets for marginal stories. However, as Barnes' *Ryder* reminds the reader: censorship occurs both in silencing stories and in the reinscription of experiences in a dominant discourse. The multiplicity of marginal stories emphasizes a series of losses along the way – in other words, holes that threaten to unravel the multiple strands keeping everything together.

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Virginia Woolf and the Perception of Things

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"Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small". The words stem from Virginia Woolf's much quoted essay on literature, "Modern Fiction" from 1925 (Woolf 1984: 89), and the inversion between "big" and "small" which she advocates here may serve as a useful reminder of how things that are normally pushed to the margins can be an entrance to a life forgotten and invisible.

In many of her texts, Woolf investigates the relation between physical objects and human life. I will venture to give some examples of how, on the one hand, material objects come into being when seen, perceived, and remembered by a human consciousness, and how, on the other hand, human beings are affected and influenced by the things they encounter. Objects are a means of remembering a past otherwise lost to us, and this essay will explore how the interaction between the material world and the human mind gives rise to situations of remembering and to emotions that may transcend

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the boundaries of the everyday world. The situation in which the individual is embedded becomes visible in and through things; things are a source of experience and memory that include the relation to that which is *not* visible or available. Seeing and describing objects are ways of asking, and hopefully understanding, our connection to the world, and the emotional impact of this connection. Thus, I will argue that the quotidian interaction with the physical world implies an affective investment. Furthermore, the sympathy for "small" and lost objects also seems to have relevance for the relation between humans: overlooked objects and overlooked people have a lot in common; they both testify to what Woolf calls *lives of the obscure*.

Let me start with a couple of examples taken from Woolf's essays on London. When Woolf writes about London, she is not interested in the imperial city, the majestic, official city of historical landmarks intended as testimonies to a glorious past. Her account is a toponymy where perception and memory are located in "what is commonly thought small". "Small" may refer to useful things like tools and soaps and umbrellas and stockings, but also to seemingly insignificant objects, those things which are no longer part of the functional, work-related world, but discarded, thrown away, forgotten and broken – what we normally call garbage or rubbish. In the six essays from 1931-32, collected in *The London Scene* (1975), the main topics are the link between eternity and modernity, and the link between things – objects – and lived life. London, particularly the docks area, is the quintessential image of the transition from use to rubbish: "Barges heaped with old buckets, razor blades, fish tales, newspapers and ashes – whatever we leave on our plates and throw into our dust bins – are discharging their cargoes upon the most desolate land in the world", she argues in "The Docks of London" (Woolf 2004: 15).

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Material objects are subject to change, and to be able to see change one must have an image, or an idea, of before and after. The memorial process, embedded in time as it is, presupposes an acceptance of change that – at least ideally – involves compassion for the destroyed and distorted, the discarded and disremembered. The docks of London are containers of such things – things perceived as garbage. Garbage is a testimony to life as it is lived, or rather, life as it *was* lived. To see and acknowledge garbage is to acknowledge change, and consequently, the past as different from the present. Things that are no longer useful objects are part of the city's *sine qua non*: without garbage, the city is dead, devoid of human life. This inevitably involves an acceptance of life and surroundings as shifting; to care for the city is to be able to see that which is normally left out and disregarded as ugly and useless. Woolf's eye for the contingency of the city subscribes to a positive evaluation of the fugitive, the transient and the contingent, to echo Baudelaire (Baudelaire 1992: 355), which has its counterpart in the architecture of the modern metropolis as that which is inextricably bound up with change and decay. In "Oxford Street Tide", an essay devoted to the daily life of London as a place for commerce and exchange, it is described thus: "The charm of modern London is that it is not built to last; it is built to pass. Its glassiness, its transparency, its surging waves of coloured plaster give a different pleasure and achieve a different end from that which was desired and attempted by the old builders and their patrons, the nobility of London" (Woolf 2004: 31).

To be human is to be mortal, and the city, as the emblem of human life par excellence, embodies mortality as a prime quality. One may of course ask: what has this celebration of modernity to do with remembering? Doesn't the account of things as *passing* rather testify to forgetting? Having Baudelaire's definition of modernity in mind as related to every-

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thing transient and ephemeral, it should be enough to be reminded of the other side of the coin: the eternal and the lasting (Baudelaire 1992: 355). In Woolf's words we see a historical consciousness that includes both the contingent and the eternal, and when she confronts the new and the old, we are presented with an image that springs from an awareness of history as a process of memory *and* forgetting. The juxtaposition of the passing and the lasting lends the city positive qualities which are different from what we normally attribute to "greatness": to accept glassiness and transparency gives the city a beauty that is different from but no less valuable than the coloured plaster of the old, even though the first is bound to pass while the second is more likely to prevail. Both are involved in the process of remembering.

"Solid Objects"

Let me then turn to my main text, Woolf's short story "Solid Objects" (1920).[1] The story is an account of a young man, John, with a promising political career ahead of him. One day, and that is where and when the story starts, he walks with his friend Charles on the beach, and by coincidence finds a piece of glass: a big, thick lump washed by sand and water that appears when he happens to move his hand around in the sand – "burrowing his fingers down, down into the sand" (Woolf 2003: 96). The lump triggers his imagination – it has undergone the transition from a useful object to an anonymous thing; one can no longer see what it once was: "it was impossible to say whether it had been a bottle, tumbler or window-pane; it was nothing but glass; it was almost a pre-

1 The present analysis of "Solid Objects" is an expanded version of a sub-chapter in my essay "Virginia Woolf og byens fenomenologi" (Selboe 2013).

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cious stone" (ib.: 97). This discovery engenders a change in John's life; he starts to search for other things, and gradually he devotes all his time to finding bits and pieces of glass and hard materials from nature. He searches hidden or sealed-off areas, discarded railway tracks, in short, places for garbage and things thrown away: "He now began to haunt the places which are most prolific of broken china, such as pieces of waste land between railway lines, sites of demolished houses, and commons in the neighbourhood of London" (ib.: 99). In a detailed and subtle reading, Bill Brown argues that the story "is in fact a story not about solidity, but about the fluidity of objects, about how they decompose and recompose themselves as the object of a new fascination" (Brown 1999: 3). However, as we will see, the meaning attributed to the objects in John's mind makes them eternal and solid indeed.

While his friend Charles continues his political career, John gets more and more obsessed by the world of things, to the extent that he lets his career slip in favour of an intense search for new objects. To start with, the things he finds – bits of broken china or glass, amber, and stone – serve a sort of function in the political and social world where he initially belongs: "They were useful, too, for a man who is standing for Parliament upon the brink of a brilliant career has any number of papers to keep in order – addresses to constituents, declarations of policy, appeals for subscriptions, invitations to dinner, and so on" (Woolf 2003: 98). However, while the number of objects grows, the number of papers diminishes: "their duty was more and more of an ornamental nature, since papers needing a weight to keep them down became scarcer and scarcer" (ib.: 99).

A point of no return occurs the day John, on his way to an electoral meeting, suddenly sees "a remarkable object lying half-hidden" behind some railings, tries to reach it with the point of his stick but has to give in, returns home to put a wire

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ring on the end of his stick in order to reach it – and misses his meeting. The desired object is described in detail: "it was a piece of china of the most remarkable shape, as nearly resembling a starfish as anything – shaped, or broken accidentally, into five irregular but unmistakable points. The colouring was mainly blue, but green stripes or spots of some kind overlaid the blue, and lines of crimson gave it a richness and lustre of the most attractive kind" (ib.: 98). As is obvious from this, the object acquires a meaning for John; it is beautiful in terms of colour and form, and it resembles something from the natural world from which it stems, namely a starfish. The form, or the shape, is nevertheless purely accidental; it is like a sign open to all sorts of interpretations and imaginations. The lump of glass makes an impression on the mind – which immediately starts its explanatory work, in order to trace its genesis:

> But how had the piece of china been broken into this remarkable shape? A careful examination put it beyond doubt that the star shape was accidental, which made it all the more strange, and it seemed unlikely that there should be another such in existence. Set at the opposite end of the mantelpiece from the lump of glass that had been dug from the sand, it looked like a creature from another world – freakish and fantastic as a harlequin. It seemed to be pirouetting through space, winking light like a fitful star. The contrast between the china so vivid and alert, and the glass so mute and contemplative, fascinated him, and wondering and amazed he asked himself how the two came to exist in the same world, let alone to stand upon the same narrow strip of marble in the same room. The question remained unanswered. (ib.: 99)

The piece of china is personified, but the meeting between mind and object does not lead to an identification, but rather to an acknowledgement of the difference between things, and more importantly, the difference between *worlds*. No answer, no final solution is the result of John's speculations on the object's *sine qua non*.

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The acquisition of this particular piece leads to the final break with what has so far been John's reality and everyday life, and it marks his transition from citizen to collector. Collecting is itself an act of memory: "Collecting is a form of practical memory", writes Walter Benjamin, and underlines how the collector encloses his precious objects within a magical circle (Benjamin 1999: Hla,2).[2] While the flâneur is characterized by the optical faculty, the collector is bound to the tactile: "Collectors are beings with tactile instincts" (ib.: H2,5).[3] Most important is that the true collector lifts the thing out of its usefulness, and liberates it from the drudgery of being useful. This, however, is not the whole picture. While the collector is facing the world of things, the objects he collects are organized in a system which can't be grasped within a profane context of the everyday. Benjamin's words may seem to apply to John, who is concerned with the beauty and strangeness of things, not their use, and who first and foremost lets himself be fascinated by the "freakish and fantastic" qualities of the shape. Function is subordinated to beauty, and the shapes he collects lack monetary value and are far from any financial circulation.

For the collector the object is more of a fetish than a commodity, according to Benjamin, and thus forms part of what he labels a *magic encyclopedia*. Nevertheless, he emphasizes that the true collector is obsessed with every object's genealogy: earlier ownership, value, and price. It follows from this that John is no proper collector, or at least a curious sort of collector. He collects, yes, but he is not really a collector in the Benjaminian sense. He neither looks for things that can

2 "Sammeln ist eine Form des praktischen Erinnerns" (1982). I refer to the letters and numbers following each of Benjamin's notations, which are identical in the German and English editions.

3 "Sammler sind Menschen mit taktischem Instinkt" (1982).

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be categorized or valued, nor are his 'natural' objects included in any history of reception. The making of an encyclopedic system is absent in John's case; he is completely absorbed by the accidental and the arbitrary, and it is the singular rather than the collection as such that is at the center of his interest. He is concerned with the unique and autonomous in every piece he finds; it is precisely the fact that each part is transformed and changed into a fragment of a lost and inaccessible whole that catches his attention, although it may be argued that the free indirect narration makes it unclear whether it is John himself, or the narrator, who wonders how a certain object has acquired its shape.

John actively searches for new objects, but they also seem to come to him of their own accord, from the margins of society – from the "rubbish heaps": "Such objects often occurred there – thrown away, of no use to anybody, shapeless, discarded" (Woolf 2003: 98). In other words, what most people would overlook and see as superfluous rubbish is exactly what John cares about and gives a new home.

Where John's friends see rubbish, things already parted from the world of objects, John on the contrary sees solid objects – things for eternity. For John, the objects are not really part of memorial time, or rather his way of calling them back to life, and hence slipping them through the temporal net, makes it clear that the time of memory is always now. In the course of the story a curious reversal takes place: the more these marginalized objects fill his house and his shelves, the more marginalized *he* becomes. In fact, he becomes more and more like the things he collects from the rubbish heaps. While his previous colleagues and friends are concerned with success and political careers, John and his collection of things represent the opposite. With his collection he has taken leave of the rhythm of common society that characterizes the world of useful, even violent things, and resorted to an isolated

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world of objects only he perceives the beauty of, and which has replaced the world he originally knew.

In one way we may call it a rubbish equivalent to *l'art pour l'art*, with the important reservation that his objects are *not* art, regardless of the fact that they are exhibited in his room. Phenomenologically speaking, the lumps are precisely what they are seen as: neither rubbish nor art, but simply things, strange and fantastic, but solid enough on his mantelpiece, embedded in history although cut off from collective memory. Instead they have entered the realm of the personal, even solipsistic. Their *value* is neither financial nor functional, nor artistic; it lies in the way in which they interfere with his mind.

On the one hand, the story "Solid Objects" describes a withdrawal from the world of others that results in a social degradation, while on the other, it investigates how the connection to a lost world is re-established. The unity that evolves between John and his things connects him to the past, to childhood, to what we may call his inner or even secret life. Already in the opening, when digging in the sand, the text emphasizes that it is like making "a secret channel to the sea" – as if he is digging his way to a world beyond time and place. The *content* of his experience, and his perception of objects, is not semantic, but rather the intuitive coherence the fragmented and discarded things have for him when he finds them and copes with them in his specific situation. In a more general sense: things make sense for him perceptually, as if he were a pre-verbal child, but this "sense" is not integrated in the social world of the grown-up.

To collect is, as we heard from Benjamin, a way of remembering, but also a way of connecting to the world; the world is present in and through each object: "for the collector, the world is present, and indeed ordered, in each of his objects"

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(Benjamin 1999: H2,7; H2, a,l).[4] The relation between past, present, and future is inherent in every object. In John's case, the connection to the past is re-established, but the connection *forward*, to the future, is cut off, and not only from the grown-up life of career and wealth, but also from other human beings. John and his objects become a world of its own, isolated from, and misunderstood by his surroundings. While empathy is at work between John and his objects, it is absent in his relation to other people.

The narrator neither condemns nor embraces his actions; she simply registers that he sees beauty where others see rubbish, and reality where others see illusion. His situation engenders hope, but also disappointments, and we are told that the hunt for new and better objects "tormented the young man" (Woolf 2003: 100), and gives him that dazed look – "something fixed and distant in his expression" (ib.: 101) – that characterizes the obsessed. On the one hand, he is about to lose himself in his objects; on the other, he is representing an alternative to the normal world of things. Does he lose himself in the world of things? "He loses himself, assuredly. But he has the strength to pull himself up again by nothing more than a straw; and from out of the sea of fog that envelops his senses rises the newly acquired piece, like an island", to borrow Benjamin's beautiful phrase about the collector (Benjamin 1999: Hla,2).[5] The question is whether John will remain in the sea of fog and sink with his "island", or will manage to pull himself up again.

Woolf gives us not only the perspective of John, however,

4 "dem Sammler ist in jedem seiner Gegenstände die Welt present und zwar geordnet" (1982).

5 "Er verliert sich, gewiss. Aber er hat die Kraft, an einem Strohhalm sich von neuem aufzurichten und aus dem Nebelmeer, das seinen Sinn umfängt, hebt sich das eben erworbene Stück wie eine Insel" (1982).

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but also the perspective of the object. Like a child, we are told, John, without closer reflection, puts the first lump of glass in his pocket, then transfers it on to the mantelpiece when he gets home – and the perspective immediately turns from John to the object itself: "the heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it, to enjoy this bliss instead of a life of cold and wet upon the high road. 'It might so easily have been any other of the millions of stones, but it was I, I, I!'" (Woolf 2003: 97-98). We thus see how John's look and touch is projected on to the objects he brings home, while he himself at the same time becomes silent and absent. Whether John wins or loses in this, if his meeting with things involves a salvation or a damnation, remains an open question, dependent on which perspective one sees it from – his own or his friend Charles', who in the text stands in for society. What is clear, though, is that his situation in the world is inextricably linked to his hunt for new objects, to the extent that he is in danger of becoming one himself. The narrator doesn't take sides when it comes to the development John has gone through: "His career – that is his political career – was a thing of the past" (ib.: 100), the narrator notes, and the words demonstrate that "career" has quite different meanings and implications for John and his surroundings. While John's career is a thing, a passing thing even, contingent and about to dissolve into nothingness, his bits and pieces of stone and glass are, in contrast, "solid objects". The story ends with a scene between John and Charles:

> He leaned back in his chair now and watched Charles lift the stones on the mantelpiece a dozen times and put them down emphatically to mark what he was saying about the conduct of the Government, without once noticing their existence.

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'What was the truth of it, John?' asked Charles suddenly, turning and facing him. 'What made you give it up like that all in a second?'

'I've not given it up,' John replied.

'But you've not a ghost of a chance now,' said Charles roughly.

'I don't agree with you there,' said John with conviction. Charles looked at him and was profoundly uneasy, the most extraordinary doubts possessed him; he had a queer sense that they were talking about different things. (ib.: 101)

Charles then goes on to look about the room and he sees what he perceives as shabbiness; the carpet-bag, the stick, the stones on the mantelpiece, which he lifts, but doesn't recognize as the reason for John's withdrawal. The scene ties in with the opening, where Charles immediately loses interest in the lump of glass John finds, because "it was not flat", and thus is not an object with a purpose – it can't be skimmed over the water.

Charles refers from the very start to social and political reality, while John's answer is steeped in another reality – the inner world he has found in and through his objects: "He had a queer sense that they were talking about different things" (ib.: 101). They are indeed; the two men are completely unable to read each other's minds. Their final conversation clearly demonstrates that they have different things in mind when they discuss his "career". Their final conversation is foreshadowed in the opening scene on the beach where they both look at the same object but see different things. Perception, the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us, is both intentional and bodily, and neither exclusively objective nor subjective – and Woolf, being a phenomenologist *avant la lettre*, so to speak, gives voice to this fundamental insight. John is absorbed and silent, Charles active and determined, and the object which captivates John is dismissed by Charles. One might well say that the perception of the lump of glass is a mixture of

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the cognitive and the sensory, at the same time inside and outside the subjective consciousness, mechanical and only partly intentional.

The two men's different perspectival orientation really comes to the forefront in this final scene. What is at the center of Charles' attention is at the background or even absent from John's, and vice versa. What for Charles are arbitrary things are for John solid objects. What one man deems rubbish, the other regards as a precious object; one might even say an *objet d'art*, without the word art ever being mentioned in the text. In short, their perceptions are not synchronized. The scene demonstrates through verbal and gestural language (asking, lifting of stones, turning) that "it is our inevitable fate to be seen differently from the way we see ourselves", in Merleau-Ponty's words (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 38).

Whereas John's obsession with objects seems to represent an absolute break with the social and political world, Charles seems to represent the opposite. Charles, however, has no alternative when it comes to social commitment or responsibility; his way of dealing with the world is by blindness to everything but surface.[6] Hence, rather than representing a retreat from the social sphere, John's vision may indeed be seen as Woolf's way of redefining that sphere – an act of resistance *vis à vis* an increasingly alienated existence. In this respect, John's "work" is like the work of an artist resisting the deprivations of modern life. But when modernists like

6 Bill Brown distances himself from those critics who read the story "as a cautionary tale warning against aesthetic absorption at the expense of the practical, the ethical, the political" (9), and sees John's relation to objects in a more productive light. Thus, he reads the story, like Douglas Mao (1998), as part of a larger modernist attention to material objects. More recently Charles Sumner has noted that there is a "virtually non-existent critical response to Charles's decision" (2008: 10).

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Woolf insist on treating artistic work as real and "solid", it is not "a desire to render art impervious to social conditions, but rather a perceived need to justify art's place in a society apparently unsympathetic to the idea of beauty as its own end but deeply committed to production as moral imperative", as Douglas Mao argues (Mao 1998: 39-40).

Nevertheless, the reciprocal respect between John and his objects undoubtedly leads to a kind of withdrawal from contemporary life, perhaps analogous to what Alison Light, with reference to Woolf herself, labels "defensive narcissism": "Though she was immensely curious about others, her most usual response, especially in [...] early years, was to dissociate from the group – a kind of defensive narcissism – by which she anchored her 'self'". Light argues that the urge to identify with others, the "fellow feeling" of nineteenth-century novelists like Dickens and Eliot "to create a moral community and uphold a consensus between reader and writer", is not for Woolf: "By contrast, Woolf became a writer excited by difference" (Light 2007: 12). If we extend this view to John, and regard him as an embodiment of a certain artistic attitude, we might say that his relation to the world – to his "readers" – is exactly one of excited difference, and his response the kind of defensive narcissism that Light attributes to Woolf.

Woolf addresses the question of being an outsider from different angles in her texts; her interest in forgotten and overlooked lives is well known. John is an interesting example of the species because he goes, so to speak, from inside to outside; he starts out as someone who belongs to society and ends as someone distant from it. He collects homeless objects, and more and more he himself becomes somebody discarded and forgotten, "homeless" in terms of career and social life. His development thus forms a reversed "*Bildung*-process". In this respect John as collector also becomes closer to the artist-writer who acquires a different rhythm and a different

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vision from 'ordinary' people. Both artist and collector are deserters in terms of 'normal life'. In this they also resemble another type, steeped in a particular situation, which Woolf has commented upon: the ill. A person who is ill is forced out of the everyday world of activity and haste, and Woolf's interest in the state of illness ties up with the situation of the artist. The essay "On being ill" (1930) concerns itself with literature as much as with illness, with reading and writing about illness as an important although neglected theme for literature.

"On being ill" is in short a defense of the unity of body and mind. Why doesn't literature concern itself with the body, Woolf asks, or rather, why are we fooled into thinking that literature is a matter of the mind while the body is forgotten? The healthy have to pretend they don't have a body; their careers necessitate a marching forward directed by the mind. The ill person, like the artist, has to stop and reflect on the "make-believe" (Woolf's word) nature of this behaviour: "we cease to be soldiers in the army of the upright; we become deserters. They march to battle. We float with the sticks on the stream; helter-skelter with the dead leaves on the lawn, irresponsible and disinterested and able, perhaps for the first time in years, to look around, to look up – to look, for example, at the sky" (Woolf 2002: 12). John is, like the writer and the ill, a deserter from the army of the upright.

Things or objects?

So far, I have used the words *things* and *objects* as more or less interchangeable, as they may well be. Now, I will try to narrow my take on what is at stake here. In fact, the text never once uses the word *thing* about the pieces of china, glass, stone, and iron John finds on "the deposits of earth"; they are always named objects. The story nevertheless investigates

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the relation between things and objects. This is foreshadowed in the opening, where the two men are perceived as things, a spot, indistinguishable from nature's other spots, only gradually identified as human: "this spot contained four legs". The opening line takes a bird's perspective: "The only *thing* that moved upon the vast semicircle of the beach was one small black spot" (Woolf 2003: 96, my emphasis) – which turns out to be referring to the two men, Charles and John, walking on the beach. The interaction between them, or rather, the relationship they each have to the objects as well as to the external world, is what the story is 'about', its 'subject', while the two men are objectified.

The thing/object dialectic is a hard one to define, and has been a recurrent subject for theoretical and philosophical analysis in recent years, as Bill Brown's now seminal article "Thing Theory" from 2001 testifies to. Things and objects may indeed differ: "Things lie beyond the grid of intelligibility the way mere things lie outside the grid of museal exhibition, outside the order of objects", as he argues (Brown 2001: 5). If we stick to Woolf's own interrogation in "Solid Objects", we will see that objects are on the one hand material – they exist within the field of phenomenality – and on the other, their phenomenality is itself subject to change, thus implying both the lasting and the passing, the solid and the shifting. In Johanna Wagner's words:

> Things are not things, but develop into objects in the story. A thing seen as distinct from others is just a thing. But a thing which comes into contact with a person, a subject, becomes an object by being a teleological point of reference. This relationship is also expressed by the grammatical meaning of the words 'subject' and 'object'. So every object is a thing, but not every thing is an object. (Wagner 2006: 10)

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An object is concrete, as opposed to all other 'things', which alludes to general, fleeting, even abstract entities, people and nature included: "it was so hard, so concentrated, so definite an object compared with the vague sea and the hazy shore" (Woolf 2003: 97), as the narrator's comment on John's first treasure has it. Objects, whether useful or broken, whole or fragmented, are carriers of history, memory, and stories, but they only become visible and meaningful when met with a human consciousness. It follows from this that there *is* an implicit connection between the collector and artist or writer: both find dead objects from the rubbish heap of history and give them 'life'. The presence engendered by physical objects happens in and through an act of interpretation which is sensual and verbal, linguistic and gestural, even metaphysical and magical. The text thus embodies a fundamental phenomenological and hermeneutical insight: perception, sensation, situation, and meaning are inextricably bound together. The objects are objects even when their shapes are distorted, twisted, or unrecognizable. In naming the object – what does it look like, is it a star, a creature from another world, a harlequin? – it also becomes linked to the human world, to ordinary experience. The thing as object has installed itself in John's mind and become his subject. But what is known and recognized also involves the strange and alien – the accidental shape. The objects are what they are: seen, perceived, and interpreted by us, but never identical with us. The writer, like the collector, is the one who lifts the objects from obscurity and presents them with a story; thus the objects function like a *shifter*, mediating between present and past, and between the individual consciousness and the external world. A thing turned object is the emblem of interaction, a mediation, whether positive or negative, functional or aesthetic.

Nowhere is the complex interplay between subject and object more beautifully, and subtly, expressed than in the

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following words from Woolf's story: "Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it" (ib.: 98). Consequentially, it is not only the brain which is influenced by what it sees, also the object is transformed by the act of seeing. The object is the true subject of the sentence, or rather, the emphasis shifts from the mind to the object, and we are reminded of the intricate interaction between the two. "For nothing was simply one thing", as the boy James says in *To the Lighthouse* (Woolf 2002: 202); forms and shapes shift and change, and the brain receives myriads of impressions and perceptions which haunt and influence it. Therefore, an object can be embedded and situated in the everyday world while at the same time pointing us in the direction of the forgotten, transcendental, and miraculous – the duplicity of the ordinary and the ecstatic which Woolf, via the artist Lily, also speaks of in *To the Lighthouse*: "One wanted, she thought, dipping her brush deliberately, to be on a level with ordinary experience, to feel simply that's a chair, that's a table, and yet, at the same time, it's a miracle, it's an ecstasy" (ib.: 218).

Woolf's interest in the essence of objects, that which survives the quotidian quality, is well documented. For Woolf, as for other members of the Bloomsbury group, the converging of aesthetics and domesticity implies thinking and remembering through and via physical objects. Her short stories and essays testify to this, and the discussion is alive among her fellow "bloomsberries", such as the artists Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, and art historians like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, who in different ways provided Woolf with food for thought. John's interest in form – the shape and texture of his objects – may well have found its inspiration in Clive

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Bell's idea of art as "significant form" with the aim of stirring emotions which lead to another, ultimate reality.[7] Thus, when "Solid Objects" is criticized for fetishizing and aesthetizing waste, or even worse, for subscribing to a desire to acquire more and more things, – in short, commodity culture – the objects as a path to an awareness of a life different from the 'normal', quotidian reality, is overlooked.[8]

Objects of the past: "Haworth, November 1904"

When fragments from the past occur as visible objects in a room or on a mantelpiece, they are at the same time employed with a temporality – lifted from an obscure past into a living present, and thus subject to change. This move, however, necessitates that somebody sees and recognizes them; in the case of "Solid Objects" that somebody is John. Although John's 'exhibition' is a private, even solipsistic one, the objects occur in a similar way to objects in a museum: "To say that objects *occur* is to suggest that objects have a temporality; they don't happen to be there so much as they happen", in Bill Brown's words (Brown 1999: 8). In other words, when exhibited, they are given a life that implies past, present, and future.

We know from Woolf's memorial texts as well as her novels that she often envisions the past, her own and others', via houses – their rooms and objects – and thus merges the spatial and the temporal. Let me therefore end by giving an example from her very first essay to be published: "Haworth, November, 1904". The essay is devoted to a visit to Haworth, the home of the Brontë family, and appeared unsigned, in *The*

7 I have discussed Woolf's relation to the aesthetic views of the Bloomsbury group in "Virginia Woolf and the Ambiguities of Domestic Life" (Selboe 2010).

8 Cf. note 2.

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Guardian, on December 21, 1904. In Woolf's account of the visit, she is particularly concerned with the relations between the material and the human, and between the passing and the lasting.[9] The house turned museum, like any museum, displays a collection of objects, and Woolf demonstrates an ambivalence towards this heap of things: "An effort ought to be made to keep things out of these mausoleums, but the choice often lies between them and destruction, so that we must be grateful for the care which has preserved much that is, under any circumstances, of deep interest" (Woolf 1986: 7). She then goes on to list a number of things in this "pallid and inanimate collection of objects" (ib.: 7), but then concentrates on one case that contains "the personal relics" of Charlotte Brontë:

> But the most touching case – so touching that one hardly feels reverent in one's gaze – is that which contains the little personal relics, the dresses and shoes of the dead woman. The natural fate of such things is to die before the body that wore them, and because these, trifling and transient though they are, have survived, Charlotte Brontë the woman comes to life, and one forgets the chiefly memorable fact that she was a great writer. Her shoes and her thin muslin dress have outlived her. (ib.: 7)

Woolf explores the relation between death and survival: while the body is gone, the clothing remains. The objects live, but the body to which the objects belong is long dead. In displaying Charlotte Brontë's small shoes and little dress – anybody

9 As Anka Ryall points out, Woolf's view on Haworth is in accordance with Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), in her attitude to the place as well as to Charlotte Brontë (Ryall 2011: 205). Woolf refers to Gaskell throughout her essay, and says in the second paragraph: "The *Life*, by Mrs Gaskell, gives you the impression that Haworth and the Brontës are somehow inextricably mixed" (Woolf 1986: 5).

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who has been to the museum and seen these relics can easily identify with Woolf's view of them as "touching" – an almost mystical effect occurs: the dead woman "comes to life". Woolf points to the fact that our personal, material things are often due to die before us; we wear out dresses and shoes and go on with our lives. Here it is the other way around: the young woman's dress has survived – and still does. Furthermore, the muslin dress and shoes that belonged to a famous writer have the effect of making us more interested in the woman than in the writer who was the reason for displaying them in the first case.

Both Charlotte and Emily Brontë died young, so it is hardly surprising that some of their personal things survived them. Woolf's view on this, however, is not only to emphasize the object as a living entity (the clothes and shoes "have outlived her"), but also to convey empathy with the form as such: the relics are few, they are little and they are touching. This is further underlined when the observant eye turns from Charlotte to Emily:

> One other object gives a thrill; the little oak stool which Emily carried with her on her solitary moorland tramps, and on which she sat, if not to write, as they say, to think what was probably better than her writing. (ib.: 7)

Woolf reminds us that the relation between the lasting and the passing is an intricate one. Who is to say what is the most important: the thinking or the writing? Writing is both a process and an object; Emily's books are the result of her activity on the little stool. The relation between human life and material objects is interwined and interdependent. Thus, solid objects are here, as in John's case, not dead objects but emblems of empathy – and of memory.

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Memory as Resurrection in Roland Barthes

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Barthes analyzed many different cultural objects, from literature to fashion, sports, and film. His interest in photography dates from the 1970s; in his book *La Chambre Claire* (*Camera Lucida*), with the eloquent subtitle "Reflections on Photography" ("Note sur la photographie"), he investigated the medium of photography via another medium, literature, and yet another mode of writing, historiography. The point I want to make in this article is that precisely through the interwining of these three visual and written media, Barthes also offered an original reflection on memory, interpreted as resurrection. *Camera Lucida* was published just before his death in 1980 and after his mother's death in 1977: this essay exposes his research on the essence of photography as well as his quest for the "right" picture of his mother, the image that would be true to her being. Contemporary research in media is mostly concerned with the attempt to specify the technical characteristics, social effects, and interferences of various media, exploring the concepts and practices of

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mediality, intermediality, and medialisation. Barthes' works from the mid-1960s until the mid-1970s pioneered the study of communication, sociology, and semiotics of communication; however, his concern in his last book is of a different order. In *Camera Lucida* he strove to discover the existential and affective endeavor connecting photographic images and verbal-written expressions of different kinds. Several pictures are shown and commented on, as well as several texts, mainly by Marcel Proust and Jules Michelet, with the highly personal and existential motivation that Barthes wished to write something to keep his mother's memory alive.

The analysis of Barthes' trajectory in *Camera Lucida* will allow me to disentangle what I call his theory of memory as resurrection. The result of Barthes' research in terms of form is an essay – the form of the essay being a hybrid in which different aspects of knowledge and of writing converge: philosophy, literary criticism and theory, psychoanalysis, quotations from various writers, and personal remarks. *Camera Lucida* can be seen as the essay that englobes the form of the novel Barthes constantly referred to from the late 1970s on. From the perspective of our research on memory and media, his last book opens yet another approach of a particular phenomenological and poetic nature. In *Camera Lucida*, intermediality, or the interaction among various media, leads to an original viewpoint. Photographic image, literary text, and historiography are not analyzed by Barthes in their specificity or in their institutional and technical interconnection but, so to speak, in their existential unity. The enterprise is profoundly phenomenological by virtue of Barthes' constant concern in studying an object of knowledge, in this case photography, with the continuous awareness of the relationship between subjective and objective elements.

We will see that the notion of memory as resurrection breaks both with the most current idea of memory as nos-

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talgia or regret for the past and with the practical idea of memory as mnemotechnical competence. My method is a textual analysis or intermittent close reading which aims to extract some theoretical issues and also, besides the general points just announced, to involve the reader in a series of surprising displacements coupling Barthes' writing strategies and my interpretation. I call my analysis "intermittent" because I do not follow linearly the development of *Camera Lucida*; instead, my argument proceeds in concentric waves, and, when I construct a parallelism among passages in this text and in other texts by Barthes or by other authors, I look less for stable concepts than for transformations and dynamic ideas.

Away with nostalgia

In Barthes' own words, in *Camera Lucida* he is engaged in a two-fold enterprise: he wants it to offer a reflection on photography's essence as much as he wants to find in a photograph the real image of his mother's – the true personality of his dead mother. The book, written in the first person, starts with a souvenir, with the tense of reminiscence, the past: "One day, quite some time ago, I happened to find a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jérôme, taken in 1852" (Barthes 1981: 3).[1] This is a positive, non-nostalgic, and knowledge-oriented aspect of remembrance, triggering an action: the enterprise to find a relevant way to research the characteristics of photography further. Barthes wants to unite the personal memory of the very episode in his past that led to his search on photography, and the historical past glimmering in the date: 1852. Three temporalities blend to-

1 "Un jour, il y a bien longtemps, je tombai sur une photographie du dernier frère de Napoléon, Jérôme (1852)" (Barthes 1980: 13).

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gether: the moment Barthes writes and remembers that episode; the episode itself, which happened a long time ago in his life; and the historical time of Napoleon's brother. The entanglement of the three temporalities emerges in the use of different grammatical tenses linking the past amazement with the present: "And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor'".[2]

Barthes's book entails a double endeavor: his accurate, active, and successful classification of Photography, via his observations on several photos which are included in *Camera Lucida*, and his discouraging attempt to find his mother's "right" picture. Photography is capable of giving the certitude that something has existed, as Barthes concluded about its essence, its *noème*: "The name of Photography's *noème* will therefore be: 'That-has-been'" (1981: 77).[3] Photography gives back historically the past as reference, but the medium is unable to re-call, call again, and bring back the existential truth of the beloved. The fatality of the medium consists in this failure to transcend the sheer factuality of the past. Barthes joins Proust in his conviction that thought is a better medium for existential memory: the evanescence of mental images is stronger than the evidence of Photography.

Barthes, both author and narrator of *Camera Lucida*, looks into a series of pictures and is dissatisfied; the medium is insufficient to recall the beloved.

Now, one November evening shortly after my mother's death, I was going through some photographs. I had no hope of "finding" her, I

2 "Je me dis alors, avec un étonnement que depuis je n'ai jamais pu réduire: 'Je vois les yeux qui ont vu l'Empereur'" (Barthes 1980: 13).

3 "Le nom du noème de la Photographie sera donc: '*ça a été*'" (Barthes 1980: 120).

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expected nothing from these "photographs of a being before which one *recalls* less of that being than by merely thinking of him or her" (Proust). I had acknowledged that fatality, one of the most agonizing features of mourning, which decreed that however often I might consult such images, I could never recall her features (summon them up as a totality). No, what I wanted – as Valery wanted, after his mother's death – was "to write a little compilation about her, just for myself" […] I could not even say that I loved them [these photographs]: I was not sitting down to contemplate them, I was not *engulfing* myself in them. I was sorting them, but none seemed to me really 'right': neither as a photographic performance nor as a living *resurrection* of the beloved face. (1981: 63-64; my ital.)[4]

Switching from the theoretical research to the personal quest, Barthes looks for the impossible: the resurrection of the dead. Writing promises to be a better solution than looking through pictures.

Camera Lucida is imbued with mourning. Inevitably, nostalgia is lurking in the sorrow for his mother's death, but the term itself appears only once in the whole book, in a list of four positive and negative affective terms: Barthes asks if, in his investigation on the essence of Photography, it would be

4 "Or, un soir de novembre, peu de temps après la mort de ma mère, je rangeais des photos. Je n'espérais pas la 'retrouver', je n'attendais rien de 'ces photographies d'un être, devant lesquelles on se le rappelle moins bien qu'en se contentant de penser à lui' (Proust). Je savais bien que, par cette fatalité qui est un des traits atroces du deuil, j'aurais beau consulter des images, je ne pourrais jamais plus me rappeler ses traits (les appeler tout entiers à moi). Non, je voulais, selon le vœu de Valéry à la mort de sa mère, 'écrire un petit recueil sur elle, pour moi seul' […] ces photos que j'avais d'elles, je ne pouvais même pas dire que je les amais: je ne me mettais pas à les contempler, je n'abîmais pas en elles. Je les égrenais, mais aucune me paraissait vraiment 'bonne': ni performance photographique, ni réssurrection vive du visage aimé". (Barthes 1980: 99-100).

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possible to have "a view of the object which was immediately steeped in desire, repulsion, nostalgia, euphoria?" (1981: 21).[5]

This series culminating in euphoria is a list of emotional states. I will expand later on the question of emotion; as for now, I will address the idea that nostalgia isn't the main issue, either of Barthes' last book or of his relationship to the past. What really matters is a type of memory that Barthes calls the resurrection of the past, "a living resurrection" of something or somebody we love. Resurrection has the power of transforming reminiscences of people and things. It transcends both the past as evidence and the nostalgic longing for the past; while evidence is constative and nostalgia is contemplative, resurrection is dynamic in the present of remembrance.

Barthes expressed his non-nostalgic mood in *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* (1977) (Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes), when recalling something from the past, the *baladeuse* (the caboose), a streetcar that ran from his home town Bayonne to Biarritz. People loved to take the tram, he explains, but today it no longer exists. And he adds in this fragmented instance of recollection a comment that rejects any Romantic attitude: he does not mean to embellish the past, nor to express regret for his youth, but just to say that pleasures do not progress, they just change.[6] Actually, in his whole enterprise of *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, which

5 "une visée de l'objet qui fut immédiatement pénétrée de désir, de répulsion, de nostalgie, d'euphorie?" (Barthes 1980: 41).

6 "This is not to apply a mythic embellishment to the past, or to express regrets for a lost youth by pretending to regret a streetcar. This is to say that the art of living has no history – it does not evolve: the pleasure which vanishes, vanishes for good, there is no substitute for it. Other pleasures come, which replace nothing. *No progress in pleasures,* nothing but mutations" (Barthes 1994: 45). – ("Ceci n'est pas pour embellir mythiquement le passé, ni pour dire le regret d'une jeunesse perdue, en feignant de regretter un tramway. Ceci est pour dire que l'art de vivre n'a pas d'histoire; il n'évolue pas: le

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supposedly is a trip through his bygone personal and intellectual life, Barthes resists any hint of an autobiographical research reviewing the past. He does not even consider the past as past; he merely wishes to acknowledge his activity of writing: "I abandon the exhausting pursuit of an old piece of myself, I do not try to *restore* myself (as we say of a monument). I do not say: 'I am going to describe myself' but: 'I am writing a text, and I call it R. B.'" (Barthes 1994: 56).[7]

Barthes and Proust

Nevertheless, looking through a pile of photos implies investigating the past and provoking memories. Looking at photographs of old days, don't we all say: "This was when …", thus making an effort to recollect the episode or the person or the place, or to suddenly being brought back to that episode? Like the narrator of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and as unsuccessfully as him, Barthes tries to connect the memory of the beloved with a photographic image. Barthes' association with Marcel Proust is recurrent in many texts, and justified in *Camera Lucida* by several quotations and references.

It is well known that Proust made a distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory, which is crucial in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (first volume published in 1913, the last in 1927), where he described the emergence of remembrance and its psychic effects. Barthes' idea of resurrection

plaisir qui tombe, tombe à jamais, insubstituable. D'autres plaisirs viennent, qui ne remplacent rien. *Pas de progrès dans les plaisirs*, rien que des mutations". (Barthes 1973: 54)).

7 "je renonce à la poursuite épuisante d'un ancien morceau de moi-même, je ne cherche pas à me *restaurer* (comme on dit d'un monument). Je ne dis pas: 'Je vais me décrire', mais 'J'écris un texte, et je l'appelle R. B.'" (Barthes 1973: 60). – For a reading of some aspects of memory in Barthes and in Claude Simon, see Anne Herschberg Pierrot, "Cette brume de la mémoire" (2009).

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of the past – "the living resurrection of the beloved face"– is indeed linked to Proust's vision; nevertheless I would like to point out some crucial dissimilarities. I will argue that Michelet is more important than Proust in characterizing the type of memory Barthes is looking for.

"Vivid" or "lively" or "living" can often be an appropriate adjective to designate memory. In fact, as is clear in Proust and, before him, in René Chateaubriand and Gérard de Nerval, episodes from the past can be retrieved as if they were alive, and not as long-gone, irreversible, and dead experiences. Such retrieval from the past does not correspond to the typically Romantic melancholy or sweetness of remembrance – to the situation, for example, of Alphonse de Lamartine looking at the lake he used to contemplate with his beloved,[8] or of William Wordsworth revisiting the bank of the Wye, near Tintern Abbey.[9] The episodes of "living" memory rise up abruptly and abolish the passing of time. As explained by Proust, we are then struck and dazzled by

8 Alphonse de Lamartine, in his poem "Le Lac" ("The Lake"), addresses Time directly, calling back the ecstatic hours of his past: *Éternité, néant, passé, sombres abîmes,/ Que faites-vous des jours que vous engloutissez?/ Parlez: nous rendrez-vous ces extases sublimes/ Que vous nous ravissez?* (Lamartine 1963: 39). – "Eternity, nothingness, past, dark gulfs:/ What do you do with the days you devour?/ Speak up! Shall you bring back the bliss/ Of which you rob us?"; (my transl.).

9 William Wordsworth found consolation and strength in remembrance as he declared in his "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798": "These beauteous forms,/ Through a long absence, have not been to me/ As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:/ But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din/ Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,/ In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,/ Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart". (Wordsworth 2016). – In Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* (Boym 2001), the author convincingly points to the Janus face of nostalgia, potentially being either a regressive longing or an active reconstructing of the past in view of the present.

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those events as if they were literally born again, being resurrected, thus existing in the present.[10]

The analysis of the way in which recollections emerge and the scrutiny of their temporal dimension will shed more light on the strange phenomenon of resurrection as understood by Barthes. Here, it is necessary to retrace not only Barthes' evident relationship to Proust but also his less acknowledged affinity to Michelet.

In Proust, memory triggers important mental activities related to the astonishment and thrill of an epiphany. The unexpected, surprising impression of rebirth takes place quickly; then it demands a slower temporal dimension, since the subject needs some time for spiritual concentration to understand what is exactly being resurrected, and to search for it, allowing it to come to life. In the episode of the *madeleine*, the narrator has to make an effort in order to identify and recover from the past the impression that has just struck him. As suggested by Julien Zanetta's article in this volume, Proust's involuntary memory actually does require an act of will. Without the struggle of volition – Proust claims – many important events of our past would be lost and dead forever. Only via a repeated effort is the narrator able at last to discover the link between the impression and the resurrected episode:

> No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place […]. Whence could it have come to me, this *all-powerful joy*? I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs. Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it?

10 Freud talks about *wiederbeleben* (to revive, to give life to an image).

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I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third, which gives me rather less than the second. It is time to stop; the potion is losing its magic. It is plain that the object of my quest, the truth, lies not in the cup but in myself. (Proust 1981; my ital.)[11]

The narrator's search is first described as a sudden extraordinary but undetermined feeling, then as the deliberate labor of his attention and will to rescue the original experience that has produced a "powerful joy" in him. His search becomes more and more a mental activity in which the process of discovering implies creation:

I put down my cup and examine my own mind. It is for it to discover the truth. But how? What an abyss of uncertainty whenever the mind feels that some part of it has strayed beyond its own borders; when it, the seeker, is at once the dark region through which it must go seeking, where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. It is face to face with something which does not so far exist, to which it alone can give reality and substance, which it alone can bring into the light of day.

And I begin again to ask myself what it could have been, this unremembered state which brought with it no logical proof of its existence, but only the sense that it was a happy, that it was a real state in whose presence other states of consciousness melted and vanished. I decide to attempt to make it reappear. I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea. I find again the same state, illu-

11 "Mais à l'instant même où la gorgée mêlée des miettes du gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d'extraordinaire en moi […]. D'où avait pu me venir cette *puissante joie*? Je sentais qu'elle était liée au goût du thé et du gâteau, mais qu'elle le dépassait infiniment, ne devait pas être de même nature. D'où venait-elle? Que signifiait-elle? Où l'appréhender? Je bois une seconde gorgée où je ne trouve rien de plus que dans la première, une troisième qui m'apporte un peu moins que la seconde. Il est temps que je m'arrête, la vertu du breuvage semble diminuer. Il est clair que la vérité que je cherche n'est pas en lui, mais en moi" (Proust 1987: I, 44-45, my ital.).

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mined by no fresh light. I compel my mind to make one further effort, to follow and recapture once again the fleeting sensation. (1981, my ital.)[12]

Barthes often stressed the importance of Proust for him. References to Proust multiply in his late articles and books: as he said in 1973 in *Le Plaisir du texte* (The Pleasure of the Text), this writer is his main reference, even having the status of a constant memory, "a *circular memory*" – a kind of memory without nostalgia, signaling the living presence of a friend, of somebody or something we love:

I recognize that Proust's work, for myself at least, is *the* reference work, the general *mathesis*, the *mandala* of the entire literary cosmogony – as Mme de Sévigné's letters were for the narrator's grandmother, tales of chivalry for Don Quixote, etc.; this does not mean that I am in any way a Proust "specialist": Proust is what comes to me, not what I summon up; not an "authority," simply a *circular memory*. (Barthes 1975: 36)[13]

12 "Je pose la tasse et me tourne vers mon esprit. C'est à lui de trouver la vérité. Mais comment? Grave incertitude, toutes les fois que l'esprit se sent dépassé par lui-même; quand lui, le chercheur, est tout ensemble le pays obscur où il doit chercher et où tout son bagage ne lui sera de rien. Chercher? pas seulement: créer. Il est en face de quelque chose qui n'est pas encore et que seul il peut réaliser, puis faire entrer dans sa lumière. Et je recommence à me demander quel pouvait être cet état inconnu, qui n'apportait aucune preuve logique, mais l'évidence, de sa félicité, de sa réalité devant laquelle les autres s'évanouissaient. Je veux essayer de le faire réapparaître. Je rétrograde par la pensée au moment où je pris la première cuillerée de thé. Je retrouve le même état, sans une clarté nouvelle. Je demande à mon esprit un effort de plus, de ramener encore une fois la sensation qui s'enfuit" (Proust 1987: 45). – On Proust and memory, see Poulet 1949.

13 "Je comprends que l'œuvre de Proust est, du mois pour moi, l'œuvre de référence, la *mathesis* générale, le *mandala* de toute une cosmogonie littéraire – comme l'étaient les lettres de Mme de Sévigné pour la grand-mère du narrateur, les romans de chevalerie pour Don Quichotte, etc.; cela ne veut pas dire que je sois un 'spécialiste' de Proust: Proust, c'est ce qui me vient, ce n'est pas une 'autorité', simplement *un souvenir circulaire*" (Barthes 2002a: IV, 40-41).

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From the end of the 1970s Proust is given an important role, as it appears from the 1978 article "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure", and, after the publication of *Camera Lucida*, in Barthes' posthumously published courses at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979, *La Préparation du roman* (The Preparation of the Novel) and *Le Neutre* (The Neuter). Barthes doesn't want to be a specialist in Proust; as he says in "Longtemps …", he doesn't mention Proust as an erudite reference but as the writer with whom he most identifies, his projection targeting not so much the fictive characters as the writer's work and the writer at work:

> [B]y setting Proust and myself on one and the same line, I am not in the least comparing myself to this great writer but, quite differently, *identifying myself with him*: an association of practice not of value. Let me explain: in figurative language, in the novel, for instance, it seems to me that one more or less identifies oneself with one of the characters represented; this projection, I believe, is the very wellspring of literature; but in certain marginal cases, once the reader himself wants to write a work, he no longer identifies himself merely with this or that fictive character but also and especially with the actual author of the book he has read, insofar as the author wanted to write this book. […] I am not identifying myself with the prestigious author of a monumental work but with the worker […]. (Barthes 1989: 277-278)[14]

14 "car en disposant sur une même ligne Proust et moi-même, je ne signifie nullement que je me compare à ce grand écrivain, mais, d'une manière tout à fait différente, que *je m'identifie à lui*: confusion de pratique, non de valeur. Je m'explique: dans la littérature figurative, dans le roman, par exemple, il me semble qu'on s'identifie plus ou moins (je veux dire par moments) à l'un des personnages représentés; cette projection, je le crois, est le ressort même de la littérature; mais dans certains cas marginaux, dès que le lecteur est un sujet qui veut lui-même écrire une œuvre, ce sujet ne s'identifie plus tellement à tel ou tel personnage fictif, mais aussi et surtout à l'auteur même du livre lu, en tant qu'il a voulu écrire ce livre […] je ne m'identifie pas à l'auteur prestigieux d'une œuvre monumentale, mais à l'ouvrier" (Barthes 2002a: V, 459).

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Nevertheless, Barthes' theory of memory only partially mirrors Proust's reflections, while Jules Michelet's conceptions in his historiography are crucial for the understanding of the idea of "living resurrection". The nineteenth-century historian has been fundamental for Barthes, who discovered him in 1945 and read his works with passion (Samoyault 2015: 70, 184); one of Barthes' first articles in the journal *Esprit*, in 1951, discusses Michelet's history; and the book Barthes has always preferred among his own works is his 1954 *Michelet par lui-même* (Michelet by Michelet, 1987, 1992).

Glimpses of the medium of historiography absorb both the literary medium of the Proustian novel and the written text Barthes, like Valéry, wants to write in order to keep alive his mother's memory (as quoted above: "No, what I wanted – as Valéry wanted, after his mother's death – was 'to write a little compilation about her, just for myself'"). Intermediality as it is normally understood today is the combination and adaptation of distinct means of representation and reproduction. Michelet's type of resurrection as adopted by Barthes establishes a kind of intermedial communication which, in tune with Barthes' exploration of media and memory, is not institutional, technical, or sociological but fundamentally existential. At the personal level of Barthes' mourning his take on memory as resurrection assures the contact with the beloved one; at the level of forms and media it translates into the essay, a discursive form that includes photographs as well as written text, in a composition where several pictures are shown and commented upon, with the exception of the one that, finally, would be his mother's right image. This changing configuration between text and image hints at the fact that the visual medium and the written text cannot always be juxtaposed: intermediality is not fluid, but might proceed in jolts, in broken correspondences. This irregularity does not simply originate in the discrepancy of

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the techniques but in the degree of affect or emotion the use of intermediality evokes.

Resurrection in Michelet

Barthes' book on Michelet was published in the publishing house Éditions du Seuil's series called "Les écrivains par eux-mêmes" (Writers by themselves), and consists of an anthology of passages from the historian's works preceded by Barthes' introduction. It is organized in thematic categories.[15] The term *resurrection* is used already on the first pages, when Barthes affirms that, in *History of France* and *History of the French Revolution*, Michelet realized a true resurrection of French national history. However, the full sense of the resurrection of the past accomplished by the historian appears in the section entitled "To Live out Death". Barthes insists on the non-metaphorical sense of Michelet's resurrection, insofar as it can weave together the full presence of death and the return to life operated by the historian.

> The resurrection of the past is not a metaphor; it is actually a kind of sacred manducation, a domestication of Death. The life Michelet restores to the dead is assigned a funereal coefficient so heavy that resurrection becomes the original essence, absolutely fresh and virgin of death, as in those dreams where one sees a dead person living, knowing perfectly well that the person is dead. (Barthes 1992: 84)[16]

15 In this book Barthes' text is always in italics.

16 "La résurrection du passé n'est pas métaphore, elle est en fait une sorte de manducation sacrée, d'apprivoisement de la Mort. La vie que Michelet redonne aux morts est affectée d'un coefficient funèbre si lourd que la résurrection devient l'essence originelle, absolue fraîche et vierge de la mort, comme dans ces rêves où l'on voit vivre un mort, tout en connaissant qu'il est mort" (Barthes 2002a: I, 351).

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This intermingling of life and death corresponds to the cycle of nature, to which Michelet refers in the passage of *La Sorcière* (The Witch) quoted by Barthes, as "the powerful, invincible resurrection of the life of nature" (1992: 197).[17]

Later on, in another section called "The Document as a Voice", the theme of vital energy emerges forcefully in the words of the people from the past, which the historian can hear as if they were alive. Michelet preferred oral documents to written ones. But paradoxically the sound of the voice has to come out from the written medium; the historian is the one who can bring it out. The voice is "an attribute of life". Memory is connected to dead bodies: "The roots of historical truth are therefore documents as voices, not as witnesses. Michelet considers in them, exclusively, that quality of having been an *attribute of life*, the privileged object to which clings a kind of *residual memory of past bodies*" (1992: 81, my ital.).[18] Paradoxically again, in Michelet's vitalistic vision, death ensures life. In the section called "A Morphology of Tissues", Barthes remarked that, for the historian, the classical image of the skeleton is not the allegory of death since death stays in the flesh, in the tissues. Their decay entails a continuous transformation allowing them to be resurrected – such is the invincible cycle of nature: "The corruption of bodies is a pledge for their *resurrection*" (1992: 87; my ital.).[19]

Historiography is a powerful medium capable of recollecting and recording human events, actions, and ways of

17 In the words of Michelet: "la puissante, invincible résurrection de la vie naturelle" (Barthes 2002a: I, 426).

18 "Les racines de la vérité historique, ce sont donc les documents comme voix, non comme témoins. Michelet considère en eux seulement cette qualité d'avoir été un attribut de la vie, l'objet privilégié où s'accroche come une rémanence des corps passés" (2002a: I, 349).

19 "La corruption des corps est un gage de leur résurrection" (2002a: I, 353).

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living and thinking; Michelet's resurrection through the historiographical medium implies something quite different from the creation suggested by Proust in the quoted passages. For Proust the effort to remember entails that the subject plunges deeply into the self, while Michelet's resurrection involves the coming back of the actors of history. Proust's unexpected impression demands the slow path of the narrator's search; Michelet's trajectory goes almost the other way round. Hardworking, slow, and resistant like an athlete, he suddenly perceives right across from him some historical figures. This phenomenon takes place abruptly, provoking a strong reaction described by Barthes with terms of emotional crescendo:

> Consider how he progresses in his 14th century (by erudition above all); he advances, he narrates, he adds the years to the years, the facts to the facts, in short he rows blind and stubborn as a long-distance swimmer; and then, *all of a sudden*, without any warning, he encounters the figure of the peasant Jacques standing on his plowed field: *profound astonishment*, even *trauma*, then *emotion*, *euphoria* of the traveler who, caught short, stops, sees, and understands […]. (1992: 23, my ital.)[20]

"All of a sudden" designates the kind of congested temporality characterizing memory insofar as it is living. Here again the phenomenon is different from Proust's mnemonic episode. The impression comes suddenly to the narrator in *Remembrance of Things Past*; his powerful joy created by the mysteri-

20 "Voyez comment il chemine dans son XIVe siècle (d'érudition surtout); il avance, il raconte, il ajoute les années aux années, les faits aux faits, bref il rame, aveugle et têtu comme un nageur de long parcours, et puis tout d'un coup, *sans s'y attendre*, il rencontre la figure du paysan Jacques, dressé sur son sillon: étonnement profond, traumatisme même, puis émotion, euphorie du voyageur qui, surpris, s'arrête, voit et comprend" (Barthes 2002a: I, 305).

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ous impression sets off the process of creative memory. The recollection that triggered the joyful impression needs time in order to be revealed: in the end, the spiritual search succeeds in the creation and re-creation of the specific recollection connected to that impression. On the contrary, according to Barthes, Michelet's research is a process of a long endurance – at the pace of a long-distance swimmer. Michelet's historical narration encompasses years and years of history and all the time the historian is devoted to erudite research. Then something happens suddenly, as related to us in the quotation: it is the amazing, unanticipated encounter with a human being from the past, the peasant Jacques, provoking "profound astonishment, even trauma, then emotion, euphoria".

Pathos

More than twenty years after his *Michelet*, Barthes referred again to Michelet's history as a research filled with emotion. In his 1955 book, the emotions are detailed and reach a climax with the historian's amazement in front of the dead suddenly rising up from death. In his 1978 course on *The Neuter*, Barthes defined the historian's texts with three synonyms indicating emotions: "Michelet carried out a history of *pathos*, *emotions*, *affects*".[21] The link between the critic and the nineteenth-century historian grew stronger and revealed the importance of affect for Barthes in the years after his mother's death. His phenomenology of photography is linked to affect, a "power" he does not want to reduce. As he writes in Chapter 8 of *Camera Lucida*: "As *Spectator* I was interested in Photography only for 'sentimental' reasons; I wanted to explore not as a question (a theme) but as a

21 "Michelet s'est livré à une histoire pathologique, des états, des affects" (Barthes 2002b: 197; my transl. and ital.).

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wound. I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe and I think" (Barthes 1981: 20).[22]

The theme of memory cannot be separated from affect. Affect is implicit in the recalling of those past emotions connected to the remembered episode and the emotions recreated by the act of memory. I will not digress on the contemporary theoretical debate about the presence or lack of emotions in memory;[23] I will just refer to the emotional track literature has been taking since the *Odyssey* – recollections are usually moving and reenact a host of sentiments and feelings. When, in Book VIII, Odysseus arrives at the isle of the Phaicians, King Alcinous asks him to tell his story; Odysseus narrates his long trip and tears pour from his eyes, as he is overwhelmed by the emotion caused by both the memory of his sufferings and the bard's voice singing the war of Troy, which he knew too well. This wonderful example from one of the first sources of Western literature fuses memory and art through emotions, indicating that one of literature's major vocations is to convey the past and the affects connected to it.

After his mother's death, Barthes envisions his own existence using Dante's phrase: "Vita Nova" (new life). In "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure", first given as a lecture at the Collège de France, his new life is perceived as the possibility of finding a new literary form open to pathos. And he looks for the ideal medium of pathos.

Barthes' interest in pathos, or affect or emotion or sentiment, took two directions: on the one hand he felt the need to express his love for his mother, while on the other he became concerned with those questions that have been ne-

22 "Comme *Spectateur,* je ne m'intéressais à la Photographie que par 'sentiment'" (Barthes 1980: 42).

23 See Cahill and McGaugh 1995, Schacter 1996, Kensinger 2004. For an approach considering both the humanities and the neurosciences, see Nalbantian 2003.

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glected or fiercely opposed by modernist approaches in the second half of the twentieth century, when literary studies were informed by structuralism and formalism – precisely those trends which Barthes himself also shaped. Barthes' article "La mort de l'auteur" (The Death of the Author), which became a reference for a whole generation, argues against the cult of the author that was typical of literary history and against the reader's identification with fictional characters, narrators, and writers. But in his course on *The Neuter*, some decades after the advent of structuralism, Barthes admitted how deeply he could be moved by some literary passages and by the real death of the authors he loved:

> To read a dead author is for me something alive, because I am devastated, torn apart by the consciousness of the contradiction between the intense life of his text and the sadness to know that he is dead. I am always moved by the stories of the deaths of writers (Tolstoi, Gide). (Barthes 2007: 9)[24]

The early Barthes, enthralled with Brecht's theatre and unsatisfied with the old psychological myth of expressivity, condemned the expression of emotions and the manifestation of sentiments. In 1968, his article "Leçon d'écriture" (Lesson in Writing) conveys his enthusiasm for Japanese Bunraku theater understood as the opposite of typical Western theater, which was so filled with emotions and sentiments: "*The poisoning substances* of Western theatre fade away: *emotion* doesn't flood, submerge the spectator; it becomes reading, stereotypes

24 "Lire l'auteur mort est pour moi vivant, car je suis *troublé, déchiré* par la conscience de la contradiction entre la vie intense de son texte et la tristesse de savoir qu'il est mort: je suis toujours triste de la mort d'un auteur, ému par les récits des morts d'auteurs (Tolstoï, Gide)" (Barthes 2002b: 35).

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disappear …" (Barthes 1977b: 77).[25] But in the late 1970s, as openly stated in "Longtemps …", emotion became a positive value: "The moment of truth would imply *the recognition of pathos*, in the simple, non-derogatory sense of the word, and, oddly enough, literary science, has a hard time recognizing pathos as *something important in reading*" (Barthes 1989: 287; my ital.).[26]

In spite of the many changes in Barthes' interests, and despite his eclecticism, there are strong elements of continuity in his research. His constant *affection* for Proust and Michelet can guarantee the connection among the various periods of his work. In *Michelet*, as indicated above, the emotional peak takes place when the historian meets a historical character "all of a sudden". Surprise – some psychologists would say – is the very signal of the advent of an emotional episode; for Michelet the most surprising occurrence of that suddenness consists of the resurrection of the dead.

The great chain of memory

I will briefly sum up my argument as developed in these pages before concluding with yet another reference to a literary memory, that of Charles Baudelaire, who is mentioned twice in *Camera Lucida*. I identified two different temporalities in Proust's and Michelet's resurrection: in Proust suddenness followed by slowness, and in Michelet slowness interrupted by suddenness. In *Camera Lucida*, the slow path of Barthes'

25 "Les substances empoisonnantes du théâtre occidental sont dissoutes: l'émotion n'inonde plus, ne submerge plus, elle devient lecture, les stéréotypes disparaissent" (Barthes 2002a: III, 38).

26 "Le 'moment de vérité' […] impliquerait une reconnaissance du *pathos*, au sens simple, non péjoratif, du terme, et la science littéraire, chose bizarre, reconnaît mal le *pathos* comme force de lecture" (Barthes 2002a: V, 468).

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inquiry into Photography and the morose experience of looking through his mother's pictures are intertwined. But suddenness plays an important role.

Barthes's research requires the patience of collecting definitions and examples; it leads to the distinction between *studium* and *punctum*. Some photographs are interesting for cultural reasons and others are moving because of some detail that strikes the viewer. For example, Keon Wessing's picture of rebellion in Nicaragua touches Barthes because of the presence of both soldiers and nuns (Barthes 1981: 22). What is the relationship between a medium and memory? As we have seen, for Barthes, all the techniques capable of recording mechanically or electronically, all the techniques that have been developing vertiginously since the invention of photography in the nineteenth century, cannot guarantee the possibility of a "true" remembrance. Photography as a medium is not per se associated with memory: "The Photograph does not call up the past (nothing Proustian in a photograph). The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed" (1981: 82).[27]

Barthes – or rather the narrator in the first person of *Camera Lucida* – blends his understanding of the medium with his quest for his mother's "right image". That intimate quest, "one November evening", is oriented by melancholy, mourning, and the disappointment of Photography's inadequacy to recall the beloved ones. Literary fictions and life combine according to variable instances; when we read Proust, we might feel that his novel talks about our existence. Who could not

27 "La Photographie ne remémore pas le passé (rien de proustien dans une photo). L'effet qu'elle produit sur moi n'est pas de restituer ce qui est aboli (par le temps, la distance), mais d'attester que cela a bien été" (Barthes 1980: 129).

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remember, in a moment of suffering, touching episodes and the narrator's comments on human sentiments and behaviors? It is natural then that a lover of Proust, who had already said that he identifies with him, fuses his own findings with his memories of *Remembrance of Things Past*. Quotations are not simply the erudite proof of our work as critics; they can be the sign of our love for literature, conceived both as *studium* and *punctum*, in an inextricable combination of life and literature, mixing memory and desire.

In *Camera Lucida*, the weaving of explicit and implicit elements stemming from Proust and from Michelet is intense. I have tried to show that the ultimate epiphany of memory for Barthes is not Proust's involuntary memory but Michelet's resurrection. Barthes often uses the term *resurrection* in *Camera Lucida* (as he did in *Michelet*), and clearly attributes it to Photography when he analyzes what he calls its scandalous effect:

> Now, this is a strictly scandalous effect. Always the Photograph *astonishes* me, with an astonishment which endures and renews itself, inexhaustibly. Perhaps this astonishment, this persistence reaches down into the religious substance out of which I am molded; nothing for it: Photography has something to do with resurrection. (Barthes 1981: 82)[28]

The astonishment striking Barthes is similar to the one that strikes Michelet when, all of a sudden, he encounters the peasant Jacques.

In the first pages of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes details his

28 "Or, c'est là un effet proprement scandaleux. Toujours la Photographie *m'étonne*, d'un étonnement qui dure et se renouvelle, inépuisablement. Peut-être cet étonnement, cet entêtement plonge-t-il dans la substance religieuse dont je suis pétri: rien à faire: la Photographie a quelque chose à voir avec la résurrection" (Barthes 1980: 129).

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long-term interest in Photography. This medium is, in his opinion, different from other types of images. He wants to discover why he can be touched by one photo while he is left indifferent by another, as suggested by a long quotation from Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Imaginaire* (The Imaginary). Even at the very beginning of his quest, suddenness characterizes the appeal of Photography: "In this gloomy desert, *suddenly* a specific photograph reaches me; it animates me, and I animate it. So that is how I must name the attraction which makes it exist: an animation" (1981: 20, my ital.).[29]

Punctum implies something sudden. This suddenness is an anticipation of what happens in the second part of the book when Barthes finds this mother's right picture. As Michelet slowly accumulated dates and facts, he accumulates pictures after pictures: "There I *was*, alone in the apartment where *she had died*, looking at those pictures one by one, under the lamp, gradually *moving back in time* with her, looking for the truth of the face I *had loved*. And I found it" (1981: 67, my ital.).[30] This contradicts his other idea that Photography is not connected to remembrance, that there is nothing Proustian in Photography, because actually Barthes is "moving back in time", visiting memories conveyed by images (even if the book does not show them). Then, unexpectedly, all of a sudden, he finds what he was not even hoping to come across: his mother's right image. The imperfect tense: "I was", referring to the repetitive gesture of going through

29 "Dans ce désert morose, telle photo, tout d'un coup m'arrive; elle m'anime et je l'anime. C'est donc ainsi que je dois nommer l'attrait qui la fait exister: une animation. La photo elle-même n'est en rien animée (je ne crois pas aux photos 'vivantes') mais elle m'anime: c'est ce qui fait toute aventure" (Barthes 1980: 39).

30 "J'allais ainsi, seul dans l'appartement où elle venait de mourir, regardant sous la lampe, une à une, ces photos de ma mère, remontant peu à peu le temps avec elle, cherchant la vérité du visage que j'avais aimé. Et je la découvris" (Barthes 1980: 105-106).

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those pictures, is accompanied by two gloomy past perfect tenses: "she had died" and "I had loved". Then, the full stop is followed by a new sentence starting with the conjunction "and", breaking off with the previous one and rising up to the simple past, the tense of the unique action: "And I found it".

The suddenness of this episode is confirmed by the quotation from *Remembrance of Things Past* following the description of the Winter Garden Photograph, in which Barthes' mother is a child: this one is the right image. The unexpected discovery amends Photography's inadequacy to recall the past as resurrection, and at last Photography can be like living remembrance:

> For once, Photography gave me a sentiment as certain as remembrance, just as Proust experienced it one day when, leaning over to take off his boots, there suddenly came to him his grandmother's true face, "whose living reality I was experiencing for the first time in an involuntary and complete memory". (1981: 70)[31]

The impression of Proust is alive, the dead grandmother's face is a living presence; Barthes is able to find the true image of his mother and the attractive side of Photography, its perfect *punctum*. Remembrance is as thick as reality, corporeal like the dead resurrected, like icons that are not pale images but presences. Barthes is shaken: this is the photo in which he does "much more than recognize her (clumsy word)". He discovers her: "a *sudden* awakening, outside 'likeness', a *satori*

31 "Pour une fois, la photographie me donnait un sentiment aussi sûr que le souvenir, tel que l'éprouva Proust, lorsque se baissant un jour pour se déchausser il aperçut brisquement dans sa mémoire le visage de sa grand-mère véritable, 'dont pour la première fois je retrouvais dans un souvenir involontaire et complet la réalité vivante'" (Barthes 1980: 109).

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in which words fail, the rare, perhaps unique evidence of the '*So yes, so much and no more*'" (1981: 109).[32]

The Buddhist notion of *satori* (spiritual awakening) appears often in Barthes' courses at the Collège de France. The discovery of his mother's true being is a proper epiphany. For this reason, because of the *satori*, Barthes' last book is about death but also about the exaltation of discovery. It moves from the painful emotions provoked by mourning to spiritual elevation, and is connected to the joy that reverberates in Barthes' *Preparation of the Novel* and *The Neuter*. In a section called "Le désir d'écrire" (The Desire to Write), he analyzes this emotion, and the shift from the pleasure of reading to the joy of writing: "it's a joy, bliss, mutation, illumination, what I often called a *satori*, a shock, a 'conversion'" (Barthes 2003: 188; my transl.).[33] This conversion is the sign of the *vita nova*, Barthes' project after his mother's death when he is not afraid to express pathos.

Hallucination

Barthes' discovery or rediscovery of his mother in *Camera Lucida* takes place after the long search and not, like in Proust, following an impression; it occurs in the same way Michelet encountered the peasant Jacques. There is a powerful joy in Proust, and the joy of epiphany in Barthes: yet another element draws Barthes's experience towards that of Michelet. In Proust the narrator finds again something he has lived and known; but both Barthes and Michelet find something they

32 "plus que la reconnaître (mot trop gros)"; "éveil brusque, hors de la 'resemblance', *satori* où les mots défaillent, évidence rare, peut-être unique du '*Ainsi, oui, ainsi, et rien de plus*'" (Barthes 1980: 168).

33 "c'est une jubilation, une ex-stase, une mutation, une illumination, ce que j'ai appelé souvent un *satori*, un ébranlement, une 'conversion'" (Barthes 2003: 188).

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have not known. Memory holds to a representation, a utopia, and not to a piece of lived life, which would have been forgotten without the effort of understanding the primitive impression. Michelet could not have met the peasant Jacques in the fourteenth century; Barthes could not have met his mother when she was five years old. Absence and past blend together.

Barthes' hypothesis about the *noème*, the essence, of Photography is double; on the one hand it exposes the absence of the object, and on the other the certitude of presence: "Now, in the Photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object; it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it" (Barthes 1981: 115).[34] It can be objected that the virtual world and contemporary photography cannot give the certainty that the represented object existed for real; this would actually increase the characteristic of Photography Barthes defines as hallucinatory:

> The Photograph then becomes a bizarre *medium*, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, *shared* hallucination (on the one hand "it is not there", on the other "but it has indeed been"): a mad image, chafed by reality. (1981: 115)[35]

This modest hallucination is similar to the one Barthes describes earlier in the essay when he wonders about his fascina-

34 "Or, dans la photographie, ce que je pose n'est pas seulement l'absence de l'objet; c'est aussi d'un même mouvement, à égalité, que cet objet a bien existé là où je le vois" (Barthes 1980: 177).

35 "La Photographie devient alors pour moi un *medium* bizarre, une nouvelle forme d'hallucination: fausse au niveau de la perception, vraie au niveau du temps: une hallucination tempérée, en quelque sorte, modeste, partagée (d'un côté ce n'est pas là, de l'autre mais cela a bien été): image folle, frotté de réel" (1980: 177).

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tion with some pictures of landscape – both urban and not: looking at an 1854 picture of Alhambra, he feels he would like to live there and explains the nature of his attraction.

It is fantasmatic deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or to carry me back to somewhere in myself: a double movement which Baudelaire celebrated in *Invitation au voyage* and *La Vie antérieure*. Looking at these landscapes of predilection, it is as if *I were certain* of having been there or of going there. (1981: 40)[36]

This modest hallucination makes Barthes think of Baudelaire who evokes this feeling in the two poems mentioned by Barthes, *Invitation au voyage* and *La Vie antérieure*. I would add that it is also that of another poem, "Le Cygne", where the poet sees Andromache, not on the level of perception, but of the imagination.

Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,
Ce Simoïs menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,

A fécondé *soudain* ma mémoire fertile,
Comme je traversais le nouveau Carrousel.
[…]
(Baudelaire 1975: 83, my ital.)

36 "Il est fantasmatique, relève d'une sorte de voyance qui semble me porter en avant, vers un temps utopique, ou me reporter en arrière, je ne sais pas où de moi-même: double mouvement que Baudelaire a chanté dans l'*Invitation au voyage* et la *Vie antérieure*. Devant ces paysages de prédilection, tout se passe comme si *j'étais sûr* d'y avoir été ou de devoir y aller" (1980: 68).

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Andromache, I think of you! The stream,
The poor, sad mirror where in bygone days
Shone all the majesty of your widowed grief,
The lying Simoïs flooded by your tears,

Suddenly nourished my fertile memory
As I crossed the new Carrousel.
[…]
(12 December 2016 <http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides8/Swan.html>, transl. slightly modified, and my ital.)

Andromache with all her tears is as present and alive to the poet as the peasant Jacques is to Michelet, and as his five-year-old mother is for Barthes. She rises through centuries of literature, arts, and various media, across the new constructions of the present time; she rises suddenly to the poet's mind, like the historical figures to the historian's imagination and the mother to the son's grief. In Barthes' words, all these figures are as certain as remembrance. Andromache, the peasant Jacques, and Barthes' mother are resurrected thanks to the richness of memory, its imaginative strength and almost hallucinatory power. Recollections, media, and imagination give life to time, people, and places. They are all re-presentations, and, mixing memory and desire like the dead in Eliot's *Waste Land* (1922), intermingle in an exultant resurrection of images from the past.

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Will and Indolence: Proust, Reader of Baudelaire

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One can forget time only by using it.[1]
Baudelaire

In the last pages of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the Narrator, as he is going to a *matinée* hosted by the Guermantes Princess, is subject to a series of events "supplied by chance" (Proust 1992c: 283)[2] that suddenly wakens slumbering remembrances. The uneven paving-stones in the Guermantes courtyard, the knock of a spoon against a plate, the starched napkin passed on both sides of the mouth: all of these minute incidents project him into his past, and trigger a succession of revelations, a "point of departure for a new life" (ib.: 283),[3] that opens the path to the ultimate decision that ends the

1 "On ne peut oublier le temps qu'en s'en servant" (Baudelaire 1971: 669).
2 "fournies par le hasard" (Proust 1989: 497).
3 "point de départ vers une vie nouvelle" (ib.: 496).

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book: he has to put himself to work and start to write. In spite of the compelling events leading to this decision, he nevertheless chooses to attend the reading he came for in the first place. As he deepens the reflections inspired in him by the succession of "ecstasies" he just experienced, the concert that was keeping him waiting in the antechamber all at once comes to a halt. "Not at all bothered" by this interruption, he calls to mind, as he steps into the living room, a lineage of writers he feels related to, or in whom he observes "analogous traits" in the way of conveying "genuinely aesthetic impressions"[4] through a particular use of memory. Among this "noble line" in which he himself "finds [his] place", the Narrator immediately thinks of Chateaubriand in his *Mémoires d'Outre-tombe* (*Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*) and Gérard de Nerval in *Sylvie*, both surprised by remembrances that they did not expect. He then adds Charles Baudelaire, slightly separated from the other two:

> Above all in Baudelaire, where they are more numerous still, reminiscences of this kind are clearly *less fortuitous* and therefore, to my mind, unmistakable in their significance. Here the poet himself, with something of a *slow and indolent choice*, *deliberately* seeks, in the perfume of a woman, for instance, of her hair and her breast, the analogies which will inspire him and evoke for him "the azure of the sky immense and round" and "a harbour full of masts and pennants". (Proust 1992c: 285, my emphasis)[5]

4 "impressions vraiment esthétiques" (ib.: 497).

5 "Chez Baudelaire enfin, ces réminiscences, plus nombreuses encore, sont évidemment moins fortuites et par conséquent, à mon avis, décisives. C'est le poète lui-même qui, avec plus de choix et de paresse, recherche volontairement, dans l'odeur d'une femme par exemple, de sa chevelure et de son sein, les analogies inspiratrices qui lui évoqueront 'l'azur du ciel immense et rond' et 'un port rempli de flammes et de mâts'" (Proust 1989: 498).

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While Nerval and Chateaubriand seem to reassure the Narrator in his belief that one must wait until chance, offering incidentally the appropriate elements, impels you to write, Baudelaire's position stands on its own. Slowness, indolence, choice, deliberation: these are the terms that Proust singles out when he thinks of Baudelaire and the art of remembering. The "lesson" is somewhat odd: what has deliberation or will to do with this, in a passage that is precisely dedicated to the celebration of involuntary memory? What kind of deliberation is Proust talking about, and what part does indolence play in it? And what exactly are these "laws governing recollection" (Proust 2000: 259)[6] that Proust hints at in a letter to André Lang, and that he says he "owes" to Baudelaire? These questions seem, at first, to be addressed to the author of the *Recherche*; I will claim they pertain to Baudelaire more directly and will lead, through Proust's observations, to outline fundamental properties of a poetics of memory – that is a *mode* of memory as it is understood and carried out by the text itself. In order to do so, I will first trace out, following the reading of Proust, the peculiarity of Nerval and Chateaubriand's approaches to remembrance, as it differs from Baudelaire's. This will allow me to focus on the interplay between will and indolence that the poet puts into play in his correspondence, his diaries, and the *Fleurs du Mal*. Far from being a speculative wish, this dialectic finds its most successful balance in a poem much favoured by Proust – "A Head of Hair" – which I shall conclude by analysing so as to demonstrate the necessary concurrence of will and indolence in Baudelaire's art of remembering.

6 "ces lois de la réminiscence" (Proust 1992d: 498).

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Involuntary?

What part does Baudelaire play in the trio of writers referred to by the Narrator? Each one of the three summoned authors grants a particular function to remembrance in his oeuvre. What distinguishes Baudelaire consists in the *intentional* character of his use of memory. Chateaubriand, in the example given by the Narrator, did not prepare himself to hear the singing of the thrush in Combourg, bringing him back to his youthful games in the woods, nor did he forecast how the "sweet scent of heliotrope" (Proust 1992c: 284)[7] on his trip to Terre-Neuve would hold sway over his impressions, mentally dragging him back to France. Bearing much resemblance with Proust, the autodiegetic narrator of Nerval's *Sylvie* experiences quite a similar adventure. As he "idly" skims through the newspaper on a dull evening, he is taken aback when he reads that the "*Bouquet Festival*" is about to take place that same night. The reading of the name "stir[s]" in him "memories of provincial days" (Nerval 1896: 8-9):[8] his childhood in the village of Senlis, the revels, the dances, and his youthful love for Sylvie. According to the Narrator, the *récit* in both Chateaubriand and Nerval undergoes a "sudden transition" (Proust 1988: 273):[9] as soon as their protagonists stumble on an unexpected sign, the narrative in the imperfect tense stops and continues in the *passé simple*, i.e. a deeper, long-forgotten past. Then begins the evocation of a dead world that seems to be restored *all at once*. Both examples have to deal with something that has been lost, and for which they have been yearning for, without even being aware that they were.

In Chateaubriand and Nerval, the signification of the *in-*

7 "Une odeur fine et suave d'héliotrope" (Proust 1989: 498).
8 "un souvenir de la province" (Nerval 1993: 540).
9 "une brusque transition" (Proust 1971: 599).

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voluntary is dual. On the upstream part of remembrance, the *involuntary* postulates that one does not anticipate the event or the stimulus that will trigger the sequence of remembering: the protagonist of Nerval's *Sylvie* discovers by accident the "very simple words" that will shake his memory; it is fortuitously that Chateaubriand gets a whiff of the "small bed of flowering beans" (Proust 1992c: 284),[10] or listens to the thrush's song. On the downstream part, one does not expect the *effect* of such of an event: neither Chateaubriand nor the protagonist of *Sylvie* anticipate the power of the blow. If they are suddenly astonished as the "restored" past magically unfold under their eyes, it is *beyond their will*. And that is why they stand, to the Narrator's eye, as models to worship: both have been capable of connecting and relating a present sensation to a corresponding past impression. The "involuntary" thus concerns both upstream and downstream: it implies no mastery over the events that elicit remembrance, as well as no control of the resilience and power of these forgotten and suddenly revived impressions. One has also to consider that the surprise and the inquiry that follows subsequently (i.e. elucidating the origins of that event), taking place within the realm of the text; whether it is an autobiographical memoir (Chateaubriand) or a novella (Nerval), the wonder and confusion elicited by the event are organised narratively, and the investigation takes place on a literary ground – it offers us the possibility to read the *experience* of seeking for lost recollection.

In his discussion of these excerpts, the Narrator of the *Recherche du temps perdu* identifies a "sensation common to past and present" (Proust 1992c: 226)[11] proper to the functioning of remembrance, which establishes a type of

10 "un petit carré de fèves en fleurs" (Proust 1988: 498).
11 "sensation commune" (Proust 1989: 453).

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integral identity between two temporally distant moments. More than a double or a replica, this sensation comes back identically, completely the *same*, as in a perfect superposition: it is the *same* song of the thrush, the exact *same* perfume, the *same* words describing a similar event which abolish the time elapsed between these moments and also spontaneously makes them contiguous. It belongs to this spontaneity to launch the "immediate, delicious and total deflagration" (ib.: 2)[12] of involuntary memory. The less we are prepared for it, the bigger the repercussion of beauty and truth contained in these moments will be. It then falls to the writer to know how to unfold them and make the most of their richness, by capturing them in "the necessary links of a well-wrought style" (ib.: 246)[13].

These "mysterious laws of thought" (Proust 1988: 30)[14] that Proust wanted to explain in his *Against Sainte-Beuve* essay are revealed to him by involuntary memory – and not, as he often observes, by voluntary memory. Voluntary memory, as Gilles Deleuze remarks, "comes always too late" (Deleuze 1972: 51): it always fails to decipher signs, requires the patient efforts of reasoning and seems often incoherent and full of holes – most of the time it is sterile and disappointing. In the *Recherche*, its deficiencies are unrelentingly deplored; a few lines before the "madeleine" episode, the Narrator, discouraged by his unfruitful attempts to regain fractions of his past, sighs:

> And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in

12 "immédiate, délicieuse et totale déflagration" (ib.: 2).
13 "les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style". (ib.: 246).
14 "mystérieuses lois de la pensée" (Proust 1971: 239).

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some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die. (Proust 1992a: 51)[15]

As this quotation indicates, one can only encounter the element that will provoke the anamnesis by chance. Hence, volition shall never amount, in spite of all the exertion to encourage memory, to the same intensity as the rare moments of revelation like those in the Guermantes' courtyard. Apparently, such ideas seem to be absolutely opposed to those of the Narrator on Baudelaire. Yet deliberation remains a prominent feature in his account of the poet. However, it is not certain that the will evoked by the Narrator as it refers to the process of remembering wilfully ("*mémoire volontaire*") can be considered as identical to the will noticed in Baudelaire's poem.

Procrastination

How are we then to understand Proust's account of Baudelaire regarding memory? Should the poet be seen as an example to follow or counterexample to avoid? If we go back to the Narrator's description of Baudelaire in the Guermantes' salon, it is surprising to come across the term "deliberation" in a laudatory context. If the Narrator aligns himself with the authors he admires, we should expect that he would not criticise the flaw he already lambasted – especially at the mo-

15 "Il en est ainsi de notre passé. C'est peine perdue que nous cherchions à l'évoquer, tous les efforts de notre intelligence sont inutiles. Il est caché hors de son domaine et de sa portée, en quelque objet matériel (en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel), que nous ne soupçonnons pas. Cet objet, il dépend du hasard que nous le rencontrions avant de mourir, ou que nous ne le rencontrions pas" (Proust 1987: 44).

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ment when he decided to overcome it. It becomes even more surprising if we recall that Proust's reproach to Baudelaire and Nerval, in *Against Sainte-Beuve*, hinges on the question of will. At the beginning of the article, devoted to the author of *Sylvie*, he declares: "his poetry and his stories are (like Baudelaire's *Petits poèmes en prose* and *Les Fleurs du mal* for example) merely different attempts at expressing the same thing" (Proust 1988: 26).[16] In the opinion of Proust, had their imagination been lavish enough, it would not have repeated itself. Yet Baudelaire and Nerval repeat themselves. According to Proust's diagnostic, the "malady of the will" (ib.)[17] afflicting them stems from their laziness – in other words, their laziness is one of the main components of their incapacity to produce something new without having to repeat themselves. Perhaps Proust has in mind the letter that Baudelaire addressed to his publisher, Auguste Poulet-Malassis, in which he admits his fear of having caught "the kind of illness Gérard [de Nerval] had, that is, the fear of being incapable either of thinking, or of writing, a single line" (Baudelaire 1986: 163).[18] Proust's verdict is adamant: both Nerval and Baudelaire are "lazy, showed certainty in the detailed execution, and uncertainty in the overall scheme" (Proust 1988: 52).[19]

Notwithstanding the fact that this assessment does not consider the painful work of "literalization" (Johnson 1979: 67) from verse to prose that it required, the sentence hits where it hurts: laziness and will are two key-words of Baudelaire's

16 "ses vers et ses nouvelles ne sont (comme les *Petits poèmes en prose* de Baudelaire et *Les Fleurs du mal*, par exemple) que des tentatives différentes pour exprimer la même chose" (Proust 1971: 234).
17 "maladie de la volonté" (ib.).
18 "attaqué d'une espèce de maladie à la Gérard, à savoir la peur de ne plus pouvoir penser, ni écrire une ligne" (Baudelaire 1973: 135-136).
19 "paresseux, avec des certitudes d'exécution dans le détail, et de l'incertitude dans le plan" (Proust 1971: 259).

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lexicon of melancholy, appearing repeatedly in his letters or his diaries as soon as inspiration vanishes. Unremittingly, Baudelaire observes and diminishes himself while desperately seeking for causes and remedies. He writes to his mother in a fit of despair:

> Try and imagine this perpetual idleness which is brought about my continual feeling of illness, coupled with a profound hatred for that illness. […] I have such faith in the employment of my time, and the strength of my will, *that I know positively* that if I could contrive to lead a regular life for a fortnight or three weeks, *my intelligence would be saved*. (Baudelaire 1971: 23)[20]

Baudelaire logically relates one term to the other, as in a vicious circle: laziness knocks down the efforts of will, and the absence of will establishes laziness's dominion. However, aware as he is of this spiral, he continues to denigrate his work, dissipating "that fluctuating skill, *will-power*"[21] in spite of himself, while constantly thinking that his concentration is not entirely lost.

Following Proust, many critics insisted on Baudelaire's so-called idleness. The poet has been successively identified as being struck by "creative difficulty" (Pichois 1967: 242), "haunted by infertility" (Labarthe 2000: 37), "bitterly stuck in a pointless idleness" (Bataille 1957: 49), harmed by his incapacity to fulfil "his dream of writing […] a man of letter's immense oeuvre" (Blanchot 1948: 148), and beholding his

20 "Supposez une oisiveté perpétuelle commandée par un malaise perpétuel, avec une haine profonde de cette oisiveté. […] Je crois si parfaitement à l'emploi du temps et à la puissance de ma volonté, *que je sais positivement* que si je pouvais parvenir à mener quinze ou vingt jours durant, une vie régulière, *mon intelligence serait sauvée*" (Baudelaire 1973a: 142-143).

21 "le trésor variable de la *volonté*" (Baudelaire 1986: 198).

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own "failure" (Laforgue 1931). Those merciless comments were already formulated, as a matter of fact, by Baudelaire himself. The sore letters to his friends or his mother recurrently manifest his struggle against indolence: "My will is in a piteous state and if I do not delve at once into work, I am lost" (Baudelaire 1971: 43).[22] Baudelaire went as far as to give the title *Hygiene* to a section of his diary: this is where we find developed with great care the exercises he was inflicting upon himself in order to cast out the demon of laziness. He collects in these pages notes on inactivity, painfully extracted from the procrastinator's pen, incessantly recalling what he *should* do. Baudelaire's loitering strategy does not even fool himself. He knows too well that when one writes what one is supposed to do, that does not mean he will do it.

The notes of the *Hygiene* diary are ambiguous: they are implorations for an imminent return of energy, wishful thinking very conscious that there is a substantial difference between a promise and its accomplishment. On the one hand, they are *recollections* – they come from the lived experience of prolific hours in which Baudelaire takes the measure of his own capacities; on the other hand, they are *prescriptions*, oriented towards an imaginary and timeless future where all ambitions are stored. Nevertheless, they are written and read again in the inactive present. Baudelaire cautiously registers these private instructions in a notebook to be consulted as a *memorandum*, in dark days. A memorandum – that is a voice repeating each and every second "Remember!" (as in "The Clock"), or "You will recall" (as in "The Balcony"). Eventually, everything revolves around the obsession of dispersion, dissipation, evaporation of the concentration – the

22 "Ma volonté est dans un état piteux, et si je ne pique pas, *par hygiène, et malgré tout*, une tête dans le travail, je suis perdu" (Baudelaire 1973b: 123).

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first sentence of *My Heart Laid Bare* promises nothing else: "Of the vaporization and centralization of the *Ego*. Everything depends on that" (Baudelaire 1983: 53).[23]

Indolence as a technique

Proust's conviction is identical to the one Baudelaire develops in *Hygiene*: "We are weighed down, every moment, by the conception and the sensation of Time. And there are but two means of escaping and forgetting this nightmare: pleasure and work. Pleasure consumes us. Work strengthens us. Let us choose" (Baudelaire 1986: 100).[24] After having delayed as much as possible, the Narrator of the *Recherche* finally decides: he resolves to abandon "the habit […] of perpetual postponement" (Proust 1992 b: 90),[25] and Baudelaire, as a new Virgil, guides him in these steps. Let us go back to the precise passage where Baudelaire is conjured up alongside Chateaubriand and Nerval. If we remember Proust's distaste for voluntary memory, can we plainly believe that these lines are in fact approbatory? I hold that we ought to: "indolence" and "will" do not necessarily imply a reproach. The laziness and the will that Proust perceives in Baudelaire are, in fact, observations on the *method* of writing as well as on the *theme* of the poems.

According to Proust, laziness first belongs to the world that Baudelaire's poems depict. We can find it in pieces where the exotic and tropical atmosphere mingles with shiftlessness and

23 "De la vaporisation et de la centralisation du *Moi*. Tout est là" (Baudelaire 1971: 175).

24 "À chaque minute nous sommes écrasés par l'idée et la sensation du temps. Et il n'y a que deux moyens pour échapper à ce cauchemar, – pour l'oublier: le Plaisir et le Travail. Le Plaisir nous use. Le Travail nous fortifie. Choisissons" (ib.: 669).

25 "cette habitude […] de l'ajournement perpétuel" (Proust 1989: 95).

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indolence. It permeates the air of a foreign country – such as the "lazy island" (Baudelaire 1993: 95)[26] of "Exotic perfume", or the "place where indolence drops on the eyes like rain" (ib: 161)[27] of "For A Creole Lady" – unless, in a metonymical movement, it takes hold of its inhabitants; we then think of the woman of the "Dancing Serpent", that lets "[her] childlike head [loll] with the weight of all [her] idleness" (ib.: 103),[28] or the demeanour of the "soft enchantress" that is compared to "a ship […] that rolls along/ In rhythm with a slow and languid song" (ib.).[29] Undulating gait, the regular rhythm of the sea, generous warmth: all of these elements create an ensemble that lets the reverie sink into a peaceful and serene atmosphere.

One of the most important components of this intense and suggestive pleasure is *visual*. In a personal note in his account of the 1859 painting salon, Baudelaire remarks, in a personal note, how drawn he is towards warm lights:

> It is to be presumed that I myself am suffering to some extent from a nostalgia which drags me towards the sun; for I find an intoxicating mist arising from these luminous canvases, which soon condenses into desires and regrets. I catch myself envying the lot of those men who are lying outstretched amid their azure shades, and whose eyes, neither waking nor sleeping, express, if anything at all, only love of repose and the feeling of a blissful happiness inspired by an immensity of light. (Baudelaire 1955: 264)[30]

26 "l'île paresseuse" (Baudelaire 1971: 25).
27 "d'où pleut sur les yeux la paresse" (ib.).
28 "Sous le fardeau de ta paresse / Ta tête d'enfant / Se balance" (ib.: 36).
29 "un beau vaisseau qui […] va roulant / Suivant un rythme doux, et paresseux, et lent" (ib.).
30 "Il est présumable que je suis moi-même atteint quelque peu d'une nostalgie qui m'entraîne vers le soleil; car de ces toiles lumineuses s'élève pour moi une vapeur enivrante, qui se condense bientôt en désirs et en regrets. Je me surprends à envier le sort de ces hommes

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The spectator, impressed by the pure radiance of the sun, immerses himself in the heat released by Eugène Fromentin's painting. Lulled by langour – which has nothing in common with the procrastinator's anxious laziness mixed with guilt – Baudelaire shelters in a dream, feeding on remembrances. He might have conjured up his trip to the South Seas and his stop on the Bourbon Island – although it wasn't the best of times and the trip in itself was somewhat distressing, the images it left engraved in the mind seem to account for Baudelaire's "envy" and "nostalgia". On that topic, Proust notes that "Baudelaire had clear memories of this tropical nature" (Proust 1988: 306),[31] but unlike real travellers, the reader retains the impression that the poet "only saw that nature from on board ship" (ib.).[32]

As a matter of fact, the distance that Baudelaire keeps is deliberate: he knows that the shimmers and comforting climate of the tropics dampen the quickness and accuracy of thoughts. According to Baudelaire, if the nervousness of the city kept a stimulating tension for the mind, the absolute opposite, i.e. the calmness of tropical sun, can induce a damaging relaxation. In an article on contemporary French poets, he depicts the milieu where C. M. Leconte de Lisle was raised: "one of those perfumed and volcanic islands where the human soul, gently rocked by all the caresses of the atmosphere, *unlearns* each day the exercise of thought". One relinquishes thought as he chooses a life of pure sensation, a numbed life where stupefaction allows an infinite contempla-

étendus sous ces ombres bleues, et dont les yeux, qui ne sont ni éveillés ni endormis, n'expriment, si toutefois ils expriment quelque chose, que l'amour du repos et le sentiment du bonheur qu'inspire une immense lumière" (Baudelaire 1971: 650).

31 "Baudelaire se souvenait bien de cette nature tropicale" (Proust 1971: 637).

32 "cette nature, on dirait qu'il ne l'a vue que du bateau" (ib.).

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tion. But this contemplation cannot be lived without fear. As a matter of fact, authorised leisure seemed to be a constant motive of anguish for Baudelaire. Paradoxically, he feared that his judicial council (strictly controlling his financial affairs) would stop – although he never ceased to complain about it, constantly impecunious as he was. He explains his reasoning thus: "my first thought was *that I must defend myself* against that indolence and idleness which always follow a momentary relief; for then the future difficulties are ignored […]. *Beatitude would create idleness*" (ib.: 67).[33] And, as we know, idleness would contravene the hygiene rules that Baudelaire severely recorded. The very Baudelairian conclusion of this reasoning could then be: I am happy to be unlucky and well deserve my evil fate (his "guignon", as he called it), for it generates enough obstacles in my way to resist the too-easy temptations of *otium*.

Still wishing to understand the value implied in the Narrator's comments on Baudelaire, we could read the indolence described in the poem differently: more than a theme, it is a *technique*. It is no longer considered, in the poem itself, as a flaw or a deficiency violating the rules set by Baudelaire's hygiene manual. Well rooted in the warm atmosphere of a tropical island, it seems in its place, represented as though it would condition inspiration. In such poems as "Exotic Perfume" and "Head of Hair", his "active inaction", as the critic Jean-Pierre Richard puts it, stimulates the development of remembrances – nostalgic remembrances of a bygone Eden. Indolence lets memory speak without hurry, without urging it: in the warm envelope of a universe without delays or pressure,

33 "ma première pensée a été de *me défendre* contre cette indolence et cette paresse qui suivent toujours un soulagement momentané; car, dans ce cas, on oublie les embarras de l'avenir […]. *La béatitude créerait la paresse*" (Baudelaire 1973b: 159).

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it seizes key traits of remembrances. The fluctuant essence of these distinctive and striking images will then be transformed into a *repeatable* form. In some ways, this method could be similar to the Proustian involuntary memory, inasmuch as remembrance is suddenly brought to light, in a blow, and that lasting power exceeds the control of the subject who remembers.

We must be careful when we speak with Proust's own lexicon. In *Time Regained*, the intervention of involuntary memory that spurs the Narrator's reflections calls for two remarks: first, "involuntary" qualifies both the external circumstances of experience that are not in the reach of our will, and the effect that these circumstances produced on the person who remembers. But if involuntary memory supplies sensation, one needs the support of the will to analyse this sensation and search for elements matching two periods of time far apart. One must then refrain from considering involuntary and non-voluntary as identical. The involuntary is a full withdrawal of the will, a complete absence of grip on a given situation; the non-voluntary states a decision *per se*: a part of will remains in the non-voluntary. In other words, the non-voluntary is the will not to have a will. Hence, when Proust speaks of the "choice" and "indolence" Baudelaire displayed in the evocation of his remembrances, it rather seems to be the result of a non-voluntary laziness – a laziness that would allow the joint effect of the involuntary (in the discovery of the components of remembrance) *and* the voluntary (in the decision of being lazy enough to let the remembrance blossom). That is why Baudelaire qualifies laziness, in "La Chevelure" ("Head of Hair"), as "fruitful", "fertile", or "creative".

According to Proust, the fertility of idleness characterises Baudelaire's greatest originality in the art of writing memory: the way in which he elaborates an autonomous universe,

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"Baudelaire's mental world", "a planet where he alone has dwelt and which resembles nothing of what we know" (Proust 1988: 308);[34] Proust also names it "the country of his genius, of which each poem is only a fragment that, the moment one has read it, joins up with the other fragments that we know already" (ib.).[35] But in this imaginary topography revealing the passion of a reader confined to bed,[36] "genius" may be considered as the exact synonym of memory. We can find the confirmation of this hypothesis in the answer that Proust gives to André Lang in October 1921, where he turns to the same "family" of authors as at the end of the *Recherche*, but in a different order. He resorts furthermore to a comparison between Baudelaire and Jean Racine,[37] explaining how they are alike:

> Racine is richer in psychological insights, Baudelaire in the laws governing recollection, which for me are in fact more vividly revealed by Chateaubriand and Nerval. In Baudelaire, the recollection is there, *in a static state*, *already in existence when a poem begins* ('When with both eyes closed' etc., 'O fleece curling' etc.). (Proust 2000: 259, my emphasis)[38]

34 "une planète où lui seul a habité et qui ne ressemble à rien de ce que nous connaissons" (Proust 1971: 253).

35 "le pays de son génie, dont chaque poème n'est qu'un fragment, et qui dès qu'on le lit se rejoint aux autres fragments que nous en connaissons" (ib.).

36 Proust clarifies, in a postscript, the circumstances in which he wrote his article: "When I wrote this letter to Jacques Rivière, I did not have a single book beside my sickbed. May I therefore be forgiven for the possible inaccuracy – easily rectified – of certain quotations. I aspired only to leaf through my memory and to give direction to the taste of my friends" (Proust 1988: 307).

37 Proust had already used such a comparison in his preface to Paul Morand's *Tendres stocks* (1920).

38 "Racine est plus fertile en découvertes psychologiques, Baudelaire est plus instructif en ce qui concerne les lois de la réminiscence, que je trouve exposées du reste d'une façon plus vivante chez Chateaubri-

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According to Proust, the world of remembrance as it is brought forth by Baudelaire's poem is "already in existence when the poem begins"; that is, unlike what the Narrator claimed in the passage of the *Recherche*, it is not the object of an investigation that we would witness and follow throughout its development. It is not linked to a strictly subjective temporality in which periods and epochs would interpolate rhapsodically. It seems rather that the poem, in Baudelaire's case, already *represents*, in its material existence, a fragment of memory, in which an organised world follows its pace, detached from the laws of time: it is a noted recollection that can be repeated in the present tense. The poems to which Proust refers ("Head of Hair", "The Balcony", "Exotic Perfume", "The Perfume Flask") are all constructed on the iteration of recollection. They are not the stage of particular events that could induce discontinuity; the remembrance does not spring to mind suddenly, abruptly, such as in Nerval's or Chateaubriand's case. I claim that the reason for this depends on a dramaturgical choice: the way in which Baudelaire's poem pictures memory does not consist in a fiction of remembering or ongoing research that leads to what has been forgotten. It is rather an achieved process that can be performed repeatedly: "*already in existence*", as Proust reads it.

Therefore, if the materials that Baudelaire aims to recollect are already in his possession, they do not have to occur all at once, in the present, *because they are not forgotten* and *then* rediscovered. Or, rather, if they have been forgotten, we do not attend to the instant where past and present collide.

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and ou Nerval. Chez Baudelaire la réminiscence est à l'état statique, elle existe déjà quand la pièce commence (quand les deux yeux fermés, etc. ô toison moutonnant, etc.)" (Proust 1992d: 497-498).

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"Head of Hair"

We can now see what struck Proust at first: the world of remembrance in *The Flowers of Evil* does not open consequently to a "sudden transition", a rupture in the order of time when the past would burst into the present, or when entire sequences of the past would be re-lived within a present in which we no longer belong. There is a certain slowness proper to remembrances in the *Flowers of Evil* that is opposed to the "deflagrations" of involuntary memory. As soon as the first words are read, we are *already* bathed in the atmosphere of remembrance. As regards the dialectic between will and indolence, "Head of Hair" ("La Chevelure") is perhaps the most significant poem:

O fleece, billowing even down the neck!
O locks! O perfume charged with nonchalance!
What ecstasy! To people our dark room
With memories that sleep within this mane,
I'll shake it like a kerchief in the air!

Languorous Asia, scorching Africa,
A whole world distant, vacant, nearly dead,
Lives in your depths, o forest of perfume!
While other spirits sail on symphonies
Mine, my beloved, swims along your scent.

I will go down there, where the trees and men,
Both full of sap, swoon in the ardent heat;
Strong swelling tresses, carry me away!
Yours, sea of ebony, a dazzling dream
Of sails, of oarsmen, waving pennants, masts:

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A sounding harbour where my soul can drink
From great floods subtle tones, perfumes and hues;
Where vessels gliding in the moire and gold
Open their wide arms to the glorious sky
Where purely trembles the eternal warmth.

I'll plunge my drunken head, dizzy with love
In this black sea where that one is confined;
My subtle soul that rolls in its caress
Will bring you back, o fertile indolence!
Infinite lulling, leisure steeped in balm!

Blue head of hair, tent of spread shadows, you
Give me the azure of the open sky;
In downy wisps along your twisted locks
I'll gladly drug myself on mingled scents,
Essence of cocoa-oil, pitch and musk.

For ages! always! in your heavy mane
My hand will scatter ruby, sapphire, pearl
So you will never chill to my desire!
Are you not the oasis where I dream,
My drinking-gourd for memory's fine wine?

[Ô toison, moutonnant jusque sur l'encolure!
Ô boucles! Ô parfum chargé de nonchaloir!
Extase! Pour peupler ce soir l'alcôve obscure
Des souvenirs dormant dans cette chevelure,
Je la veux agiter dans l'air comme un mouchoir!

La langoureuse Asie et la brûlante Afrique,
Tout un monde lointain, absent, presque défunt,
Vit dans tes profondeurs, forêt aromatique!

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Comme d'autres esprits voguent sur la musique,
Le mien, ô mon amour! nage sur ton parfum.

J'irai là-bas où l'arbre et l'homme, pleins de sève,
Se pâment longuement sous l'ardeur des climats;
Fortes tresses, soyez la houle qui m'enlève!
Tu contiens, mer d'ébène, un éblouissant rêve
De voiles, de rameurs, de flammes et de mâts:

Un port retentissant où mon âme peut boire
A grands flots le parfum, le son et la couleur;
Où les vaisseaux, glissant dans l'or et dans la moire,
Ouvrent leurs vastes bras pour embrasser la gloire
D'un ciel pur où frémit l'éternelle chaleur.

Je plongerai ma tête amoureuse d'ivresse
Dans ce noir océan où l'autre est enfermé;
Et mon esprit subtil que le roulis caresse
Saura vous retrouver, ô féconde paresse,
Infinis bercements du loisir embaumé!

Cheveux bleus, pavillon de ténèbres tendues,
Vous me rendez l'azur du ciel immense et rond;
Sur les bords duvetés de vos mèches tordues
Je m'enivre ardemment des senteurs confondues
De l'huile de coco, du musc et du goudron.

Longtemps! toujours! ma main dans ta crinière lourde
Sèmera le rubis, la perle et le saphir,
Afin qu'à mon désir tu ne sois jamais sourde!
N'es-tu pas l'oasis où je rêve, et la gourde
Où je hume à longs traits le vin du souvenir?]

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The "plot" of the poem is simple: a lover plunges his head into his mistress' shock of hair, the perfume of which leads him to recall "A whole world distant, vacant, nearly dead".[39] Baudelaire develops the same temporal ambiguity as in the notes of the *Hygiene* diary: an immediate will, stretched between the beautiful image of the past and the future project to join it again – but indolence, this time, is more an ally than an enemy. In this dense poem, attention concentrates exclusively on the lover's hair, which dispenses euphoria and elation, as well as patience and determination to breathe as much as possible of the perfume of the past. As the final exclamations demonstrate ("For ages! always!"), the pleasure seems boundless; together they denote the present sensation lured by an "infinite" joy, the desire to prolong this delight indefinitely, and the corollary fear of seeing it vanish. The olfactory pleasure of the mass of hair stems from the *total* regaining of a world previously consigned to oblivion that is on the verge of disappearing again. The emotion is all the more intense as it is held in abeyance.

We can parallel the description of the sensation captured by Baudelaire's poem with something Walter Benjamin noted in his commentary on Proust's involuntary memory:

> anyone who wishes to surrender knowingly to the innermost overtones in this work must place himself in a special stratum […] of this involuntary memory, one in which the materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily, in the same way as the weight of his net tells a fisherman about his catch. (Benjamin 1985: 214)

39 "Tout un monde lointain, absent, presque défunt".

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In Benjamin's terms, "Head of Hair" is a poem of surrender and awareness, of will and its relinquishment. Uttering no fewer than five times a volitional act in order to better refute it, the lyrical *I* seems to say: I wish not to have will any longer, I want my will to disappear in the serenity of remembered indolence. But the *I* must have been resolute prior to distancing itself from the experience, to fix in verses this paradoxical claim that both affirms and negates itself. The willful statement that structures the poem is parallel to the effort of isolating remembrance as an iterative event, turned into verse. There is not, as in Proust, a possibility that the experience might "fail", that it would remain a mute and dead image, such as the trees in Hudimesnil.[40] Baudelaire conceived, in this poem, a *fictitious* exploration: the lyrical *I*, enraptured by the perfume of the hair, feigns to discover a new world that is revealed to him; but he knows it already – as Proust noticed. He knows the memory path to get there and can find anew what has been given to him once: the poem's dreamy image of the "harbour", a transitory place in between two voyages, offers a refuge where the traveler can rest before leaving again. He has now learned the charms to conjure up his remembrances "at will" without having to pass through the pains of a *recherche*. While Proust's acknowledgment of his surrounding world always

40 The Narrator of the *Recherche* remains dumbstruck in front of the trees of Hudimesnil: "I looked at the three trees; I could see them plainly, but my mind felt that they were concealing something which it could not grasp, as when an object is placed out of reach so that our fingers can only touch for a moment its outer surface, without managing to take hold of anything" (Proust 1992 a: 653); "Je regardais les trois arbres, je les voyais bien, mais mon esprit sentait qu'ils recouvraient quelque chose sur quoi ils n'avaient pas prise, comme sur ces objets placés trop loin dont nos doigts allongés au bout de notre bras tendu effleurent seulement par instant l'enveloppe sans arriver à rien saisir" (Proust 1989: 450).

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seems to be – geographically as well as mentally – in the process of discovery, Baudelaire's appears fully armed out of the head of the poet. That is, it does not belong to a logic of reconstitution but of evocation. The world of remembrances may exist without he who remembers them: remembrances are autonomous, they are caught in the hair and dwell there latently, but they still remain accessible through their poetical translation.

Proust was fascinated by this poem; perhaps did he spot some kind of convergence between voluntary and involuntary memory – or even a reciprocal improvement of both. I hold that he finds, in "Head of Hair", the felicity related to the total resurrection of a long lost world, as much as the rehabilitation of voluntary memory that allows a stabilisation of remembrances, without the anxiety linked to their ephemerality. In thi poem Baudelaire demonstrates an inclination to seek remembrances willfully, and surprises himself by his own good disposition, such as in the first lines of the *Artificial Paradises*: "There are days when a man awakens with a young, vigorous genius" (Baudelaire 1996: 31).[41] In these "poetical days", as he calls them, every object becomes *more visible*, "the objects of the outward world are brought into powerful relief, with sharp contours and a wealth of admirable colours" (ib.).[42] On such days, the unpredictable Muse consents to present herself, and offers to the poet the accuracy of a beautiful verse that will blend, as Proust suggests, the fortuitousness of involuntary memory (one does not decide to wake up in such state) and the precision of intention. These days therefore become memorable: days where remembrance

41 "Il est des jours où l'homme s'éveille avec un génie jeune et vigoureux" (Baudelaire 1971: 401).

42 "le monde s'offre à lui avec un relief puissant, une netteté de contour, une richesse de couleurs admirables" (ib.).

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is comforting, and where writing consigns a trace of what the yearning procrastinator is capable of achieving.

Idleness and will, as we have seen, are central concepts for understanding both Proust and Baudelaire's relationships to memory. When the first reads the latter, his opinion is curiously twisted: he agrees as he dissents; he is inspired but knows that his work must take another path. According to the Narrator, Baudelaire belongs to an illustrious family of writers that have been able to put to use the impromptu material offered by involuntary memory. Yet, he is characterised by his consideration of will as a fundamental component in his inquiry for remembrances. Unlike Chateaubriand and Nerval, he makes an explicit use of it in order to compose his poems, but they nevertheless remain under the sign of involuntary. Baudelaire, therefore, is the only writer who puts into practice this "*memory of intelligence*" that knows how to muster voluntariness and involuntariness.

Before the Narrator confronts his own finitude and enters the harrowing "*Bal de têtes*" –the last episode of the *Recherche*, in which each and every character appears aged, decayed, and barely recognisable – he quotes Baudelaire, as a token or a talisman. The poet remains, to his eyes, a protective model, the last sign of an ideal conjunction where the remembered verses of experience hold out against the relentless destruction operated by time. This model traces what we have called a poetics of memory: a memory that is caught and developed within the text as a theme, and talked over and expanded from one text to the other as guidelines for a method. Proust knows that the pattern he chooses for his novel is built upon the experience of seeking for recollection, but he knows that this experience can only be tentative, exploratory, and may well fall short. Therefore, he rivets his ambition to Baudelaire's poem, as it is, to his eyes, the only attempt to spell out *with* the text the experience of recollection per se. Baudelaire

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appears to have undertaken the task of using the text as a means to capture the non-voluntary decision to grasp the past. Ultimately, Proust finds a keystone to the gigantic cathedral of his oeuvre in a poem, that is, a textual memory that one can utter out loud, and repeat, and repeat again.

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Cleansing the Soul of Images: Overcoming Forgetfulness in Mattis Øybø's *Alle ting skinner*

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"Television makes your brain rot"
Graffiti on a wall in Bergen, Norway

For better or worse, human existence in the twenty-first century is filled to the brim with different media. While many of these undoubtedly improve our lives, at the same time it is also uncanny how quickly we come to depend upon them: inventions that were brand new yesterday are today simply taken for granted, as if they had always been there and as if life without them were unthinkable. For some, this proliferation has given rise to the fear that these new media might negatively affect us as human beings, for example by causing our ability to recollect the past to deteriorate. As social anthropologist Paul Connerton has aptly put it, "[t]o say that something has been stored – in an archive, in a computer – is tantamount to saying that, though it is in principle always retrievable, we can afford to forget it"

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(Connerton 2008: 65). This fear is far from new, of course, having already been given expression through the critique of the medium of writing in Plato's *Phaedrus*. However, there is no doubt that contemporary culture is dominated by media to an unprecedented degree, and for many people, it seems like we are surrounded by an onslaught of information every waking moment of our lives.

One novel that explicitly addresses this perceived overload of information and how it might affect our capacities for remembrance is *Alle ting skinner* (All Things Shine; 2003) by the Norwegian author Mattis Øybø (b. 1971). In addition, the novel also asks a related question: what would happen if, all of a sudden, people were forced to go without all of the media they take for granted in their quotidian lives? Or, to put it differently, what would happen to our capacities for remembrance if, for a prolonged period, the all-encompassing and ever-present buzz of information suddenly fell silent? Øybø's novel approaches these questions through its depiction of the aftermath of a terrorist attack that caused a massive power failure in Oslo. This attack functions as the first of the novel's two main themes, serving as the backdrop against which the narrative unfolds. The second and most important theme is the question of remembrance, posed in regard to the protagonist Otto Horn, a promising young historian in his mid-thirties whose recent lecture series on the Rote Armee Fraktion turns out to have helped inspire the terrorists. Whereas he is initially described as incapable of remembering his own past and of being truly present in his own life, when he is forced into a situation where he is no longer bombarded by images, the novel depicts how his earlier life and experiences slowly start coming back to him, resulting in a final moment of clarity described as close to a reconquest of the past.

At first glance, *Alle ting skinner* might thus be said to

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romanticize memory, treating it almost as a solid and immutable object that can be "owned" by the subject. On a related note, the novel could also be accused of somewhat naively romanticizing the terroristic state of exception, treating it like a necessary precondition for the emergence of a more authentic mode of existence. While I am inclined to agree with the latter criticism, in the following I will be arguing that even though the text seems to present Otto's successful overcoming of forgetfulness as a real possibility, it can also be said to partially undermine the validity of such an optimistic conclusion. Not only does the novel leave open the question of whether the transformation he has gone through will be a lasting one, but in doing so it also indicates that such a renewal of the past in the present must by definition be a highly precarious and problematic process.

On becoming more free than ever before

When Øybø published the novel – his debut – in 2003, for the most part it received positive reviews, though some critics did not find his attempt to address states of exception and their capacity to fascinate convincing, while others accused him of relying too heavily on the work of Don DeLillo, in general, and on *White Noise* (1984) in particular.[1] The novel opens with a brief chance meeting in August 2003 between Otto and a close friend of his former girlfriend, Helle. Otto

1 For positive reviews, cf. Bentzrud, Hagen, Aakre, Auklend, Roggen, and Sivertsen, all from 2003; for more critical voices, cf. Røed and Vassenden, also from 2003. In addition to these reviews, a handful of scholarly analyses exist, cf. Wold 2004, Johannessen 2005, Gullestad 2005, and Megård 2010. For dissenting views on the nature of the relationship between Øybø's novel and DeLillo's oeuvre, cf. Roggen and Aakre, both of whom considered the similarities a conscious form of metatextual recycling, and Røed, who claimed that Øybø's book amounted to little more than a pale copy of *White Noise*.

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is here told that Helle, whom he dated for three years, has committed suicide. The narrative then jumps ahead to Oslo in December 2003 and January 2004, describing how the city is brought to a complete, extended standstill due to massive snowfall. The main part of the narrative takes place after it has finally stopped snowing near the end of January, when Oslo is left without electricity for ten days due to the acts of a small terrorist organization, whose strategic bomb explosions succeed in taking out the entire city's power supply. The rest of the novel depicts the various consequences of this situation for Otto and his wife, Sarah, their three small children, Otto's thirteen-year-old son from a previous marriage, and his aged parents, who come to stay with them during the snowfall. As Otto gradually undergoes some sort of psychological change, the progress of the narrative is frequently halted by a number of flashbacks describing different memories returning to him. The book ends with a short epilogue after the power supply has been restored and the situation returned to normal.

Throughout the novel, for a long time people are uncertain what has caused the power failure, even though rumors about terrorism and sabotage soon start circulating among the inhabitants of Oslo. It is only near the end of the book that Otto and the readers learn that one of his best friends, Thomas, has been actively involved as a member of the terror organization and that Otto himself has functioned as a catalyst for their actions. During the fall semester of 2003, he had given a popular course at the University of Oslo on the Rote Armee Fraktion under the title "Revolutionary Theory and Praxis. Baader, Ensslin, Meinhof". Unbeknownst to him, he thereby plays a part in bringing the small group of terrorists together, since many of the twelve members followed his course. In addition, he has also supplied them with the revolutionary ideas that they later end up testing out when they blow up Oslo's power supply. This is not something

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Otto could possibly have foreseen when he gave the course. In fact, the narrator stresses that one of the primary aims of his class was to dissect a fundamentalist discourse such as that of the RAF:

> By way of the history of RAF Otto wanted to show how a fundamentalist rhetoric was constructed. And, furthermore, how it was capable of withstanding any form of criticism and all arguments. The fundamentalist language was in many ways a perfect construction, according to Otto's thesis, exactly because it made itself hermetic and unassailable. (256)[2]

Otto's intentions notwithstanding, what his friend Thomas takes away from the lectures is something quite different: "rather than understanding how truth was constructed, which was what Otto obviously wanted for his students, Thomas only heard truth. Not its construction. No. What Otto said was true" (256-257).[3] In other words, the RAF's unassailable rhetoric and their use of violence turns out to have been able to fill a deep-seated desire in Thomas, a desire for something he feels is lacking in his own life; or, in Alain Badiou's terms, a "passion for the real" (Badiou 2007).

At this point, a question might be raised: how does the novel explain the origin of this lack in Thomas? In other

2 All quotations from *Alle ting skinner* (Øybø 2003) are given only with page numbers; all translations from the novel and other Norwegian texts in the following are my own. "Med historien om RAF ville Otto vise hvordan en fundamentalistisk retorikk var bygget opp. Og videre, hvordan den var i stand til å motstå enhver kritikk og ethvert argument. Det fundamentalistiske språket var på mange måter en perfekt konstruksjon, det var Ottos tese, nettopp fordi den gjorde seg hermetisk og uangripbar".

3 "istedenfor å erkjenne hvordan sannhet ble skapt, som åpenbart var det Otto ville at hans studenter skulle, hørte Thomas bare sannhet. Ikke konstruksjonen av den. Nei. Det var sant det Otto sa".

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words: what has made him so receptive to the RAF's ideas and discourse, and who or what is it that he and the rest of the terror organization see as their enemy? Here it should first be pointed out that the group seems to have very little interest in politics, as such. One possible explanation would be that Thomas is living in an epoch where a form of government that combines capitalism and democracy has established itself as something akin to an unavoidable fate that it would be useless to try to resist. Hence, seeking something outside of these ideological boundaries does not even seem to strike him as a possibility. In addition, there is nothing in the novel that indicates that the group to which he belongs has particularly strong feelings about the Norwegian political system or about capitalism in general, nor do they seem to be in favor of or opposed to any specific political party.

To the degree the group actually has a main opponent, it is rather the media their revolt is aimed at. More specifically, what drives them to act is their desire to oppose a feeling of lacking contact with reality, a feeling they understand to be the result of a fundamental information overload resulting from being bombarded, as is several times reiterated in the novel, with on average 100,000 words every day. Hence, as they see it, the problem is that words, as well as images, are everywhere in today's western societies, invading every nook and cranny of our lives.

That people are in some way affected by all these words and images is obvious, but what exactly the flood of information does to us is harder to describe. The theory advanced in the novel in many ways seems indebted to Walter Benjamin's understanding of the deterioration of the aura in modernity, as elaborated in a number of his essays. Not only is the concept of the aura several times explicitly invoked – for example, Otto and Sarah are at one point described as "being surrounded by an aura of happiness and terror"

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(254)[4] – but it is also highly relevant in regard to the theme of remembrance and forgetfulness, as we will see later.

In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), Benjamin argued that the advances in technology and the media that he saw manifested in his own lifetime had led to a deterioration of the aura, a concept he relates to a specific sort of relationship between us, as subjects perceiving our surroundings, and the historical and authentic character of the objects we perceive. In his "Little History of Photography" (1931), he describes the aura as "[a] strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be" (Benjamin 1999a: 518). To him, the deterioration of the aura is something that defines modern society as a whole, as can be seen for example in his "Experience and Poverty" (1933) and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939) – in the former, he talks of a new "poverty of human experience in general" (Benjamin 1999a: 732), and in the latter, he designates an "increasing atrophy of experience" (Benjamin 1999b: 155). The accuracy of this assessment can of course be debated, but what is important from my perspective is that prior to his radicalization, Thomas obviously feels something very similar. He, too, feels that experience has atrophied, and this is what has thrown him into a kind of existential crisis.

Prior to Otto's lectures, the only outlet Thomas had for his feeling of alienation from reality was a form of vague, cynical pleasure he found in shocking people with provocative statements such as "A burning book is beautiful" (75), "There is nothing wrong with a bit of fascism" (76), and "I sometimes miss the atomic bomb" (138).[5] This position perfectly

4 "en aura av lykke og terror omkring dem".

5 "En bok som brenner er vakker"; "Det er ikke noe galt med litt fascisme"; "Det hender jeg savner atombomben".

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coincides with the form of "enlightened false consciousness" described by Peter Sloterdijk in his *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1983), and prior to his radicalization, Thomas can be seen as a prototypical Sloterdijkian cynic, hiding his inability to act and his fundamental insecurity behind a smug and ironic grin.

Since it is the seemingly unlimited possibilities of society in combination with the excessive flow of information which constitutes the problem for Thomas, it is its very *openness* which becomes his main target. By limiting his own freedom, he hopes to create another – and for him more real – form of freedom:

> The only thing he could do was to force himself into a situation where he no longer could do what he wanted. He had to create preconditions for himself and for others that threw him out of such a freedom, thus making him more free than ever before. Yes. His words wanted to be in contact with the world. He wanted to make his life into something concrete. He wanted to see the real. (260-261)[6]

This passage alerts us to an important point concerning the group's terroristic acts: for them, there is a didactic aspect involved. They want to create the preconditions not only for their own freedom, but also for the freedom of others.

6 "Det eneste han kunne gjøre var å tvinge seg selv inn i en situasjon der han ikke lenger kunne gjøre hva han ville. Han måtte skape forutsetninger for seg selv og andre som kastet ham ut av en slik frihet, og på den måten gjorde ham mer fri enn noen gang. Ja. Ordene hans ville være i kontakt med verden. Han ville gjøre sitt liv til noe konkret. Han ville se det virkelige".

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Otto and forgetfulness

This brings us back to Otto: in the novel, it is primarily through his reactions that readers are allowed an insight into the potential psychological effects of the state of exception. It also brings us to the main theme of the novel, forgetfulness, which is already hinted at in its very first sentence, describing a chance encounter on the street in Oslo: "In front of him stands a woman he does not know" (9).[7] Even though the woman in question addresses Otto by name and treats him like an old friend or acquaintance she has not seen in a long time, he is able neither to figure out who she is nor remember if he has ever met her before. Their encounter therefore turns into one of those awkward conversations where one party does his best to hide his ignorance about the identity of the other. Not even after she mentions that they last met five years ago, the name of a mutual friend (whom Otto cannot remember either), and, finally, that she is a friend of his former girlfriend, Helle, is he able to pin a name to the face in front of him. It is only later in the novel that we learn from the narrator that her name is Kristin. The chapter ends with her telling him that Helle, whom he dated for three years, has recently committed suicide. After Kristin has left, Otto remains motionless on the street while trying to recall the past: "– Helle, he says out aloud to himself, while the rain increases in strength. And he repeats the name, Helle, in an attempt to recollect something he knows that he has long since forgotten" (13).[8]

7 "Foran ham står en kvinne han ikke vet hvem er".

8 "– Helle, sier han høyt til seg selv, mens regnet øker i styrke. Og han gjentar navnet, Helle, i et forsøk på å fremkalle noe han vet at han forlengst har glemt".

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This passage perfectly illustrates Otto's rather limited ability to remember the faces and names of the people he meets, or things he has experienced, something that is repeatedly addressed in the novel. The narrator also makes it clear that this lack of connection with the past is not a new problem, but something that has helped define Otto throughout his entire adult life, at least. It also seems that this problem is connected to a certain tendency to daydream, instead of being mentally present in his quotidian life, which can easily come across as a form of indifference on his part. Even if the specific nature of his problem is never properly explained in the novel, Paul Connerton's taxonomy of seven different types of forgetting might here prove useful. Out of these seven types, Otto's forgetfulness definitely seems to have the most in common with the fifth category, "forgetting as annulment", said to result from an overload of information (Connerton 2008: 64). Contrary to the commonsense opinion that forgetfulness is solely a negative and shameful thing, Connerton argues that given the amount of information we encounter today, it is also, in a sense, a bare necessity. In his words:

> We now live in a society that has access to too much information and in the foreseeable future the problem can only get worse. Genuine skill in conducting one's life may come to reside less and less in knowing how to gather information and more and more in knowing how to discard information. (Connerton 2008: 66)

Hence, one should be wary of categorically defining forgetfulness in negative terms. Even so, in the novel it soon becomes clear that Otto's inability to be mentally present has been the cause of a number of problems for himself and those closest to him. For example, the narrator describes how at one point he becomes separated from his oldest son, Sebastian, on the subway in Oslo. When Sebastian, who at the time is three

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and a half years old, steps out of the subway compartment, Otto remains in his seat until the doors close because he is lost in thought; as the narrator puts it: "How long did he sit before he did anything? For ten seconds, twenty, half a minute? He sat without moving and saw his son disappear, while Sebastian smiled and waved. He did nothing. He only sat and watched" (169).[9] Since Otto gets off the subway and runs back one stop as soon as he realizes what has happened, everything turns out all right. Even so, the incident makes him reflect on how he could allow this to happen. In other words, he is perfectly aware of his own forgetfulness and absent-mindedness, but this insight is not enough to change these aspects of his own personality.

In the novel, Otto's girlfriends are the ones who most frequently experience this part of him. The narrator does not say a lot about Sarah's reactions, instead portraying their marriage as a happy one, but it is obvious that in his previous relationship, Otto's absent-mindedness was a real problem for Helle. She cried easily, and the narrator offers several signs that indicate some sort of mental imbalance on her part. To a certain degree, Otto seems to have realized that his forgetfulness and absent-mindedness has had a negative effect on her psyche, as can be seen from the narrator's description of how, during a long drive from Norway to Germany, she starts crying after first having accused him of existing in his own world, shut off from everybody else: "He sits down next to her, stroking her back. […] She tries to push his hand away, does not want to give him this, does not accept his caress,

9 "Hvor lenge satt han før han gjorde noe? I 10 sekunder, 20, et halvt minutt? Han satt rolig og så sin sønn forsvinne, mens Sebastian smilte og vinket. Han gjorde ingenting. Han satt bare og så på".

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wants to let him live with the guilt that he knows is his, but which he does not understand" (113).[10]

Otto's clearest insight in regard to his own forgetfulness becomes apparent during the narrator's descriptions of a trip to Helle's parents' summer cottage in the south of Norway in May 1998. This trip is described in the novel's penultimate chapter, coming shortly after readers have learned that the power supply has been restored to Oslo. While Otto is leafing through the cottage's guest book, he comes across something he had written the previous year. Even though he can remember that he and Helle were in fact there that summer, almost everything that happened there has simply vanished from his mind, including the events described in the guest book:

> in particular, there is one thing neither Helle nor I will ever forget from this summer. It happened last night. A swarm of meteors. Helle woke me up and we went outside. All over the sky this night there were shooting stars. Tiny white points spreading across the sky. It was a fantastic sight! It almost looked like it was snowing. (310)[11]

When he asks Helle about the swarm of meteors the previous year, she remembers it with perfect clarity, and she is unable to understand how it is possible that he could have forgotten it. This makes him say something that there and then suddenly must have struck him with great force: "– I will forget everything, he said. – Forget this day, this place,

10 "Han setter seg ned ved siden av henne, stryker henne over ryggen. […] Hun forsøker å skyve hånden hans vekk, vil ikke gi ham dette, aksepterer ikke kjærtegnet, vil la ham leve med den skyld han vet han har, men som han ikke forstår".

11 "det er særlig en ting verken Helle eller jeg kommer til å glemme fra denne sommeren. Det skjedde natt til i går. En meteorskur. Helle vekket meg og vi gikk ut. Overalt på himmelen denne natten var det stjerneskudd. Små hvite punkter som fór over himmelen. Det var et fantastisk skue! Det så nesten ut som det snødde".

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this summer, you. – What are you saying? I will forget you, Otto said" (313).[12]

If we return to the beginning of the book, this prophecy turns out to have come true: Otto has totally forgotten Helle, including the fact that he had once told her that he would forget her. To him, the only things that remain of their relationship are a few extremely vague memories. The narrative's frequent use of flashbacks thus reflects the process of remembrance Otto experiences throughout the period when he is shut off from the media he normally takes for granted. What sets this process in motion is not his meeting with Kristin where she tells him about Helle's suicide, which happens several months prior to the main events described in the book. Instead, it is his old and sick father mentioning Helle's name while rambling on, just prior to the power failure caused by the terrorist group. In other words: while Otto, unbeknownst to himself, functions as a catalyst for the group's actions, their actions are what function as a catalyst for his slow remembrance of things past. For, as the novel points out, "[t]he sudden darkness created a before and an after (63)", where this break is what allows Otto's gradual memorial reconquest to take place.[13]

For this reason, Øybø's novel might be seen as a perfect illustration of Friedrich Kittler's dictum that "[m]edia determine our situation" (Kittler 1999: xxxix). More specifically, the latter's argument is that the media available to us not only influence how we act in the world as subjects, but they also become embedded in and help shape our sensorial apparatuses. For him, there is a clear causality at work; as he puts

12 "– Jeg kommer til å glemme alt, sa han. – Til å glemme denne dagen, dette stedet, denne sommeren, deg. – Hva er det du sier? – Jeg kommer til å glemme deg, sa Otto".

13 "Det plutselige mørket skaper et før og et etter".

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it in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986): "Once storage media can accommodate optical and acoustic data, human memory capacity is bound to dwindle" (Kittler 1999: 10). In other words, Kittler's argument implies that when technology is capable of remembering for us, we no longer need to do so ourselves. Such a negative understanding of the relationship between memory and technology is one that also seems to inform the novel; it is not until the ten days of silence, when Otto no longer has access to the media he usually takes for granted, that he can start recapturing the past. Hence, the situation following the bombings can be said to help give birth to another way of thinking, another way of remembering, and another way of being present in the world.

Alle ting skinner explicitly invites the reader to conceptualize this process in terms of Marcel Proust's notion of *mémoire involontaire*. Throughout Øybø's novel, Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* is read and discussed by several of the characters: Otto for example is reading the first volume during the aforementioned trip to the south of Norway and plans to get through the entire novel that summer; Thomas gives the impression of having read it when he sees Otto with the book; Helle is said to have read the first three volumes the previous summer; and Sarah is reading the first volume during the power failure. Versions of the question "[h]ave you come to the petite madeleine yet?" are also repeated several times by different characters (244, see also 308 and 312).[14] This cake, or more precisely, its taste after having been dipped in tea, is what starts the slow and gradual process of recollection that Proust's first-person narrator goes through:

> No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent

14 "Har du kommet til madeleinekaken?".

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upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestions of its origin. […] Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? I was conscious that it was connected with the taste of tea and cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature as theirs. Whence did it come? What did it signify? How could I seize upon and define it? (Proust 2006: 61)[15]

One of the defining traits of this process is that it is outside the reach of will. It cannot be forced into being by human consciousness, even though it is possible to try to create the optimal conditions for its appearance, the way Proust's narrator does by going to bed early. In other words, the past must come to you:

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of the intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die. (Ib.: 61)[16]

15 "Mais à l'instant même où la gorgée mêlée des miettes du gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d'extraordinaire en moi. Un plaisir délicieux m'avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause. […] D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie? Je sentais qu'elle était liée au goût du thé et du gâteau, mais qu'elle le dépassait infiniment, ne devait pas être de même nature. D'où venait-elle? Que signifiait-elle? Où l'appréhender?" (Proust 1987: 44).

16 "Il en est ainsi de notre passé. C'est peine perdue que nous cherchions à l'évoquer, tous les efforts de notre intelligence sont inutiles. Il est caché hors de son domaine et de sa portée, en quelque objet matériel (en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel) que nous ne soupçonnons pas. Cet objet, il dépend du hasard que nous le rencontrions avant de mourir, ou que nous ne le rencontrions pas" (Proust 1987: 44).

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The form of memory available to the will and the intellect, *mémoire volontaire*, should therefore be kept distinct from the form of memory that comes to us (or refrains from doing so), independent of our own consciousness: *mémoire involontaire*. Even if Proust is not explicitly mentioned in the following quotation, it is obvious that his ideas are central to Otto's reflections about different forms of memory, as presented by the narrator:

> [Otto] had to wait, had to let the memories come of their own accord, as he had read somewhere that they eventually would. For there were two forms of memories, that which he himself could recall, and what had to come of its own accord. This was the way it worked. The passive memory. (106)[17]

In other words, it is Otto's passive memory that slowly but surely is capable of bringing the memories of Helle back to life. As opposed to Proust, in his case the *mémoire involontaire* is not located in the taste of an object, as such, but in the very situation he and the rest of Oslo's citizens are forced to experience. If we approach what happens in photographic terms, the stillness caused by the power failure could thus be seen as the darkroom allowing Otto to finally process his memories and properly imprint them in his mind. When he finds a photograph from the trip to the south of Norway in the novel's last chapter, he finally gains access to the last important memory that has been eluding him throughout the entire book. As such, it could be seen as the end-point of the process he has been going through. Not only does it allow

17 "Han måtte vente, la minnene komme av seg selv, som han hadde lest et sted at de til slutt ville. For det var to former for hukommelse, det han selv kunne komme på, og det som måtte komme av seg selv. Det var slik den virket. Den passive hukommelsen".

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the lost memories to reappear, but as we will soon see, it is also implied that it results in Otto's renewed ability to truly *see* the objects surrounding him and to be more fully present in his own life.

When considered from a Benjaminean perspective, the last chapter, in which Otto and Sarah are emptying out his parents' cellar, can thus be read as signifying the rebirth of the auratic perception. They have gotten through the state of exception – as the narrator puts it, "[b]ut here and now the sharp expectations caused by the snow and the cold have left them. Gone is the combination of astonishment and fear" (317).[18] In this situation, the narrator lays great emphasis on how clearly Otto's surroundings appear to him, as if it were the first time he truly saw them. For example, the narrative stresses the feeling of touching a warm oven, the taste of a glass of water, how beautiful Sarah appears, and how a number of everyday objects found in the cellar look. The light in the cellar is out, but Sarah finds a new lightbulb, which she screws into the socket. The last two sentences of the novel are as follows: "They gaze into mum and dad's cellar. All things shine" (320).[19] What is it that here becomes visible, if not the aura of the objects, emerging out of the preconditions created by the small terrorist organization?

The evanescence of the recaptured aura

Through this ending, which can be read as a strong indication that Otto has finally mastered his forgetfulness and his absent-mindedness, the novel thus seems to offer its readers an uplifting – if perhaps also overly romanticized – message

18 "Men her og nå er den skarpe forventningen til snøen og kulden, falt av dem. Borte er blandingen av forbløffelse og redsel".
19 "De ser innover mors og fars kjeller. Alle ting skinner".

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about the possibility of forgetfulness being overcome. However, the validity of such a reading is subtly undermined by the novel's penultimate paragraph, in which Otto discovers an old cardboard box bearing Helle's handwriting in his parents' cellar, while waiting for Sarah to return with the lightbulb. This is where he finds the aforementioned picture from the summer cottage in the south of Norway, showing him together with Helle, Thomas, and two other friends:

> A self-timer must have been used when the photograph was taken, Otto thought he could see the traces of expectation and coincidence in their faces. And here they are, smiling with obvious warmth. He in a green t-shirt. Helle in a light blue dress. A yellow coffee mug stands on the table in front of them, next to it a book. There is a happiness here, of course, a happiness in the photograph as medium, and the self-timer as technology. They cannot but smile, to the sun and the heat and the future they know is coming after this. The people who will see the picture and think how happy they were. (319-320)[20]

However, in direct contrast to what Otto is here thinking, the moment in question was not a happy one at all. More precisely, at the end of the preceding chapter, it became clear that the photograph was actually taken immediately after he had told Helle that he would end up forgetting her. This can perhaps be seen in light of a remark Roland Barthes made in *Camera Lucida* about a picture showing himself in

20 "Bildet må være tatt med selvutløser, Otto synes han kan se sporene av forventning og tilfeldighet i ansiktene deres. Og her er de, smilende i en åpenbar varme. Han er i grønn t-skjorte. Helle i lyseblå kjole. En gul kaffekopp står foran dem på bordet, ved siden av ligger det en bok. Det ligger en lykke her, selvfølgelig, en lykke i fotografiet som medium, og selvutløseren som teknikk. De kan ikke annet enn å smile, til solen og varmen og fremtiden som de vet kommer etter dette. Menneskene som skal se bildet og tenke hvor lykkelige de var".

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a situation he could no longer remember: "And yet, *because it was a photograph* I could not deny that I had been *there* (even if I did not know *where*)" (Barthes 1981: 85, ital. in the original). Thus, one could say that even if the medium of photography is capable of ensuring that the past does not completely vanish for us, it can in no way guarantee a correct remembrance or any real insight into that past. For this reason, Otto's misreading of the photograph might be said perfectly to exemplify the following claim made by Susan Sontag in *Regarding the Pain of Others*: "The problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs. This remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering" (Sontag 2003: 89).

In other words, if Otto's perception has truly undergone a transformation, it cannot have been as effective or as lasting as we might have otherwise been led to believe. For this reason, the novel indicates that ultimately, the terroristic acts have not been able to inscribe themselves into the symbolic order in a lasting manner. Understood as a type of defamiliarizing strategy, they acquire their force precisely because they help cause a state of exception. The moment this situation were to end up as the norm, it would also lose its ability to make us really see the objects surrounding us or remember the past. Hence, Otto will most likely forget this winter, too, just as he once forgot the "unforgettable" swarm of meteors he and Helle experienced together. This is something he seems to be partly aware of, since the return to normality at the end of the novel makes him think that "[w]e are returning to forgetfulness" (320).[21] For this reason, the Norwegian critic Bendik Wold is only partly right in the following claim:

21 "Vi er på vei inn i glemselen".

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But perhaps – and this is the central claim made by the novel, as I read it – the state of exception has an effect on an individual level. Perhaps it does something to our gaze, perhaps it does something to the words we use, perhaps it does something to our relationship to things. (Wold 2004: 93, my translation)

More precisely, while this assessment of the effect the situation has on Otto is an accurate one, what Wold fails to point out is how the novel indicates that, at the same time this is, and *must* probably be, a passing state. This is the irony of Øybø's novel. Even if all things do indeed shine in the last chapter, this is nothing but a temporary effect that will wane as soon as the force of habit once more makes itself felt: it is in the nature of things only to shine for a short while at a time.

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Posthuman Memory

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The term "posthuman" was little used only a few decades ago, but it has now become shorthand for a number of different changes, either realised or latent, to what it means to be human. A posthuman horizon has opened in the sense that we cannot take it for granted that any future generation will consider themselves to be of the same species of the human as we know it now. This horizon could or should have been a logical consequence of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, but for various reasons the potential for change of the human species did not receive much attention – possibly because evolution by natural selection works slowly, far too slowly to make a difference for the human race over many generations, and most likely also due to the fact that most religious and philosophical ideologies hold the idea of the human as the end point in history as an implicit condition.

With the rapid developments in technology in our time, it is harder to ignore possible changes that could take place from various perspectives. The creation of artificial intelligence that is on par with or superior to human intelligence seems likely or inevitable, and if packaged in an artificial

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human-like robot, the realisation of androids would alter the idea of human exceptionalism. The integration of humans and machines, propelled by technologies that help disabled persons, but with potential to enhance otherwise normally functioning individuals, is the most easily imagined example of a posthuman state, in the form of a cyborg. Genetic engineering develops fast, and it is first and foremost ethical considerations rather than technical limitations that regulate the uses of these technologies. In time this could make the idea of a naturally born baby the exception, at least in some parts of the world. Furthermore, the development of medicine that can enhance cognitive and physical performance, as well as slow down ageing, is also a considerable factor. Finally, the new digital era and the ways more information challenges the formation of human minds could also provide a path to a leap in evolution, as the cognitive psychologist Merlin Donald has suggested (Donald 2014: 68).

The idea of the posthuman is in many ways scary, not least if one envisions the possible loss of the unity of humanity – a unity we take for granted although even recent human history has plenty of examples of how humanity has been differentiated along racial lines. New differences could emerge from various aspects of human change. In a larger historical perspective the current situation of only one extant human species is the exception. There are more than twenty recorded hominids, many of which coexisted, yet avoiding speciation is generally considered to be of the utmost importance (Sarmiento 2007: 23).

There is a paradox that comes with the posthuman: on the one hand, we hold human dignity and the right to exist as a central axiom in modern history. But on the other hand, we cannot claim that humanity is perfect. From frail and mortal bodies, limited cognitive abilities, including an inadequate memory, to the too often questionable morals of human be-

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ings, there is little ground for claiming that there is no room at all for improvement. However, what the means and ends should be is a more complex question.

Art and literature have contributed to the discussion of the posthuman in a number of ways, both very directly and also more subtly in vague or downplayed visions of what humanity could become. To the first category belongs Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and a vast number of works of science fiction, including works by H. G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, Neal Stephenson, Margaret Atwood, and William Gibson. Less science fiction-oriented authors like Kazuo Ishiguro and Michel Houellebecq have also very directly included both cloning and genetic engineering in their novels, leaving no doubt about a clear vision of a new mode of being. More subtly, one finds a fascination with human change at various levels in works of authors such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Don DeLillo, and Chinese Nobel laureate Mo Yan (Thomsen 2013). None of these can be labelled as futurists, but their works contain distinct visions of changes of the human condition in body, mind, and social context.

Memory is one area where the posthuman is often envisioned to have different capabilities. Typically, one would imagine a posthuman being could have larger capacities for storing memory, but often also with a different and more limited conception of history, both personally and collectively. This is of course crucial, as memories and a relation to any kind of historical time are both very existential and an integral part of the emotional life of humans.

In what follows, I will first consider the importance of memory to identity in taking up two neoclassical visions of posthuman memory, in Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* (1982) and Jorge Luis Borges' short story "Funes – The Memorious" (1964), which frame some of the key questions of what a changed relation to memory could entail. Then

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three themes related to posthuman memory and literature will be investigated: the importance of self-creation, the visions of changing humanity through control of their memories, and finally the perspectives of those living with vastly expanded and often collective ways of accessing memories.

Memory, imperfection, and the posthuman

Some theories of human advancement as well as of the development of artificial intelligence focus on computational power, while access to memory is taken for granted (Bostrom 2014). Such theories highlight how complex and important memory is to human existence, as an imperfect tapestry of experience. In *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty uses the metaphor of a lading list, borrowed from a poem by Philip Larkin, to illustrate how the self is made up of exchangeable memories of lived life (Rorty 1989: 23-24). Some things may be lost, but the memories all take part in making a unique structure that does not correspond to anything else. There is no truth to or in self-hood, according to Rorty, or any end that can be reached, but the uniqueness of the structure is a quality. Losing one's memory, for example through senility, Alzheimer's, or Mad Cow Disease, is for most people the worst of nightmares, and a most unworthy way to pass away. To opponents of transhumanist hopes, including Francis Fukuyama among many others, the prospect of longer lives without a cure for Alzheimer's would be a terribly ironic outcome of the hopes for longevity, as Jonathan Swift already envisioned in his *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), in which the ageing Strullbergs are granted long but not healthy lives.

The unpredictability of memory, often lauded in literary studies with Marcel Proust as the centrepiece, is also an aspect that one could suggest would be in need of an upgrade. Improvement could come with a number of downsides, if

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one thinks it is not necessarily beneficial for the human mind to be in control of everything. For example, there could be advantages in having to react to both external and internal impulses that the individual cannot predict. Rorty finds support in Sigmund Freud when questioning Friedrich Nietzsche's scorn for the masses and praise for the genius. There may be dull people, but no one has a dull Id and one of Freud's achievements is to have democratised genius, according to Rorty (ib.: 36-37). The imperfections in the way the human mind organises memory in this perspective have some profound existential qualities.

But what if one's memories are not one's own? Of the many visionary details in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, the attention to how the androids or replicants have formed their personalities by uploading memories from other persons stands out as a particularly demeaning aspect in the otherwise perfect illusion of having created an existence indistinguishable from human life. Having to live with someone else's memories takes away all authenticity of existence, replacing it with false memories that may function but do not matter. Even if one does not believe in the autonomous subject, but stresses the reality of shared beliefs and thought patterns that are almost impossible to escape, the personal recollection of sensation is still a bastion against being a copy of something else. Nevertheless, the replicants develop an idea of self and desperately try to hang on to it when facing their planned "retirement".

The qualities of the imperfect memory are also the subject of Jorge Luis Borges' fiction "Funes – the Memorious", which is about the unfortunate Ireneo Funes, who after a horseback accident begins to recollect everything in complete detail, with what is clearly a superhuman capacity:

> In effect, Funes not only remembered every leaf on every tree of every wood, but even every one of the times he had perceived or imagined

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it. He determined to reduce all of his past experience to some seventy thousand recollections, which he would later define numerically. Two considerations dissuaded him: the thought that the task was interminable and the thought that it was useless. He knew that at the hour of his death he would scarcely have finished classifying even all the memories of his childhood. (Borges 1964: 65)

Thus Funes is always overwhelmed with images of the past and does not possess the ability to make generalisations. The famous dogma at the end of Borges' story "To think is to forget a difference" is of course not the final argument against better memory, but still a compelling argument against the hopes for what a radically improved memory would do for the human brain (ib.: 66).

There is of course much more to be said about hopes for what memory could be, and these narratives are not definitive warnings against any kind of cognitive improvement, yet they do show in a convincing manner how the complexity and the imperfection of the human memory system cannot be thought alternatively without considering profound consequences for the identity construction of human beings.

The blank slate and self-development

The long period of growing up and shaping one's identity are unique human traits, which depend upon the ability to store memories and to bring them back in new constellations triggered by thoughts and sensations. Many fictions on the posthuman or radically different human beings do not pay much attention to these processes and "cheat" by putting the reader in media res. Or the question is addressed more openly, such as by skipping the step of growing up, for example in the uploading of memories into a replicant, which makes a short-cut to the formation of identity. One is often left to

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wonder what kind of childhood a posthuman individual has had, since more often than not, the reader is presented with the mature person's perspective on the world.

This is in contrast to the long tradition in literature that deals with how an individual develops into being a mature individual – it is a genre of its own after all – often with an emphasis on the dangers of designating a certain mode of acquiring knowledge and memories. This aspect plays a particular part in novels by Mary Shelley, Don DeLillo, and Michel Houellebecq.

A cornerstone in posthuman fiction, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) is on the one hand very observant of childhood, families, and upbringings; it is the loss of his sister that pushes Victor Frankenstein into his ambitious endeavour. On the other hand, the sudden escape of the creation after it has been brought to life skips the interesting questions of how the creation (or monster) could have been "raised". Instead, we have his own account of access to books that became a substitute for the experience he could have had with human beings:

> I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books. They produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings, that sometimes raised me to ecstasy, but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection. In the Sorrows of Werter, besides the interest of its simple and affecting story, so many opinions are canvassed and so many lights thrown upon what had hitherto been to me obscure subjects that I found in it a never-ending source of speculation and astonishment. The gentle and domestic manners it described, combined with lofty sentiments and feelings, which had for their object something out of self, accorded well with my experience among my protectors and with the wants which were forever alive in my own bosom. But I thought Werter himself a more divine being than I had ever beheld or imagined; his character contained no pretension, but it sank deep. The disquisitions upon death and suicide were calculated to fill me with wonder. I did not pretend to

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enter into the merits of the case, yet I inclined towards the opinions of the hero, whose extinction I wept, without precisely understanding it. (Shelley 1993: 134-135)

The creation then describes other encounters with books that have helped him to shape his self-image. Later on, he speaks eloquently of the way he imagines a future living far from humans, but with a female companion that Frankenstein is supposed to create for him. Whereas Frankenstein uses technology in the hope of being able to restore the past, the creation uses his education to improvise and make new plans for his life. Being out of touch with his own time is also reflected in Frankenstein's approach to science:

You have burdened your memory with exploded systems and useless names. Good God! In what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies which you have so greedily imbibed are a thousand years old and as musty as they are ancient? I little expected, in this enlightened and scientific age, to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew. (ib.: 38)

Yet these "fancies" do lead Frankenstein to new inventions, because of his own idiosyncratic approach to the problem he faced. In the end, he also recognises how his creation was interesting because it was vivid, complex, and unpredictable:

And where does he now exist? Is this gentle and lovely being lost forever? Has this mind, so replete with ideas, imaginations fanciful and magnificent, which formed a world, whose existence depended on the life of its creator; – has this mind perished? Does it now only exist in my memory? No, it is not thus; your form so divinely wrought, and beaming with beauty, has decayed, but your spirit still visits and consoles your unhappy friend. (ib.: 167)

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The question of how and with what an individual should fill his mind is also a recurrent theme in Don DeLillo's work. A credo in *The Names* (1982) is "How many languages do you know?", emphasising one way of expanding one's mind by learning. The novel's main narrative ends with a salute to all the different languages that let people share experiences, but the last chapter, a sort of appendix, reads as an excerpt from the novel that the reader has learned that Tap, the son of the narrator James Axton, is writing. Tap's novel envisions a tongue-speaking religious community in the American Midwest. There is no memory but merely the chanting of incomprehensible nonsense that the young protagonist runs away from.

DeLillo's next novel, *White Noise* (1985), is a campus novel that is both funny and sombre. A professor in Hitler studies, Jack Gladney, and his wife Babette both suffer from the fear of dying. They constantly try to convince each other that parents with small children, like themselves, do not die, as well as reassuring each other that they want to die first rather than live without the other. Yet Gladney admits to himself that he is lying, and that he would do practically anything to avoid death. He also interprets his own fascination with Hitler and Nazism as a way to connect with a movement that was stronger than death, and rather than fearing it, embraced it.

Babette has gone in a different direction, unknown to Jack, as she takes experimental medication that eliminates any thought and fear of dying. While it is dubious whether the pills work, they do have an effect on her memory. She suffers from frequent loss of short-term memory as a side effect of the pills. The novel does not pose the question directly, but leads its readers to wonder how many side effects on one's memory one would accept in order to get rid of a quintessential human concern.

The lighter side of the novel is in its blatant parodies of

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postmodernist relativity and the fascination with signs that do not really signify and surfaces that are just what they are. But there is also a darker side to this postmodern playfulness since it is not able to eliminate the longing for meaning and coherence. Two scenes illustrate this aspect both comically and solemnly. One night Jack is listening to his daughter talking in her sleep. At first he cannot hear what she is mumbling and leans over as if to receive a message from the innermost part of her soul, but what she is saying is a remnant of a commercial:

> I was convinced she was saying something, fitting together units of stable meaning. I watched her face, waited. Ten minutes passed. She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.
>
> *Toyota Celica*.
>
> A long moment passed before I realized this was the name of an automobile. The truth only amazed me more. The utterance was beautiful and mysterious, gold-shot with looming wonder. It was like the name of an ancient power in the sky, tablet-carved in cuneiform. (DeLillo 1985: 153)

Gladney goes on to describe quite positively how he sees this influence on the child's brain as a sort of transcendence, contrary to the views of his son Heinrich, who mocks the idea of free will and reduces all mental activity to a question of chemistry.

The ending of the novel takes place in a supermarket after Jack has confronted the inventor of Babette's pill, Willie Mink, who is himself addicted to the drug, and shoots him after a disagreement, but also saves him by taking him to a hospital (ib.: 312). The family finds comfort in consumerism, and the biggest hassle is that they have rearranged the supermarket isles, as Jack laconically mentions. Nevertheless, their needs are being fulfilled:

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Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead. (ib.: 326)

A striking detail of this passage is its suggestions of posthuman desires and hopes for radical changes, as also reflected in Babette's failed attempt to change her mental constituency, while at the same time it relegates this existential desire into the most mundane and meaningless setting possible. The lack of meaning is apparent in some other motives of the novel. There is both the fascination with sunsets, that are presented as both "modern" and "postmodern", and the visit to America's most photographed barn, which is nothing in particular in itself, but is famous for being famous. Taken together, these examples pose the question of what knowing or remembering is worth. Even the most significant historical figures will fade from memory, or become objects of mild ridicule, like in the example in Chapter 15 where Hitler and Elvis Presley are compared in a spirited exchange with Jack's postmodernist colleague Murray J. Siskind.

One escape from the existing world into a world that is not dependent on remembering transitory events is mathematics. Mathematics plays a significant role in DeLillo's work, not least in the early *Ratner's Star*, as a radical attempt to write a novel which in its form mimics the history of discoveries in mathematics. In *The Names* the young Maitland is a mathematical genius that can only discuss his work with two or three people; there are a number of other young, uncannily smart young boys in DeLillo's novels, including Jack's son Heinrich in *White Noise*. This generation of differently wired young people should be seen in connection with the interests in human change that can be found throughout DeLillo's work, in many different forms (Thomsen 2013: 193).

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These visions of posthuman memory thus do not include any memory at all, but the annihilation of external memory; still, DeLillo shows how barren such visions are to human existence.

Out of Michel Houellebecq's two novels that explictly involve posthuman condition, *The Possibility of an Island* (2005) addresses memory most directly. The novel shifts between the life of a comedian, Daniel, set in the present day, and three clones that live centuries into the future as the 23rd, 24th, and 25th incarnations of Daniel. This cloning is made possible by a cult that thus provides its members with a sort of quasi-immortality; however, they are also confined to living a secluded life in cells with only modest contact with other clones, primarily through an internet-like device. The elegant device of the novel is that the clones do not acquire the memory of the original Daniel by uploading it or through another form of seamless transference; they have to read Daniel's autobiography to figure out who he was and thereby try to become him. This is, of course, doomed to fail, as the clones become more and more passive and disillusioned by their lack of self-determination and self-creation.

Eventually, Daniel25 leaves his cell, enters the wilderness, and joins the remaining human beings that are not part of the cloning programme. He does so in order to seek an authentic feeling of owning his own life. This point may seem banal, but there is a profound value in insisting on the possibility of self-creation, which can be threatened from many sides, both by mean-spirited attempts like those in George Orwell's works (which is the topic of my next section), and by attempts full of good intentions yet with disastrous results for the individuals involved. Hopes for preserving identity through a combination of cloning and the transfer of memories to the next generation do not allow for reacting to the world, nor for using that interaction to build one's own identity, as

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the original Daniel was able to in his constant commentary on the world as a comedian. In contrast to this, there is no humour and no irony in the world of the clones, who instead read quasi-religious new-age poetry that praises their newly created world order.

In each of these cases – of Shelley, DeLillo, and Houellebecq – freedom of self-creation is central, and it is also clear how closely this self-creation is connected to the organisation of information and memory. Reading is a vital technology in this respect (along with other media), because of its dense communication and its ability to bring the individual into contact with numerous other parts of history – in a way that was much more limited in oral cultures.

What these stories also emphasise is the need for a sense of historical time. In many ways the idea of history is an invention that people had lived without for millennia. The question is whether history is becoming marginalised again, a situation in which the shrinking horizon of time, both backwards and forwards, has led to what Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht has characterised as the broad present (Gumbrecht 2014: xiii). But for political reasons, too, not least the ability to imagine a different order of society, it is valuable to have a strong collective memory of the kind that some regimes have tried to suppress or supplant.

Societal control

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) is famously dominated by a totalitarian state's attempt (and success) at controlling both history and personal memories. Strong ideological training works to socially engineer people into believing in the same dogmas. The lack of intimacy between men and women, a product of the upbringing of particularly girls not to enjoy sex, destroys meaningful bonds. The manipula-

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tion of history, both in detail, when persons are erased from history, and on the grand scale of history, when alliances in the tri-polar world order shift, works in sync with the dogma of double thinking. The act of forgetting how things were is part of the training of the citizens of Oceania. In a technically visionary manner, the trivial literature that is being produced to entertain the masses is not written by humans, but by machines:

> Probably she had crushed her hand while swinging round one of the big kaleidoscopes on which the plots of novels were 'roughed in'. It was a common accident in the Fiction Department. (Orwell 1989: 111)

Today, the possibility of automated writing is not too distant, just as the surveillance screens that would have been technologically out of reach a few decades earlier are now unnervingly familiar.

The construction of a new language, New Speak, is also central to the hopes eliminating independent thinking, and with it representations of historical events. The theme of being able to see oneself as an independent, coherent, and historical individual is most forcefully expressed in Winston Smith's decision to write a diary and to recuperate language, as well as in his ability to capture his own thoughts and emotions in a language that is not corrupted by demands other than writing the truth as he sees it.

Eventually, Smith is broken down by torture and becomes a blank slate for the Party to write on until he is killed at the end of the novel. The last piece of resistance in him is broken down in the dreaded room 101, which ironically is a space in which the individual horrors of tortured victims are utilized against them in order to remove the last bits of their sense of being individuals. There they use the knowledge of Smith's child memories of rats and threaten to have his face eaten by

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rats, which are put inches from his face in a small cage that could be opened with a touch of a button. This finally leads to his betrayal of his lover Julia and leaves him broken and empty, before he is finally executed.

While the main narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* ends without hope, the appendix that explains the principals of New Speak gives some hope that the system will collapse. Written in the past tense and referring to how New Speak should have been implemented, it suggests that this did not happen. There is no explanation of why the Party lost its grip, yet the conviction of how language and memory work as strong forces in individuals would be one obvious structural explanation of how the system might be brought to an end.

The eradication of individuality and the sense of memory and history is also prevalent in two other classics about attempts of social engineering, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*(1953). Huxley's visionary novel excels in many ways across the spectrum of literature on society's attempts to control people. There are descriptions of how cloning and conditioning of foetuses could work, which are far simpler than what one could imagine with the technology currently at hand, not to speak of what the world might look like in 2540, the year in which the novel is set. There is systematic use of drugs, Soma, that pacify people, but even more importantly, the social structure with its complete control of life, leisure, and death, as well as the caste-like system dividing people into classes, is characterised by a sense of being beyond history. The prospects for individual self-creation are vastly limited, as in Orwell's novel, but here by different means. The sense of a complex history as the background for one's own place in the world is reduced to a simple ideology that praises the new world order. It is thus fitting that the hero figure is Shakespeare, who is read in the wilderness, and who exempli-

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fies the value of doubt, self-determination, unpredictability, improvisation, and historical knowledge.

Fahrenheit 451 is similarly a warning against the flattening of people's worldviews that would be a result of abandoning the complex knowledge which books provide, particularly when juxtaposed with the mind-numbing televised entertainment that is predominant in Bradbury's novel. Somewhat ironically, the present-day world is turning away from paper, but the access to writing has never been greater, just as the thresholds for publishing are historically low and democratically open. It is of course not so much the medium of the book, but again the complexity of writing and the ability to express oneself that is important. As in Huxley, Orwell, and Houellebecq later on, the wilderness or the forest is a sanctuary where the individual can contemplate existence without being subject to the forces of the dominant system. The ability to store memories outside of the individual in the complex composition of a book is an important element in resisting the brutal smoothness of the totalitarian visions of reducing access to ideas of free individual development.

Social engineering is predominant in these novels; the idea of a posthuman is not at the centre of the discussion, yet attention is still given to a new human that is very different from humanity as we know it. However, the uses of drugs and conditioning of foetuses in *Brave New World* do change the physical conditions of humans to a degree that would meet one of Nick Bostrom's criteria for being posthuman, namely the control of mental well-being (Bostrom 2009: 204). It is also noteworthy, but usually overlooked, that Orwell has the party member O'Brien disclose to Winston Smith that there is work going on to change the neurological system of humans, for example with the goal of eliminating the pleasure of sex (Orwell 1989: 280). As such, the warnings against the posthuman serving a totalitarian fantasy are imagined at a biological

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level that would not be as reversible as the indoctrinations of people's minds. Yet the existential note of all three novels has more to do with control over minds and memories than over technological advances.

New technologies and unlimited memory

The British writer Olaf Stapledon explored many ideas of what could characterise a posthuman. In his 1930 novel *Last and First Men* he conjures up several new versions of the human being developed over millions of years (a rate of change that seems to be very slow compared to what we know of how humans have developed without the aid of advanced technologies during the past forty or fifty thousand years). Stapledon imagines humans with long lives, with super-intelligence, or with a particular aesthetic sensibility. Humans that can fly are also part of a sometimes far-fetched and thus neither particularly challenging nor interesting scenario. One of the most interesting visions of the posthuman occurs when humans are represented in contact with aliens, where the ability of the latter to share memories is transferred to the now very remote successors to the human race. They gain telepathic capabilities to access instantly the same memories and information in a structure that Stapleton in many ways compares to our present-day ideas of a cloud of information accessible to all.

The possible emergence of new levels of consciousness is one of the most interesting aspects of the way technology develops. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann gives social systems a prominent place in his theory, insisting that communicative systems have not merely been an abstraction for a lot of messages impacted by humans, but that these systems should instead be considered as having an internal logic of their own that cannot be reduced to the sum of intentions in

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the messages (Luhmann 1995: 22). Akin to this, the evolutionary psychologist Merlin Donald repeatedly stressed how dependent the modern human being is on networks:

> the personal cognitive capacities of human beings are highly over-rated (this includes our so-called geniuses). Some people may appear to be incredibly clever if they are fortunate enough to be functioning well in a coherent community of mind, largely because our digital networks provide them with such formidable resources. In other words, when married to an effective network, and in possession of the right combination of genes, we can be made to look, as individuals, much smarter than any of us would look if left entirely to our own resources. Geniuses are the lucky possessors of particular talents sought after in a particular historical context. Social networks function as search engines, and when they find what they need in the form of a relevant talent, they can shower that particular individual with great rewards. (Donald 2014: 78)

The same scepticism towards geniuses can be found in Luhmann, whose theory also contains elaborate considerations on the importance of communicative media to the formation of both humans and societies.

If one accepts the premise that the evolution of human societies and the wealth of knowledge that has considerably facilitated the development of advanced societies, technologies, art, etc. is possibly dependent upon access to shared knowledge, the question is whether new technologies will take ways of sharing to a new level. Is the Internet merely an exterior resource of information, or do we interact so much with it that it is becoming a part of humanity? Does the constant sharing of information enable people to make better predictions about other people's states of mind? And further on, the integration of man and machine could unleash ways of interacting with digital information in a way that would leave no doubt about the existence of a larger, collective mind. The "hive mind" is a metaphor that has become popular to

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describe access to a collective bank of information, as well as a "wisdom of crowds" that can emerge from this.

Such concepts are central to William Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy (1984-1988), as well as to the *Matrix* movie series it inspired, which envisions a computer network that is a world of its own outside of the "real" world. The makers of *The Matrix*, Lilly and Lana Wachowski, have gone on to direct a series entitled *Sense8*, in which eight individuals of very different cultural backgrounds are able to share each other's skills and insights in a way that empowers them. They do not suggest a technological cause for these superhuman powers, which is a freedom writers and filmmakers have, but settle for using the obvious fascination of what it would mean if one were both strengthened by having access to other minds, and also put in a position entailing the loss of autonomy. If the expansion of one's mind and memory comes at the cost of not being able to experience a self, then this is a price that most fiction, and probably humans as well, would find too high.

The continued fascination with hive minds, and the technological possibilities that could bring such states closer to being real, provide new contexts for works that are usually not thought of in this perspective. One canonical example of this would be the magical realist traits in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), in which all the children born at the moment of India's independence in 1947 are able to communicate telepathically with each other. Rushdie, a declared fan of science fiction who made his debut in that genre with *Grimus* in 1975 and has since returned to it, would probably not object to inspiration from such futuristic perspectives, and certainly would not write them off as merely a hyperbolic enchantment.

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Conclusion

No matter whether the posthuman makes sense as something that is imminent (for example through the widespread use of man–machine interaction) or is for the most part taken as a looming possibility (for example through changes facilitated by radical gene editing), the topic of posthuman memory has had a significant resonance in literature, film, television, and art. The use of the topic to create stories and find ways of expressing different approaches to memory is noteworthy, but just as importantly, literature's engagement with scenarios of a changed human memory helps identify a number of values and functions related to memory. This investigation is nuanced and spans a number of levels, such as those of personal memory, political power, social functions, and the influence of a growing number of powerful media. It also stresses how memory and identity are more and more connected while at the same time the hope for a unique identity (a soul, a particular mind-set) is waning. Finally, the process of self-creation as of exceptional value to humans also goes together with what psychological experiments have long told us: that narratives are the most efficient mnemonic form of the human mind, but also the most indispensable. That is not likely to change in a broad definition of human capacities. Merlin Donald warns against the consequences the digital world can have for the individual in "The Digital Era: Challenges for the Modern Mind":

> Digital natives they may be, more skilled perhaps, but also more vulnerable, precisely because they are so wired into the system. We may campaign for open access to the Internet, and against censorship of any kind. This appeals to liberal values; but it also exposes the brain to an unstoppable plethora of powerful external factors, and renders the individual vulnerable to disintegrative forces that break up attention, and can prevent the formation of a coherent personal identity. (Donald 2014: 75)

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In *Cognitive Evolution and the Definition of Human Nature*, Donald concludes with reference to the exponential growth in networked memory, which poses a significant stress on our nervous system that we may not be wired for (Donald 2000: 27). The memory is not something Donald takes lightly: the way humans can use symbols, create representations, and share memories is unique to the species. What happens to memory would thus also be definitive for the future of humanity, whether it should be called posthuman or not:

> However, this will not happen unless the world directs its resources to prioritizing human needs over machine-logic. It is urgent that we promote the importance of subjects like history, and other value-related disciplines such as philosophy, art, literature, politics, and ethics in our educational systems. A new generation of digital natives will have to find a way to make the system work more effectively for the benefit of the people in the system, which can only be achieved by placing, and then keeping, machine-driven agendas in a subsidiary role. (Donald 2014: 79)

Posthuman memory is thus an urgent concern driven by a number of factors. The most uplifting of those may be that the ability to share stories has a profound effect on humans and remains a remarkably strong way to organise memory.

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