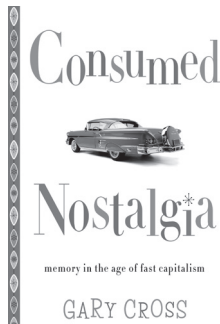
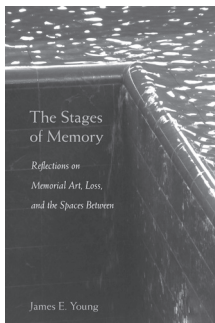
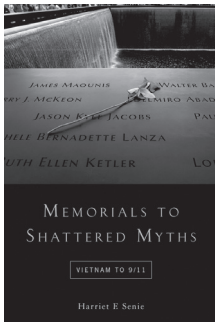


Review Essay

Material Memory: The Politics of Nostalgia on the Eve of *MAGA*

Bryan D. Price



Make Tea, Not War
Save Our NHS
Down with This Sort of Thing
Keep Calm & Carry On
Stop Worrying & Enjoy Your Life
Work Hard & Be Nice to People
Make Do & Mend
Read Some Fucking Orwell
Live Within Our Means
Support Our Boys
Make Britain Great Again
Take Back Control
Send Them Back
The Ministry of Nostalgia
Owen Hatherley

Charlottesville

On the evening of August 11, 2017, images began coming over the internet and cable news transoms of mainly young and serious-faced white men carrying torches and chanting “you will not replace us”—a phrase with a European provenance geared toward Muslims—along with the anti-Semitic derivation, “Jews will not replace us,” and the Nazi-tinged incantation of “blood and soil.” They were marching in a column toward the Rotunda on the University of Virginia’s campus in Charlottesville, which houses a statue of the school’s founder, Thomas Jefferson. This torchlight march bearing the ritualism of a midnight ride by the Ku Klux Klan

or even a Nazi rally—many of the participants displayed Nazi paraphernalia—was a precursor to a rightwing demonstration the following day to protest the

impending removal of a memorial to the Confederate General, Robert E. Lee. That day's rally erupted in violence culminating in the death of a young woman.

As the chaos unfolded, the former Klansman and past member of the Louisiana House of Representatives, David Duke, told a news reporter that the rally would "fulfill the promises of Donald Trump." This vague comment seemed to draw even closer together the ideologies of the President and his most fervent white nationalist supporters, who had gathered that day in an unashamed display of a self-conscious white supremacy the likes of which seemed hidden away in our nation's id. When the President failed to condemn the far right participants who precipitated much of the violence—or differentiate between the far right protesters and the liberal counter-protesters—it seemed to confirm the fears of many that President Trump's ideological predilections were intimately bound up with a particularly virulent strain of nativism, if not outright white supremacy.

MAGA

Much of what many have found so alarming about the recent turn of events has to do with the ways in which this confluence of whiteness and what it means to be American is inflected by the contested nature of collective memory. The instigation, for instance, of the Charlottesville debacle had to do with the civic worthiness of a Robert E. Lee statue, an object in which many see a distillation of Southern courage and heritage, and yet others see a monument that commemorates a time of mythical white unity, erected, like many Confederate monuments, as a symbol of the power, awe, and terror of white supremacy. The President, since Charlottesville, has made the protection and celebration of Confederate monuments a dominant feature of his culture war posture known, if only euphemistically, as *Trumpism*.

Trumpism is by no means a precise ideology—at least not yet—but in a very broad way it is characterized by an indifference to suffering, fear-mongering about perceived outsiders, the exacerbation of existing cultural fissures in order to undermine any kind of consensus, the aestheticization of violence, and, most important for the purposes of this essay, a revanchist need to reclaim the hegemony of a largely patriarchal whiteness lost to liberalism's meddling desire to topple it. This longing is characterized by the deeply nostalgic slogan *Make America Great Again*, shortened to the quickly mutating neologism *MAGA*, a phrase that, if one is troubled by this recent reckoning with American Fascism, chills the blood.

In this climate of *MAGA*, it is difficult not to see battle lines drawn across the arc of time in which we ask ourselves what constitutes not only *America* and *greatness*, but at what temporal point did it all turn so wrong? Even if we believe that history is cyclical and dynamic, as I do, it is hard to argue that this particular moment is not characterized by some kind of intense and rare malaise. Given this feeling of melancholy across the ideological spectrum, it is natural to seek out critical shifts or even ruptures where time breaks and we are prompted

to gaze back over the abyss. As our horizons of expectation concerning future happiness have become constrained, a reaction, for many, has been to abandon conventional politics—a circumstance unaided by the growing power of plutocratic mega-donors, making it seem as if the American experiment in democratic liberalism is itself slipping away into the past—and fixate on a very narrow and tribalist politics of culture and identity typified by appeals to some prelapsarian unity that many seek to restore. This desire takes its most noxious form among those so-called “white nationalists” who advocate for a derogation of utopia in the shape of a white “ethno-state.”



Much has been made of *Trumpism* and the longing of its most nostalgic adherents. Since the rise, and particularly the triumph of Trump, it has become *de rigueur* to write think pieces, columns, and other stories probing the deep connections between *Trumpism* and nostalgia with titles like, “Trump’s Rhetoric of White Nostalgia (*The Atlantic*),” “Why White, Evangelical Nostalgia Voters Choose Trump (*The Atlantic*),” and “Nostalgia: The Yearning That Will Continue To Carry the Trump Message Forward (*The Guardian*).” Recently in the *New Yorker*, the Russian and American journalist, Masha Gessen, who is very familiar with the current global confluence of nostalgia and authoritarianism put it, perhaps a bit gently, noting how, “In the nostalgic campaign that got him elected, Trump promised to take his voters back to an imaginary past in which they felt better, more secure, and generally more great than they do in the present.” This is at once obvious for nearly any conservative politician, and yet extremely distressing given the violence lurking behind his supporters’ calls for restoration.

While liberal historians, as well as polemicists, have long condemned nostalgia’s fugue state for the more egregious cases of conservative reaction and historical amnesia that have, at intermittent moments, gripped the United States and Europe, under the spell of *Trumpism*, nostalgia has emerged as something more sinister, actuating dark fantasies of racial realignment and the coming of an authoritarian regime tinged with threats of violence. In the midst of our current malaise, in other words, the mere mention of nostalgia is often conflated with the rise of *Trumpism*.

I was struck by this fact when going over a recent spate of books having to do with how we consume, mourn, and are confounded by the slipperiness of our collective past. These works, Harriet F. Senie’s *Memorials to Shattered Myths: Vietnam to 9/11* (2016), James E. Young’s *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (2016), Gary Cross’s *Consumed Nostalgia: Memory in the Age of Fast Capitalism* (2015), and Owen Hatherley’s *The Ministry of Nostalgia* (2016) offer an almost disorienting look at the politics of nostalgia on the eve of Trump’s rise, before his ubiquitous red hat had been burned into our collective imaginations. The authors are all critical, to one degree or another, of nostalgia, but their critiques do not anticipate the force and fury with

which this restorative nostalgia has devoured our political culture and discourse. Two of these works, for instance, which are explicitly devoted to monuments, do not allude in any substantive way to our current infatuation with Confederate monuments. To be clear, this is not a failing at all of the authors, but rather an illuminating fact about the intensity and speed with which we have come to this moment. And while each of these works do not foresee the coming specter of *Trumpism* with its recrudescence of a Confederate-era white supremacy, as one digs deeper down, the trajectory towards this reckoning reveals itself.

Material memory

In each of the works under review here, there is a rather vivid material component to memory and nostalgia. Whether these works deal with monuments (material reminders meant to collectively remember, largely traumatic events), or the quotidian things that people collect in order to remember various pasts lost in the maelstrom of modernity, or even the ubiquitous tchotchkes inscribed with the banal statement, *Keep Calm And Carry On*, as a means of misremembering some form of British midcentury austerity, underlying the consumption of these objects is the fundamental desire to mobilize the past in order to reconstitute some vague sense of the familiar as the present becomes both estranging and fractured.

This emphasis on materiality and fracture makes nostalgia into a potent force that blurs the boundaries between politics and aesthetics. In this way, nostalgia is often affiliated with the world of the senses. Discovered by a Swiss doctor in the seventeenth century, nostalgia was at first a literal disease (akin to homesickness) that afflicted soldiers and servants made to serve far from their Swiss homes. The concept migrated, first geographically and then metaphorically, but it has always maintained a deeply sensual component. These early sufferers of nostalgia, as Jean Starobinski has shown us, were actuated by sound: the rush of a river or the familiar noise of a cracked bell reminiscent of abandoned native villages. It has become almost a cliché to dwell, like Proust, on the turbid flood brought about by a tea-soaked madeleine. Just as nostalgia has metastasized and crossed disciplinary boundaries, it has colonized various discourses concerning materiality from the vast—architecture, landscapes, ruins, monuments—to the scaled down and quotidian—memorabilia, keepsakes, collectibles, photographs.

In the hands of twentieth-century philosophers concerned with revisions brought about by modernity, a potent metaphor emerged that blended nostalgia and materiality having to do with the trajectory between unity and fragmentation. There is a passage, for instance, from the Isaiah Berlin essay, “The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West,” which conveys this material imaginary concerning nostalgia in its broadest sense. “Our lives,” wrote Berlin, “are conceived as an agonized effort to piece together the broken fragments of the perfect whole with which the universe began, and to which it may yet return.” This “persistent idea,” Berlin continued, “underlies all the old Utopias and has deeply influenced western metaphysical, moral, and political ideas.” Or consider, Albert Camus’s *Myth of*

Sisyphus (1942), which addresses a world that has been revealed as inscrutable and wrecked, producing a “nostalgia for unity” and an “appetite for the absolute.” Camus continued, “So long as the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes, everything is reflected and arranged in the unity of its nostalgia. But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding.”

This modernist handling of nostalgia begins in the acknowledgement that absolutes have been wrecked and destroyed: reduced to “partial objects” and other shattered bits. This idea of time materialized and then smashed into multitudes however, is at its most potent (and famous) in Walter Benjamin’s allegory of the Angel of History that characterized the unfoldment of time-as-history in terms of the ruins and debris of progress unfolding as a catastrophic rupture that produces the desire to “make whole what has been smashed.” “This is how the angel of history must look,” wrote Benjamin in his last manuscript before taking his life in 1940 while he himself was running from his Nazi pursuers,

His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at 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 and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm.

Instead of nostalgia being, as many of its detractors would have us believe, the past frozen into a deathly form of perfect ideological compliance, in Benjamin’s estimation it was an ambivalent gaze that fell upon the past as a dispersion of fragments that could never attain their original unity. In this way the past may, instead of exuding some vampiric quality, live alongside us and be made useful in its hybridity and heterogeneity.

Monumental Nostalgia

As metaphorical or even literary as these conceptions of time and memory are, they are given real material resonance in the various avenues nostalgia offers to reconvene the past, however imagined that past may be. As James Young writes in his introduction to *The Stages of Memory*, “Part of our contemporary culture’s hunger for the monumental . . . is its nostalgia for the universal values and ethos by which it once knew itself as a unified culture.” This idea of “monumental nostalgia,” where contested visions of experience and remembrance collide has become, as referenced above, a particularly intense flashpoint in this recent

installment of our ongoing culture war pitting history against myth, and as these allusions to fragments and wholes would suggest, a perceived universality concerning American values against the multitudinous nature of our contemporary culture oriented toward a variety of particularisms.



A discussion of monuments, particularly in the hands of Senie and Young, inevitably becomes a discussion of death, primarily political death, bordering on martyrdom. The event—though the word is far too benign—that hangs over any such discussion is, of course, the Holocaust. This is particularly the case for Young, the director of the institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, as well as a widely published author on public art, collective memory, and memorials, who covers a wider global frame than Senie, an Art History and Museum Studies Professor at City College, City University of New York, who offers analysis confined to the United States. The connective tissue between each of these works, however, are extended discussions of the 9/11 memorial (*Reflecting Absence*) and a shared awe at the gentle woundedness of Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the placidity of which, Senie characterizes as “therapeutic.” Each also focuses on the contentious nature of memorial building, focusing on the trajectory from a spontaneous web of memorials to judged competitions, and then the finished products themselves, of which Young eschews in favor of anatomizing the traumatic “process and work of memory (17).” Senie, as her title would suggest, *Memorials to Shattered Myths*, is more concerned with the quintessentially American desire to deflect our attention from “actual events,” which she reads as a “form of denial” that emphasizes the funerary aspect of American commemorative built environments that seek to overwhelm our need to resolve historic problems with the solemn demand that we respect the dead—an instinct familiar to all who observe after an American mass-shooting the admonishment to not “politicize” the tragedy.

While the absence of *Trumpism* in these works on monuments in particular, as I had mentioned above, was striking given its prominence in recent discourse, in taking a closer look, one can detect the gathering storm. Young, for instance, completes *The Stages of Memory* with a chapter on Utøya, the Norwegian Island that the terrorist Anders Breivik visited on July 22, 2011 in order to murder 69 young members of a Workers’ Youth League summer camp after having detonated a bomb in Oslo killing eight. I fixate on this chapter because it complicates the American exceptionalist idea of a country, held widely by conservatives, of a people, a creed, and a culture, ideologically separate from its European forebears, revealing instead global links among identitarians for whom their nation, and by extension, patriotism, is subservient to their whiteness.

Like many ideological fanatics, Breivik left behind a manifesto, in which he wallowed in retrograde ideas that have become commonplace in America lately as media attention has been showered on radical white supremacists like

Richard Spencer, the president of the National Policy Institute, who advocates for an all-white state and who helped to organize the violent Charlottesville rally. The narrative of Anders Breivik and his terrifying murderous rampage at Utøya ties our current pathologies to those of Europe along the racist lines of preserving some vague form of whiteness rooted in the conception of the past as prelapsarian and pure, and the present in a state of cultural ruins. Of an imagined and Edenic nineteen-fifties family who could have time-traveled to the present and then made their way back to tell of their miraculous travels, Breivik writes, “Their story would be of a nation that had decayed and degenerated at a fantastic pace, moving in less than a half a century from the greatest countries on earth to Third World nations, overrun by crime, noise, drugs and dirt.”

Breivik presents a worldview that is not far removed from what is offered today by *Trumpism*; the manifesto is littered with fallacies, imagined futures (and pasts), and paeans to a beautifully resilient western (white) European history that had fallen under the spell of Marxism, feminism, and then, inevitably Islam, all of which sought to erode the traditional hegemony of an all white Europe. “Time is of the essence.” He wrote, “We have only a few decades to consolidate a sufficient level of resistance before our major cities are completely demographically overwhelmed by Muslims.” The coming Muslim horde, according to Breivik, was conditioned by a liberal culture of “political correctness” that disallowed critiques of otherness based solely on its deviation from whiteness, and thus slaughtered what he perceived to be the future of liberalism in the form of innocent children.

Young, in delineating the unfolding of a memorial process which was made even more complex by the geographical scope of the tragedy—the murdered children came from all over Norway, which produced a commemorative unfolding that was similarly territorially spread out—acknowledges the idea that Norway was ill prepared to commemorate such a tragedy, because it had been “blessedly” free of both “domestic mass murder and the memorial traditions” that attend them. Left unsaid was that this act of diabolical mass murder seems more at home in America with its addiction to firearms and the polarizing controversy such an addiction invites. Senie, in her interrogation of the American scene, pays close attention to such events and their meaning through memorial-making (or the eliding that that process conveys), focusing in particular on the Columbine Massacre and the Oklahoma City bombing, the memorial to which, Senie notes, fails to address the “fissures in the social fabric of Middle America” that the man who perpetrated it, Timothy McVeigh, was a product of. These fissures, typified by McVeigh’s “passionate interest in guns and survivalism,” had to do with a long-standing conservative mistrust of the federal government, and its “infringement on individual rights.”

Memorials to Shattered Myths works as a helpful preamble to our current malaise. The point of Senie’s work is that in our failure to account for the root causes of these self-inflicted tragedies by instead focusing on the private trauma associated with personal grief we have also failed to confront a tortured history that, in my estimation, has led inexorably to our current reckoning. This places

a heavy burden upon memorials, but the seemingly unending repetition of such incidents reveals our failure to even approach, however tentatively, a resolution of radical differences that are invigorated by a commemorative impulse to forget them. In promoting a narrative that focuses on the depoliticized memory of the dead, or even the singular “evil” of the lone perpetrator, as opposed to the historical movements that such perpetrators represent, we have left these wounds to fester and metastasize, bringing us to this moment where such noxious ideologies have become normalized by a media climate obsessed with paying equal attention and, sadly, respect, to “both sides,” even if one side seeks to exterminate the other.

In lamenting the process of the Oklahoma City Bombing in particular, Senie writes, “Although the bombing offered ample evidence of a dissident core in the nation’s heartland, no aspect of the three-part built memorial... acknowledges fissures in the body politic (61).” The instinct to collapse the difference between, in Senie’s phrase, the “heroes and victims” of a given tragic event creates the conditions for our historic irresponsibility in which we obscure or totally elide our tragic missteps and absolve ourselves of our moral culpability as a society. To not confront the pathologies that exist within these “fissures in our body politic,” is to, in other words, make an unofficial “pact of forgetting”—though not, as in Spain, legally—in which we agree not to peer behind the curtain of our differences in order to commemorate, not only the victims of a tragedy, but the rancid and dissident worldview that has produced such monsters as Timothy McVeigh who are motivated by their illiberalism and radical anti-statism as justifications for mass-murder. When we agree to forget not only the meaning, but the causes of a tragedy, we rob ourselves of resolution and doom our progeny with further damage. This has become apparent in our recent reckoning with Confederate monuments, a product of more than a century of amnesia hastened by the attention we have paid to various myths of honor and the war dead at the expense of what such people fought and died protecting: a culture built upon the rock, not only of buying and selling human beings, but of a white supremacy that is returning upon us like a dark wave.

Capital and Austerity

It can be argued that this recent rightward shift has been hastened by the 2008 global financial crisis in which the scarcity of certain resources, particularly jobs and housing, has created a global backlash against immigrants and refugees. And while conspiratorial fanatics like Timothy McVeigh—and other recent anti-statists, such as Cliven Bundy—may conjure up fantasies of a tyrannical Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms or the Bureau of Land Management, plotting, behind closed doors, the enslavement of the American people, capital, by and large, unregulated and untethered from any sense of the common good, has done, it would seem, far greater damage to the fortunes of working people in this country and abroad. As anxieties rise, wealth falls, jobs are lost, homes are abandoned, and debt piles up, nostalgia, because of its terminological slipperi-

ness, becomes a seductive conceptual framework through which to view politics, culture (particularly so-called consumer culture), art, aesthetics, anything really that falls within the realm of criticism.

Two recent works, from two very different perspectives (as well as continents), seek to elucidate the links between capital and nostalgia, a complicated project that goes back to at least the postwar period in America. Gary Cross's *Consumed Nostalgia* and Owen Hatherley's *The Ministry of Nostalgia* describe something disquieting about how the past is mobilized in order to make palatable the negative revisions brought about by modern capitalism. In Cross's hands, nostalgia becomes therapeutic as a kind of siren song enveloping cultural artifacts designed to deliver those of us troubled by the vicissitudes of capitalism into a simpler past; for Hatherley though it is just as seductive, but instead of encouraging consumption it makes palatable the bare existence of Britain's recent movement toward austerity and the dismantling of its welfare state. In each case the author seeks to anatomize nostalgia and trace its theoretical equipment into the past, and in each case finds its genealogy degenerate from something natural, actual, and based on lived experience to, for Hatherley, the protection and reimagining of a "remarkably distorted idea of the past," and for Cross, a state of pure infantilization, reducing nostalgia to the desire to recover or re-experience one's past through the consumption of certain artifacts associated with childhood.

Cross seeks to empathize with such desires in an age of "fast capitalism... a particularly intensive form of commodity culture, entailing the increasingly rapid pace of production and purchase, creating profit through the fast turnaround of investment." Such a process, in Cross's analysis, has created disquietude among many, producing a "distinctly modern" kind of stress by which, "people found identity and meaning in specific goods but, as a result felt their selfhoods were threatened when those things disappeared." As a reaction to "fast capitalism" a new strain of nostalgia emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, christened by Cross as "consumed nostalgia," which has largely been manifested in the collecting of dolls and other toys (including "muscle cars") and the consumption of old music and 1950s and 1960s-era television shows. In this way, Cross opposes this consumption of one's personal childhood ephemera to older varieties of nostalgia, which he terms *communal*, *familial*, and *fashion*, primarily on the grounds that consumed nostalgia is bound to a desire to re-experience the past and, in a related way, speaks to something intensely personal as opposed to collective or communitarian—an attempt, for better or worse, to depoliticize nostalgia, which has the quality of forgiving "fast capitalism" for creating such "disquietude." This in turn makes it so the critique falls, unjustly in my opinion, on nostalgia, as opposed to capitalism.

In Hatherley's case, *austerity nostalgia*, is deeply political in its offering in place of past promises of working-class liberation through a robust, socialist welfare state, "a return of repression itself" by urging the acceptance of suffering and going without made palatable by the cold comfort of Blitz-era encouragement. Just as the campaign of Donald Trump brought to the world the nostalgic

slogan *Make America Great Again* in the material form of a red hat, austerity nostalgia, according to Hatherley, has been reduced to shorthand in a similarly mass-produced fashion recognizable worldwide. Hatherley relates in an anecdote about being confronted in a department store in Poland by, “a collection of notebooks, mouse pads, diaries and the like, featuring a familiar English sans serif font, white on red, topped with the crown above the legend, in English: *Keep Calm and Carry On*.” This seemingly innocuous phrase, for Hatherley, alludes to a manipulative cultural process by which Britons have been seduced by this notion of themselves as self-denying, ascetic, tough-minded, and able to withstand all manner of deprivations. But instead of marshaling such fortitude in order to resist Hitler’s Blitzkrieg, its contemporary form is mobilized as a means of acquiescing to Tory austerity measures and the neoliberal push to privatize, at least portions of Britain’s welfare state in the form of public housing and the National Health Service. Austerity nostalgia then, is the kind of nostalgia that seeks to make the endurance of suffering agreeable, perhaps even enjoyable on the grounds that such asceticism is woven into the British character. Such a nostalgia exists under the assumption, like those who long for the historical unity, some may say homogeneity, that monuments can confer, that a single strain of historical patrimony can be reinstated in a multivocal present.



Each of these works fits into a longstanding critique of nostalgia as fictive, amnesia-driven, quasi-fascist, or therapeutic. As early as 1948, the liberal historian Richard Hofstadter condemned an “overpowering nostalgia” for producing a “ravenous appetite for Americana,” by which he meant “historical novels, fictionalized biographies, collections of pictures and cartoons, books on American regions and rivers.” This was certainly not the first attack on nostalgia, but it revealed the contours of a now popular and longstanding critique of nostalgia as sentimental, weak-minded, opposed to the hard *truth* of history, and—as Cross suggests—oriented toward objects and other fetishized commodities.

This critique spooled out in different directions over the ensuing decades coming to its apogee in 1991 with Michael Kammen’s *Mystic Chords of Memory*, which enjoined previous works (both British) such as Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Traditions* (1983) and Robert Hewison’s *The Heritage Industry* (1987), in castigating nostalgia as “those memories and traditions so new in origin that the banality of their invocation is manifest.” Such memories, Kammen further advised, were to be dismissed “as mere nostalgia . . . the exploitation of heritage . . . the utilization of utterly contrived myths.” Nineteen ninety one also saw Christopher Lasch’s *The True and Only Heaven*—in which he devoted a (largely brilliant) chapter to nostalgia as the “abdication of memory”—and Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, which discerned a difference between the pain-inflected “modernist nostalgia”

of a figure like Walter Benjamin and the commodified pastiche of *retro* that capitalism offered as a pallid substitute for the past.

While each of these works fit into this critical genealogy of nostalgia, what is so different about them is how they envision the stakes of nostalgia. In the case of Cross, because of the scope of his inquiry the stakes are quite low, which makes the analysis unsatisfying somehow. I cannot help thinking that this is through no fault of his own, but because of this moment we have found ourselves in, where nostalgia is invested with so much critical import, which, without even its recent embeddedness with *Trumpism*, I believe it deserves. Cross's instinct to depoliticize nostalgia has the effect of confining nostalgia's, in this case, negative force, to a largely affluent consumer culture addicted not merely to antiques, but to their childhoods.

This insistence on tethering nostalgia to the recovery of one's childhood lies partially in Cross's intellectual background, having written a book about the history of children and their relationships with toys—*Kids' Stuff: Toys and the Changing World of American Childhood* (1999). Tracing such desires into adulthood though provides only a restricted vision of a concept as protean and capacious as nostalgia. What is particularly troubling is that Cross presents “consumed nostalgia” as the most advanced (not as sophisticated but most reflective of the present) stage of an evolutionary concept. While Cross certainly allows for a “modern nostalgia” that “is a richly complex and even contradictory phenomenon,” he often uses language intimating that his concept of “consumed nostalgia” holds some present primacy: “Today's nostalgia seems to help us cope with the extraordinary speed-up of time by letting us return to our childhoods... Today's nostalgia is rooted in special emotions linked to recovering memories distinctive to the objects of modern childhood and consumerism,” and “the homesickness that once drove [nostalgia] has largely been replaced by a desire to recover the things and experiences of a novelty-driven consumer society.” Cross cannot in a single work be made to consider nostalgia in its many forms, and yet to reduce it to what can be read as a retreat from the instability of capitalism and modernity into the womb of childhood, in my opinion, does little to convince its (largely progressive and liberal) critics of its aesthetic, as well as political worthiness.

Perhaps it is Cross's constrained vision of the materialities of nostalgia that unsettles me. The things that demand our nostalgic attention ought not be confined to the remnants of our childhoods. To quarantine nostalgia to the specifically personal—to the plane of psychology—forecloses a host of nostalgic attachments. In our current age, it is important to see nostalgia in its many guises, some innocent and innocuous, some sophisticated and productive, and some grimly malignant. On at least two occasions Cross mentions the late scholar of Slavic literature, Svetlana Boym, and her groundbreaking *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001). No figure has done more to repair nostalgia's battered image than Boym, famous for her typology that separated nostalgia's quasi-fascist and conspiratorial imagination from its poetic, modernist desire to reflect upon the past's shadowy back alleys. Boym's project emphasized the poetry of the

discontinuous, the fragmentary, the partial, and the ruinous in light of the totalizing force that describes the xenophobic and reactionary quality of nostalgia. Opposing his own vision of nostalgia, Cross writes, “instead of seeking a lost community or cause, we recover our personal childhoods in a vast array of objects and recorded sensations. This essentially negates Boym’s critique of nostalgia.” I respectfully part company with Cross on this point. Boym, far from reducing nostalgia to an “intolerant tribalism” or “narrowly cast familialism,” created a powerful hermeneutic with which to “read” a variety of landscapes, texts, and images across numerous historical topographies in order to discern various productions of nostalgic desire where one would have scarcely noticed them before for fear of trafficking in such a disparaged idea.

The history of nostalgia is rich, complicated, and largely one which turns on lexicographical matters. Having been coined to describe a seventeenth century disease (a literal homesickness) it has been made to carry a lot of freight over the years migrating between the realms of medicine, psychology, politics, and culture. Perhaps the plane that *Consumed Nostalgia* covers is too narrow for my taste, too wedded to the dictates of psychology and the realm of the individual. I think Boym points us toward nostalgia’s more complicated analytical promise. “Unlike melancholia,” Boym noticed, “which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.” This hybrid notion of a nostalgia that plays between the spaces of the individual and the collective, politics and aesthetics, the temporal and the material, offers the richest vision of nostalgia as it relates to our understanding of histories complicated by the “disquieting” injunctions of modernity and capitalism.



In Hatherley’s field of vision, nostalgia can be insidious, but it is more of a political tactic (or strategic language) than an infantilizing disease. And while he uses the mass-produced imagery of *Keep Calm and Carry On* as an entry point into the contours of nostalgia discourse, his passion lies in how this brand of nostalgia has been mobilized in order to revise the built environment of England, tilting it away from the egalitarianism that the welfare state had promised before the triumph of the Thatcherite right hell-bent on destroying the idea of the state’s responsibility to provide for its people in the form of a National Health Service, Council Estates, the comprehensive schools, and New Universities. It is not Thatcher at all that comes under attack, however, but who we refer to in the United States as the Baby Boomers (in Hatherley’s phrase, the similarly liberal “late sixties generation”) who have done much to dismantle the welfare state with “hysterical” attacks “on social democracy” as “statist” and even “totalitarian.” What emerges in *The Ministry of Nostalgia* is not merely an attack on the nostalgia that makes this dismantling possible through the consolation of oneself with the “iconography of a completely different and unlikely era,” but

two competing visions of nostalgia itself, which Hatherley, perhaps unwittingly, reveals in his own desire to reinstate the past in the form of the welfare state that was partially put into practice between 1945 and 1979.

I use the term “unwittingly,” because Hatherley does not seem to want his desired ends to be tainted by the stigma of nostalgia, but that is only because nostalgia has been freighted with such a stigma by generations of authors clearly uneasy about the ways in which the past and present are nested together. And, as is often the case, those who are branded as nostalgic are generally conservative, regressive, revanchist, or reactionary. Hatherley admits as much, noting, when it comes to weaponizing the past, “the Conservative party are, and always have been, the experts (12).” In absorbing Hatherley’s instincts about the past and his prescriptions for the present, however, it is clear that another type of nostalgia is at work, one that is not oriented toward, what Boym characterized as “restorative” nostalgia, which describes the current nationalist tirades going on from Trumpist America to England and its Brexit fever. While Hatherley may find nostalgia to be an insidious feature of our current neo-liberal moment, what animates his own personal project of “attempting to rehabilitate the built environment created by this moment of social democracy,” if not a nostalgia that operates upon a different ideological principle, not restorative, but in Boym’s phrase, “reflective.” His language invokes the materialist image of nostalgia as the bringing back together of a past torn asunder by, in Benjamin’s phrase, “progress.” “The fragments of it,” Hatherley continues referring to his socialist project concerning a fair and equitable built environment, “do prove that an egalitarian future is feasible.” At this present moment, an egalitarian future only seems possible to someone invested in the past, not with a cold-eyed and progressive rationalism, but with a utopian desire to reconvene what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, had referred to as “past hopes,” writing, “what is at stake is not the conservation of the past but the fulfillment of past hopes.” In the end, nostalgia need not be what pushes us back into the past, but what pulls us into a more just future built upon the foundations of those dreamers whose hoped-for future may still be ours. That is a nostalgia worthy of defense.