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Inherited Revolution. Narratives in Transgenerational Memory Transfer

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Abstract: Our essay deals with narratives of social upheaval that act as vehicles for transgenerational memory transfer. We look at narratives of collectively experienced processes of emancipation and the subsequent possibility of remembering things not experienced firsthand under the prism of the political event of revolution understood as an inherently violent process (Arendt 1990). In this context, we inquire about postmemory along similar lines to those staked out by Marianne Hirsch, while also considering whether the term can be separated from trauma and linked to other emotional responses of comparable affective intensity. Memories of violence are frequently disjointed and impressionistic. The connection of fragments to a narrative context is often severed while the action of linking the threads into a coherent narrative faces vehement resistance. In principle, this is not different from the experience of violence in revolutions and their remembrance. However, narratives on revolution tend to exert a strong force of attraction upon their recipients. Considering the figures of *cycle*, *linear progression*, *iteration*, *disruption* and *irreversibility* as the time modes of revolution, we look at how these have enabled entirely new understandings of time since the nineteenth century. New forms of temporality, in turn, are entangled with the role *displacement* plays in the relationship between a transgenerational transfer of narratives and the construction of narrative time.

In order to explore how a generation deals with the dominance (Hirsch 2012) of the narratives transmitted to them by the preceding one, we deal with two models in which affective states charged with both suffering and pleasure are developed into terms of cultural and literary theory: Bini Adamczak's reading of *desire* as fetish in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia, and Svetlana Boym's work on *nostalgia* as an emotional disposition characteristic for modernity. Taking into account that both models are more or less constructed by cultural practices, historical events, and transformations in the history of ideas, and thus cannot always be precisely distinguished from one another, we present two main narrative strategies: The reception of the stories of one generation by another involves either

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contracting the affective intensity of their narratives at the expense of linear time or expanding narrative time far beyond individual life spans. For our analysis we mainly refer to Rodolfo Usigli's *Ensayo de un crimen* and Heinrich Heine's *Ludwig Börne: A Memorial* as post memory narratives on revolution. We understand them as examples of each narrative strategy and as part of the dialectic of this way of remembering.

Keywords: revolution, post memory, desire, nostalgia, narrative time, generation

1 Introduction

In the summer of 1830, Heinrich Heine withdrew to the then British-occupied North Sea Island of Heligoland to seek respite from the censorship and restorationist climate in Prussia. Following a series of ordeals in his homeland, he was ready to »give up politics and philosophy« (Heine 1978, 47)[1] and dedicate himself exclusively to poetry. Heine was not longing for a specific destination in which to settle after his stay in Heligoland; indeed, all of the places where he potentially could move struck him as equivalently unattractive. So, as he postponed his decision, he satisfied his longing to be in a different place by reading narratives of different times: In addition to Paul Warnefried's *Story of the Lombards* (cf. ibid., 46), one of the few books he had taken to the island with him, Heine devoted himself above all to the Bible, the »fatherland« of the Jews (ibid., 38).

Nevertheless, the solace Heine found in reading could not have lasted long. In late July, a strange occurrence foreshadowed the turn his life was about to take: Upon returning from a voyage at sea, Heine's landlord on Heligoland reported that he had been hit by the smell of freshly baked cake while out on the waves, a smell that seized him with homesickness and lured him back to shore. The very next day, a packet of foreign newspapers reached the peaceful island. Like »sunrays wrapped in printing paper« (ibid., 51), the news from Paris shone into Heine's incredulous eyes: Another revolution was happening in France. A storm of enthusiasm swelled up within him, moving him to depart for Paris to join the revolutionary event.

For Heine, there was no doubt about the righteousness of the participants in what would come to be known as the July Revolution: Unlike their »fathers« in the French Revolution of 1789, who »in addition to all their heroic deeds had also

1 This and all subsequent direct quotations from non-English sources have been translated by the authors of this article into American English. The article was proofread by Adam Baltner, whom we would like to thank for the excellence of his work.

committed those maniacal atrocities«, the sons' hands had »only been bloodied this time in the melee of righteous resistance, not after the battle. The people bandaged the wounds of their enemies themselves, and when the deed was done, they went quietly back to their daily business without demanding so much as a pittance for their great labor« (ibid., 49).

Triggered by this unforeseen recurrence of revolutionary events, Heine describes his »Freyheitsrausch« (ibid., 56), or freedom-intoxication, in eight letters addressed to an unnamed friend; these letters form a crucial part of Heine's book *Ludwig Börne: A Memorial*, first published a decade later in 1840. Born in 1797, Heine was too young to have had firsthand experience of a social upheaval of comparable extent to the French Revolution, as were many other German writers who traveled to Paris after 1830. Nevertheless, his enthusiasm was stoked by the memory of the revolution that had been preserved through narration, orally and textually transmitted from one generation to another. Although other readings have located the political events of 1830 within a Great Revolution that began in 1789 (cf. Horst 2000, 219), Heine understands them as separate from what had transpired towards the end of the previous century. And yet Heine is clearly interested in the *presence* of the 1789 French Revolution in July of 1830, or in »the meaning of the revolution across epochs and in the contemporary context« (ibid., 216). Here, the question for Heine is not simply one of historiographical perspective, or of how a political event is remembered over time, but of the enduring effect an event long past can have – more or less independently of whether it is remembered. In terms of narrative theory, one might speak of an internal narrative analepsis, or an instance when the narration of temporally precedent action extends into the substance of the narrated present.

Although Heine appears to be attracted to the relative emotionlessness of the 1830 French revolutionaries, he describes his own personal decision to leave for France as fueled by a state of euphoria. In *Ludwig Börne*, Heine's reception of unspecified narratives of the French Revolution of 1789 is dressed up in sensory experiences and embedded in pathos. Following this outline, we will examine the transgenerational transfer of narratives as a process of displacement and mediation of memory. As we do so, we will attempt to come to grips with the relationship between the narrativization of lived experience, narrative time, and the two diametrically opposed forces at play between narratives and their recipients: attraction and dominance. Additionally, we will consider forms of resistance to both of these forces. Our exploration will concern itself with the specific political-philosophical phenomenon of revolution, which will be analyzed in terms of its particular relationship to historical time, narrative time, and the above-mentioned forces. Our analysis will reveal that two strategies emerge for organizing story time when subsequent generations tell the stories of their predecessors:

Either a linear time order is suspended as an emotional response to the narrative transmission of revolutionary events takes center stage, or the story time is expanded beyond the lifespan of a generation so that the central process depicted in the narrative becomes visible.

2 Postmemory

Heinrich Heine studied the events of 1789 and their aftermath through the works of Madame de Staël (cf. 1818), an eyewitness to the Reign of Terror, and of Adolph Thiers (cf. 1823–1827), the initiator of a republican reception of the French Revolution. Yet Heine was also exposed to oral narratives of people who had experienced the French Revolution themselves (cf. Horst 2000, 212). The impression these sources made on Heine not only led him to consider writing a book on the French Revolution himself (cf. ibid., 216 sq.), but also to grow increasingly attracted to the time and place of these stories, to which he had no access through his own memory.

Which of these narratives first activated Heine's attraction is beside the point. As we will see, what matters is that the nature of this attraction meant that it could only be based on narratives to which Heine's own lived experience granted him no access. Probably the most popular elaboration of »nostalgia without lived experience« comes from the work of Arjun Appadurai, who has referred to the phenomenon as *ersatz nostalgia* (Appadurai 1996, 77 sq.). In his analysis of »the peculiar logic of nostalgia in the politics of mass consumption« (ibid., 77), Appadurai proposes a division between a primary form of nostalgia, which establishes an emotional bond between people and objects by symbolically evoking a memory of real loss (cf. ibid., 78), and a secondary form, based on someone's ability to »bring the faculty of nostalgia to an image that will supply the memory of a loss he or she has never suffered« (ibid.). This relationship of »armchair nostalgia, nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory« (ibid.), makes it possible for nostalgic longing to be addressed to an object other than one's own past: It induces you into a state of »missing what you haven't lost« (Boym 2001, 38). Nevertheless, if the perception of loss can be communicated from one generation to the other in narrative form, if the collective memory of this perception can be passed on through, for example, narratives of collective, national, ethnic, symbolic, territorial, or personal loss, then the feeling of loss can transcend individual life spans and hence also individual recollection (cf. Assman 2010). Likewise, this feeling can still convey a sense of belonging, or in Appadurai words, a *primary form of nostalgia* – regardless

of whether those who experience the feeling associate it with *their own* lived experience. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the mechanisms through which collective lived experiences of social upheaval assume a narrative form that transfers them to, and reinscribes them into, the identities of subjects from a subsequent generation who cannot access them through firsthand memory. Although these subjects lack personal experience of the revolutionary processes lived through by their predecessors, they can still share a sense of both ownership towards and belonging to these processes. Indeed, the historical and political relevance of these processes – the fact that they have shaped society in various ways – means that they will continue to play a major role in the constitution of collective identities, be these identities sympathetic or antagonistic towards one another. For a revolution to bring about fundamental, long-lasting change, it must commit future generations to its program (cf. Parnes/Vedder/Willer 2008, 12 sq.). This requires legislative measures, such as the reform of inheritance law that took place during the French Revolution. This reform abolishes the right of noble primogeniture (*majorat*) (cf. Vedder 2005, 94–96) and brings to the fore a clash between two concepts of generation, one understood as biological succession within a family, the other as social simultaneity (cf. Parnes/Vedder/Willer 2008, 11).

Marianne Hirsch has developed the concept of postmemory to describe a kind of memory between individual and historical memory, one that is »distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection« (Hirsch 2012, 22). Similar to collective memory, where impressions from one's past are reconnected with the course of history when an individual assumes the perspective of the group (cf. Halbwachs 1980, 58), postmemory also involves a process of mediation between a memory and its source that is far more indirect than individual remembrance: In Hirsch's words, postmemory's »connection to the object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation« (Hirsch 2012, 22). Imaginative investment and creation perhaps even contradict the very idea of memory recollection. For if we think of narrativization as a process that memory has to undergo to be mediated in the first place, or in other words, if we understand the act of establishing a linear order as essential to memory as a process of transmission, then we have on the one hand, with *imaginative investment and creation*, a process that suggests a prospectively oriented production of narrative, and on the other, with *recollection*, the attempt to retrieve as much information from the past as possible. The justification for postmemory, a notion developed in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, is that complete narrative retrieval is sometimes impossible due to the traumatic character of source events: »Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that precede their birth,

whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated« (ibid.). When a memory generation is subjected to extreme violence through source events such as experiences of persecution and survival in concentration camps, narratives of postmemory must be built upon fragments and debris. The narrativization processes of postmemory thus operate where violence and trauma have extinguished the possibility of narration based upon memory recollection.

Postmemory and memory differ from one another not only in terms of their processes of mediation between subject and source (imaginative investment and creation versus recollection), but also with regards to the repositories that feed and make their respective narratives of remembrance possible. Once the perceptible source of lived experience is out of reach for narratives of postmemory, it is replaced by a combination of oral history and a composite of different material and medial sources such as texts, photographs, or memory objects. The question of who (or what) tells the stories of postmemory is complex, for among memorabilia and photos, spoken and written words, behaviors, and even among silence, we can find different sources demanding to be narrativized. In other words, in the realm of postmemory, we necessarily stand before a nexus of different narrativization processes, each performed according to its own media-anthropological specificities and also always entangled with institutionalized procedures and their operative mechanisms and narrative forms. Marianne Hirsch's research, which uses the concept of the family album as imagetext (cf. Mitchell 1994) to discuss the narrativization of family photographs, provides but one example of how an investigation can proceed on this terrain. Further examples can be seen, among other, in the works of Svetlana Boym and Arjun Appadurai, who explore nostalgia and the social lives of things through the narrativization of popular culture, fashion, and commodities (cf. Boym 2001, Appadurai 1996), or of Saidiya Hartman, who examines the social lives of black subjects through the narrativization of letters, diaries, trial transcripts, prison case files, fragments of songs, and newspaper clippings (cf. Hartman 2020).

During his time in Heligoland, Heine intensively followed the events in Paris as they were passed on to him in newspapers, letters, and books. As he did, he noticed that »poignant details« – such as a story about a dog named Medor who kept watch at the grave of his master after the latter was shot in the tumult – »occupied [him] far more than the meaningful whole« (Heine 1978, 51). In a metonymic interchange of the part with the whole, Heine pursues these details, following the revolution that had already begun to sweep through the countryside before his birth like a hunter pursuing tracks. And in turn, in the words of the historian Carlo Ginzburg, this pursuit makes the hunter a narrator: »The hunter would have been the first to ›tell a story‹, because he alone was able to read, in

the silent, nearly imperceptible tracks left by his prey, a coherent sequence of events.« (Ginzburg 1989, 103)

Having broached the question of how heterogeneous and transmedial sources are narrativized, we might also ask: What happens to the dominant narratives (cf. Hirsch 2012, 22) connected with these sources once they are transferred to the following generation? In his introduction to *Narrative Dynamics*, an anthology that traces the established categories for the study of narratives, Brian Richardson asserts that the narrative act is necessarily constituted by how a narrative is told, the identity of the subject who tells it, its purpose, and the identity of its recipients (cf. Richardson 2002, 1). In sum, »a narrative cannot be divorced from the contexts of its utterance without substantially altering the narrative itself« (ibid.). For this reason, when examining postmemory processes of narrative transference, we must assume a dialectical relationship between the restorative force of the act of remembrance on the one hand, which can serve as a means of preserving a particular historical narrative or of guaranteeing its authenticity, and the inevitable narrative alteration involved in this act on the other – a byproduct of the fact that narrator, recipients, and purpose change virtually every time a narrative is told. Based on this insight, we must view the dominance that postmemory narratives enjoy over stories of the recipient generation's own lived experiences – and the resulting evacuation of significance (cf. Hirsch 2012, 22) from those stories – as open to contestation: If it is true that growing up with the stories of the preceding generation is not optional, their dominance may nevertheless be resisted at moments within the narrativization process. In the example provided by Marianne Hirsch, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, such resistance might be seen as residing in Spiegelman's power to rewrite the stories of his father, or in his portrayal of the process of their transmission and of the familial power relations they imply (cf. ibid.). Following this theory, we also argue for examining Hirsch's own scholarly work as a form of resistance to the dominance of received narratives within her own family by approaching her writings as an attempt to deconstruct and resignify the shadow cast by postmemory into her own life. Finally, Heine's *Ludwig Börne* presents yet another example of resistance: it is clear that the author's enthusiasm, fueled by revolutionary narratives, has brought him into situations against which he has to defend himself. His disappointment with the events of the July Revolution culminates in the statement: »When you read about the revolutions in the books, everything looks quite nice. [...] But while later encounters within them in reality might add to their grandiosity, they also provide a glimpse into their dirty and sordid details.« (Heine 1978, 71) For Heine, being aware of the sordid side of revolutions is what distinguishes him from people like Börne, who cannot escape revolutionary narratives and trade their »brilliant minds« for »coarse hands« (ibid., 69); Heine's pamphlet is not primarily directed against the

person Börne, but against a type he represents, characterized by a lack of resistance to these narratives. In all three cases of Spiegelman, Hirsch and Heine, an affective relation with the stories of the previous generation stands between the competing forces of identifying and distancing, of acceptance and resistance. All three register the emotional responses of attraction and repulsion, of staring and also constantly looking away.

3 Revolution

In Rodolfo Usigli's *Ensayo de un crimen* (1955), the protagonist Roberto de la Cruz is beset by an uncontrollable desire to commit crimes whenever he hears *El príncipe rojo*, a waltz by the French composer Émile Waldteufel. At decisive moments throughout the narrative plot, its melody keeps reaching his ears. The origin of this trigger is revealed at the outset of the novel through a distant analepsis in which, after listening to an antique music box, the fainting protagonist recalls a particular moment from when he was about eight or nine years old (cf. Usigli 2008, 17 sq.). In this episode, young Roberto is walking alongside a revolutionary soldier, presumably a friend of his father who is watching over him. Roberto is then brought by his caretaker to witness a scene of extreme violence, which is described very briefly: A soldier executes a man in front of Roberto, while a street-organ coincidentally plays *El principe rojo* »in a painfully slow rhythm« (ibid., 18).

This traumatic experience, a life-changing event that triggers new behavioral patterns in Roberto and gives rise to his desire to embody the socially deviant character of a psychopath, is located in the novel's narrative past. It also takes place within the historical time of the Mexican Revolution. The apparent emptiness and sadistic randomness of the violent event, which is presented by the revolutionary to the child as a potential source of amusement – »Look boy, just for a bit of fun« (ibid, 17) – corresponds with the extradiegetic weight of the historical event of the Mexican Revolution. In turn, the depiction of violence together with the depiction of the urban landscape of Mexico City – through an emphasis on restaurants, cafés, and monuments as well as buildings, parks and streets emblematic of the post-revolutionary epoch (cf. Soní 2021, 7 sq.) – are the elements which form the background of the novel's psychosocial exploration of the post-revolutionary Mexican bourgeoisie (cf. ibid).

Usigli's literary work exemplifies how it is precisely the uncontrolled recurrence of the violent event that precludes the possibility of remembrance through narrativization. Similarly, by placing revolutions alongside war in the realm of

violence, Hannah Arendt situates them »apart from all other political phenomena« (Arendt 1990, 18) as well as outside the political and discursive realm (cf. ibid.). Analogously to how traumatic events »that can be neither understood nor recreated« (Hirsch 2012, 22) shape the narratives of postmemory, revolutionary violence places revolution in the realm of silence beyond politics and speech whenever and wherever it occurs, even though it is not revolution's sole component: »The point here is that violence itself is incapable of speech, and not merely that speech is helpless when confronted with violence« (Arendt 1990, 19). The term revolution has been applied to various kinds of phenomena – see, for example, the epochal economic transformations of the eighteenth century known as the Industrial Revolution. For Arendt, however, revolution constitutes a strictly political event. According to her, revolution first appeared in human history during the modern era, specifically with the American and French Revolutions. Against ancient traditions in political theory that conceive of changes in power relations as corresponding to »quasi-natural transformations« (ibid.), she maintains that cyclical necessity is incompatible with the disruptive *moment of freedom* involved in revolution, or the moment when something new occurs in the strict sense of the word. Just as the novelty that emerges with revolutions cannot be determined in advance, neither can it be reduced to a simple relationship between means and ends: What's new about a revolution is always more than just the answer it posits to the social question (cf. ibid., 22 sq.).

The very word revolution invokes the idea of a cyclical return; indeed, this is its literal meaning in an astronomical sense. Yet in the modern era, the cyclical *shape* of revolution has been disrupted by what Arendt calls the *problem of beginning* (cf. ibid., 20). This particular problem arose when the restorative forces that used to give birth to revolution – which was once understood as a »falling back into a different stage of [history's] cycle« (ibid., 21) – suddenly fell away into the violent chasms opened up by new beginnings. The pervasive political and philosophical motif of cyclical time in history, a motif that stems from Antiquity and portrays political change as a gradual process, finds no relation in the radicality of modern revolutions. Yet while Arendt claims it is »obvious that only under the conditions of a rectilinear time concept are such phenomena as novelty, uniqueness of events, and the like conceivable at all« (ibid., 27), our focus lies on the figures of *cycle*, *linear progression*, *iteration*, *disruption* and *irreversibility* as the time modes of revolution – and on how these figures have enabled entirely new understandings of time and forms of narration since the nineteenth century.

Modern revolutions derail cyclical repetition by introducing to social conditions an absolute novelty with no counterpart in any stage of the previous cycle. Yet an element of the astronomical sense of the word revolution has been preserved in the modern term, which is still understood to imply a movement

of *irresistibility*. According to Arendt, the preservation of this older meaning of revolution within the new one arose at the precise moment when the Duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt reported the fall of the Bastille to Louis XVI: »The king, we are told, exclaimed, ›C'est une révolte‹, and Liancourt corrected him: ›Non, Sire, c'est une révolution.‹ Here [...], for the first time perhaps, the emphasis has entirely shifted from the lawfulness of a rotating, cyclical movement to its irresistibility« (ibid., 47 sq.). In other words, whereas the notion of irresistibility was contained in the older definition of revolution, it became more central in the newer definition. In Arendt's example, we see that the newfound emphasis on irresistibility is connected to the revolutionary violence that makes a new beginning possible, as this violence forecloses paths for continuous progression or gradual development.

On the other hand, regarding the narrativization of a revolution, Eric Hobsbawm suggests that it would be more productive to ask not when a revolution has begun, but rather when it has ended, and how this end can be determined (cf. Hobsbawm 1986, 20). Among other criteria, Hobsbawm proposes that historians should investigate »the date when the first adult generation of ›children of the revolution‹ emerge on the public scene, those whose education and careers belong entirely to the new era«, noting that the events of the revolution »come to them through others«, and that »even its aspirations reach them only in the forms mediated by the historical record, and the official doctrine and rhetoric of the regime and its critics or opponents, and distanced by the ideological selection of memory« (ibid., 32). Setting aside the problem that this premise would seem to imply that a revolutionary process of social reformation cannot exceed the lifespan of a generation, we could add that as one generation begins to narrativize its experience and pass it on to another, the period being narrativized draws to a close. This is also illustrated by the examples of Heinrich Heine and Rudolfo Usigli, whose literary works were written at a time (1840/1955) when they depended on a transgenerational transmission of revolutionary narratives to connect to the lived experiences of the revolutions they depict. While Heinrich Heine, as mentioned earlier, was not yet born at the time of the French Revolution of 1789, Rodolfo Usigli was only five years old at the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution and therefore, likewise the main character of his novel, was not part of the generation that actively led it. Thus, their works not only illustrate the dialectic between lived experience and its narrative transmission to the following generation, but also emerge from this dialectic.

4 Desire

When we look towards the emotions of the generation on the receiving end of narrative, we deal with two main (linear) time-axes that have the abrupt transformation of society as their ontological referent. Whereas the first of these axes encompasses the revolutionary experience and its post-revolutionary recollection by those who were present and actively involved in the historical process of political and social upheaval, the second consists exclusively of post-revolutionary experiences shared by members of a subsequent generation who were either born after this process or too young to participate in it. Within these coordinates, we find various expressions of longing, all with different political dimensions. An example of this can be seen in two contrasting depictions of nostalgia, one during the French Revolution, the other one generation after: In a report from 1789, the French physician Jourdan Le Cointe suggests nostalgia represents a danger to the revolution and »has to be cured by inciting pain and terror« (quoted in Boym 2001, 5), whereas 40 years later, a nostalgic account of smelling freshly baked cake precipitates Heine's departure for France, which he would adopt as his »fatherland«. Similarly, we can compare Soviet journalist Vladimir Slepkov's description of the Bratruschki (›Little Brothers‹), the subculture of former revolutionary fighters who loitered in the streets of Moscow asking passersby to cry with them for the end of revolutionary comradeship (cf. Adamczak 2017, 33 sq.), to the post-revolutionary depression of members of the following generation, whose own experience doing the mundane administrative and bureaucratic work necessary to build a post-revolutionary society seemed to pale in comparison to the revolutionary narratives of heroism they had received from their elders (ibid., 11–44).

In *Beziehungsweise Revolution*, Bini Adamczak writes about how the desire for revolution can manifest itself in a particular fetish, the revolution-fetish (ger.: *Revolutionsfetisch*) (cf. ibid., 23–32). Adamczak describes this fetish as the expression of a collective affect that emerges not as a political development from the revolutionary process, but rather as a particular emotional state after the process has been fulfilled. When we look at the period after the October Revolution, the ultimate consequence of revolutionary desire appears to be a general state of depression, or a *post-revolutionary depression* (cf. ibid. 11–44), a term deployed by Adamczak in a social rather than psycho-pathological sense (cf. ibid., 14). This depression started right after the revolution and had its high point at the time of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a period of political concessions made in the name of stabilizing the economy and constructing a post-revolutionary society. Its victims belonged especially to the generation too young to have participated in the revolution or born after it had taken place. In comparison to the revolutionary generation, the longing experienced by the following one is directed not towards

the beginning of a new social order but instead towards the heroic and violent fighting of the past. Similar to a postmemory generation, a post-revolutionary generation also has access to events outside of the limits of their lived experience through communicative memory, or in other words, through the narratives of their predecessors. In the case of a successful revolution, these narratives are often exacerbated by the hasty establishment of state-mediated cultural memory through celebrations and monuments. This is illustrated by the opening episode of Adamczak's *Beziehungsweise Revolution*, when, six years after the revolution at Lenin's mausoleum, which was erected right after Lenin's death, Komsomol leader Lazar Schatzky confesses to the Italian Communist Ignazio Silone his profound sadness for being too young to have lived through the violent revolution of 1917 (cf. ibid., 11).

The concept of the revolution-fetish helps us to take into account how the expression of strong desire for dominant revolutionary narratives influences narrative time. In other words, with the revolution-fetish we stand before linearity challenged through a means-end reversal:

> Like any other fetish, it originates from a reversal, in this case a reversal between means and purpose. From a necessary means to reach a post-revolutionary state, the socialist or communist society, the revolution transforms into an end in itself. It doesn't serve any longer as a means of satisfaction of the desire towards another world, instead it becomes itself the object of desire: rebellion, turmoil, action. (ibid., 24)

By using the term fetish in a cultural-theoretical sense, Adamczak follows in the tradition of Freud: while Freud used the term primarily to discuss sexual psychology, he theorized the latter from a cultural perspective by defining fetish as among the »illogical consequences« that the endangerment of »throne and altar« triggers in the counterrevolutionary defenders of the old order (cf. Freud 1950, 199). However, in contrast to Freud's broader definition of fetish, Adamczak locates the revolution-fetish specifically either in the revolting group itself – if this group, for instance, shows no interest in administering the new order after the violent overthrow (cf. Adamczak 2017, 26 sq.) – or in the subsequent generation tasked with processing the political events that preceded it. The reversal of means and ends in the second case is closely related to the aforementioned redistribution of roles assigned to different media in the transition from memory of lived experience to postmemory and to the contraction of narrative time. In addition to the oral communication of narratives of remembrance, media objects such as written documents, photographs, or memorabilia (cf. Bal 1994, Langbein 2002, Adamczak 2017) that the revolting generation carries with them as remnants of the political cause are transformed into details at the hands of the subsequent generation, which uses them to fabricate their own narratives.

The role of narrative objects that become invested with a revolution-fetish is well portrayed in Luis Buñuel's film *Ensayo de un crimen* (1955), an adaptation of Usigli's novel. In the film, the main narrative object is also a music box, which is closely linked to the protagonist's hitherto unexplained desire to commit the perfect crime. Talking to a nun after a series of failed murder attempts, the film's protagonist, now called Archibaldo de la Cruz, confides that he understands the connection between murder and music »of course only now« (ibid., 07:11); this nun becomes his next target shortly thereafter. The music box appears in the film's opening scene, an analepsis that takes place against the backdrop of revolutionary groups advancing into the Mexican capital. In this scene, young Archibaldo is served a light supper of milk and snacks by his nanny, who entertains the boy by winding his beloved antique music box while regaling him with a fairy tale: This family heirloom once belonged to a king who used its powers to track down and kill his traitors – including his queen, who is said to have been involved in a plot against him. Fascinated by the music, the box, and its power, and seeking to put the tale to the test, Archibaldo imagines with all his might the death of his nanny. And indeed, at that very moment, she is struck dead by a shot from the revolutionary street fights outside the apartment and falls to the ground, revealing her nylon stockings to the enthralled Archibaldo. »I assure you that morbid sensation gave me a certain pleasure« (ibid., 07:04), he later confesses to the nun. »It's imprinted on my memory like a photograph« (ibid., 07:39). Following a chance encounter with the same (or a similar) music box in adulthood, Archibaldo is filled with the desire to murder a woman whenever he hears its music, or encounters stockings, milk, or the combination of all three.

In psychoanalytic terms, one could describe the music box as a partial object that merely serves as a misunderstood placeholder for the object actually desired, the revolution. In rhetorical terms, one could also speak of metonymy, or when the part comes to stand in for the whole, or the cause for the effect. The music, which only incidentally accompanies the killing, stands in for the killing itself, and makes an orderly leap from stylistic device to structure, from *elocutio* to *dispositio*, when objects unfold in memory narratives. However, both psychoanalysis and rhetoric have long been appropriated by a way of thinking that compartmentalizes its subject matter according to a binary logic of fullness versus emptiness, being versus appearances, the authentic versus the substitute. Adamczak joins this tradition when she argues that the desire for revolution is fundamentally »paradoxical« because revolution »must with necessity be disappointed at the moment when revolution succeeds.« Hence the paradoxical position in which Adamczak finds herself when she advocates for a »sustain[able]« defetishization of revolution on the one hand (Adamczak 2017, 27), while acknowledging that she does not know how this could avoid »derevolutionizing the revolution« on the other (ibid., 85).

Luis Buñuel's film depicts a revolution-fetish that is not to be understood merely as a hollow form of an original desire, but rather as a nexus of various affective components – music, milk, stockings, blood – that allows desire to circulate in a self-sufficient way. The film's staging of the appearance of desire is always detached from space and time, something it accomplishes via references to fog and dimmed backgrounds. In the novel this detachment is staged through portrayals of a disruptive physical state of the protagonist who feels a sudden and uncontrollable heating up of the body and head. The fact that their murderous plans do not pursue an external goal is perceived by both Archibaldo and his novelistic counterpart Roberto – who maintain complete distance from any passionate motive for murder – as an achievement and not at all as an error. This has consequences for narrative time: no longer destined to analeptically refer to its original context until eventually running dry as a degenerated, derivative, or a perverted manifestation of its former self, desire now has the potential to rupture the bonds of time and contract it to an autonomous present.

5 Nostalgia

By identifying an expression of desire that is always intertwined with the affective dimension of remembrance, the concept of *nostalgia* allows us to understand the role of displacement in the relationship between the transgenerational transfer of narratives and the construction of narrative time. Svetlana Boym grasps nostalgia as »an intermediary between collective and individual memory« (Boym 2001, 54). In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym reflects on the political dimensions of nostalgia by way of an historical introduction, tracing how the term once identified with individual affect came to be regarded as a public threat and ultimately a possible critical position towards modernity (cf. ibid., 5 sq.). First coined in 1688 by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer to name a newly identified disease affecting Swiss soldiers stationed abroad, nostalgia was composed as a neologism combining the Ancient Greek words *nostos* and *algia*, or home and longing, although it was not conceived of as a synonym for homesickness (cf. ibid., 21). Interestingly, Boym tells us, the diagnosis of nostalgia emerges in the late seventeenth century, an historical moment when a radical transformation of »the concept of time« (ibid., 7) was initiated by the absence of the prophesied doomsday after the religious wars. This new conception of time is future-oriented and open to the possibility of humanity's progress. A hundred years later, Immanuel Kant claimed that the French Revolution revealed proof of a disposition in human nature for »progress toward the better« (Kant 1979, 153), but only insofar as progress is perceived from

a distance and without any personal interest. Paradoxically, this new way of perceiving temporality leads nostalgia to be increasingly seen as incurable and epidemic.

In the same way we must regard the process of transgenerational transfer of narratives in postmemory as a process of *displacement* – as memory forcefully travels to a second generation in the form of inherited narratives of remembrance – this process is also the central condition for the feeling of nostalgia. Displacement may correspond to a physical displacement of the longing subject from its home or homeland, such as in cases of exile and migration, but also to a temporal displacement, or a refusal »to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition« (Boym 2001, XV). As the dominant conception of historical time forfeits the approaching doomsday prophecy and opens towards the future, it also gains a purely imagined and unbridgeable beginning: nostalgia's original object. Boym traces several examples of variations of this object with reference to the »traditional community in Tönnies, ›primitive communism‹ of the pre-feudal society in Marx, the enchanted public life in Max Weber, creative sociability in Georg Simmel or the integrated civilization of antiquity in the early Georg Lukács« (ibid., 24). According to Boym, all of these variations are pervaded by a fundamental ambivalence, recalling Arendt's claim that »the notion of a state of nature alludes at least to a reality that cannot be comprehended by the nineteenth century idea of development, no matter how we may conceive of it [...]. For the hypothesis of a state of nature implies the existence of a beginning that is separated from everything following it as though by an unbridgeable chasm« (Arendt 1990, 9 sq.).

Given that the beginning of time is purely imaginary, but also that there is no room for an end of time within the modern worldview, modernity finds itself confronted with an oppressive infinity, or a »transcendental homelessness«, as it has been described by Georg Lukács (Lukács 1971, 41) – for Boym a typical representative of modern nostalgia (cf. Boym 2001, 25). According to Lukács, the individual seeks to make sense of this homelessness through novel writing, that is, by depicting a self-contained process that has a process-related beginning and end point:

> The novel [...] is by no means bound to [...] birth and death [of its protagonist]; yet by the points at which it begins and ends, it indicates the only essential segment of life, that segment which is determined by the central problem [...]. When the beginning and the end of this segment of life do not coincide with those of a human life, this merely shows that the biographical form is oriented towards ideas [...] (Lukács 1971, 81).

The story time of the novel and the life span of its main character are seen here as two not necessarily congruent quantities (e. g., Goethe depicts Wilhelm Meister's

education as extending from an early life crisis to his decision to pursue a certain career, rather than from his birth to his death). But what if the central process is not mirrored in the »biographical form« of the novel's protagonist that Lukács prescribes as an antidote to »bad infinity« (ibid., 81) but, instead, in the biographical form of an *object*? Soviet writer Sergei Tret'iakov, for example, invokes an object-related biographical form, an attempt to »view class struggle synoptically at all stages of the production process« (Tret'iakov 2006, 61 sq.), precisely when post-revolutionary soviet literature was reinstalling the living person as the center of narration (cf. ibid., 57). If in a biography of objects, the story time can transcend the time span of a human generation, the process mapped in the range between birth and death, on the other hand, tends to idealize this very same process, by putting it out of reach and to charge with nostalgia the society it reflects. In this case, nostalgia is responsible for expanding narrative time to a continuous plot through showing a central process that mirrors a desired society.

Out of her extensive cultural-historical study of nostalgia, Boym develops the thesis of two different forms of nostalgia, reflexive and restorative (cf. Boym 2001, 41–55). Embodying a conservative agenda, restorative nostalgia seeks to retrieve narratives of an idealized and homogeneous past. Its goal is to produce whole and tendentiously normative narratives, morally legitimized by their *genuine* process of extraction from the historical and collective past, and thus endowed with the power of *truth*. On the other hand, reflexive nostalgia accepts the fragmentary nature of narratives of remembrance and finds solace in the confirmation of its forever-lost elements, deriving its raison d'être from the permanent longing caused by constant awareness of the irreversibility of time. Expressions of nostalgia move between the restorative and the reflexive pole and can be distinguished by the narratives they produce and how these are either located or integrated within broader narratives of cultural memory.

> [T]hey are about the ways in which we make sense of our seemingly ineffable homesickness and how we view our relationship to a collective home. In other words, what concerns me is not solely the inner space of an individual psyche but the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance. (ibid., 41)

The concept of nostalgia drifts between expressing the bounds of collective memory and privatizing history, in the sense that it tends to be perceived by the longing subject as the expression of an individual desire towards an imagined past – a fictional construction, as is so well conveyed by Heine's words in regard to the revolutionary events of 1789: »Everything is still like a dream to me; especially the name Lafayette sounds like a saga from my earliest childhood. Is he really on horseback again now, commanding the National Guard?« (Heine 1978,

49) Perhaps it is exactly this expression, the *imagined past*, that reinforces the difference between Boym's two nostalgic categories. Both nostalgic forms deal with a relationship with the past through narrative construction, but only in reflexive nostalgia is the wish to return confronted by the impossibility of return, showing the imaginative character of the narratives of nostalgia as illusory against the forever lost experiences of the past. On the other hand, in restorative nostalgia, the same wish to return is complemented by the belief that return might still be possible through the restorative power of the nostalgic narrative. In this second expression of nostalgia, imagination does not mark places of irreversible absence; instead, imaginative investment, allied to conservative legitimation, is invested with the power to retrieve the past from death, no matter how far away in history it may lie, and to use it as the direct source of strict codes that can simply be reinscribed in the present as normative values.

Although they are not intended to be absolute categories, Boym's division of nostalgia into reflexive and restorative expressions teases out the division of the word into *nostos* and *algia*, while attributing a critical spirit to the self-reflexive activity of one form of nostalgia against a nationalistic and uncritically conservative spirit of the other one. We argue that one exemplary challenge to this dichotomy is the Portuguese aesthetic and literary movement of *saudosismo*, which is characterized by deeply reflexive expressions of longing and yet remains a prolific source of identitarian and nationalistic claims. *Saudosismo* revolves around the major social schism involved in a moment of violent upheaval, the foundation of the Portuguese Republic in 1910. Connected to the nationalist intellectual movement of the *Renascença Portuguesa*,[2] the saudosista movement proposed *saudade*, a specific bittersweet expression of nostalgic longing entailing the joy of grief (cf. Michaëlis de Vasconcellos 1914, 9), as an essential trait of the Portuguese soul and placed the concept at the literary, philosophical, and spiritual center of a new project of national cohesion. In its messianic slope, *saudosismo* retrieves the myth of *Sebastianismo*, the belief in the return of the young king D. Sebastião, who went missing in the Alcácer-Quibir battle in North Africa in 1578. Since he left no long-term heir to the throne, Portuguese national independence went missing with him as well. Longing for a king who disappeared in the sixteenth century at the beginning of the twentieth century transforms the original *romantic sebastianism* – in which the return of the king was still effectively possible, and therefore to be decided by the power of history – into *saudosist sebastianism*, in which the return of the king is only mythically possible and thus determined by the power of desire (cf. Botelho 1990, 129). If *saudade*

2 Eng.: meaning Portuguese Renaissance or Portuguese Rebirth.

had been directed towards the past in previous linguistic and literary uses of the word, whereas desire is directed towards the future, *saudosismo* entails a conflation of past and future (cf. ibid. 34), while stressing that desire is dependent on remembrance, which it needs in order to be evoked (cf. ibid. 120).

6 Conclusion

»[T]he ›great revolutions‹ [...] have provided analytical models« (Hobsbawm 1986, 5) for their descendants to investigate their own presence. In narrative terms, we could speak of an iterative meta-narrative that is actualized in the renewed revolutionary event and thus also includes a remembrance of, for example, the French Revolution. Regardless of the American Revolution, the sequence of events after 1789 in France – from the Field of Mars to the Thermidor, but also the Russian and Chinese Revolutions afterwards – constitute the traumatic prehistory of all subsequent revolutions. And indeed, in the twentieth century, the commentators of revolutionary events never grew tired of comparisons with their French great-grandmother, as evidenced by Leon Trotsky's reference to an »obedience to objective law« with which Stalin's »Soviet thermidor« put an end to the October Revolution (Trotsky 1972, 87 sq.). The narrative of the French Revolution with its supposedly inevitable sequence of events not only dominates memories, but hovers like a sword of Damocles over the lived experience of the revolutionaries who were to come.

While a new concept of time that embraces progress as a constitutive category may have originated with the religious wars at the end of the seventeenth century, it did not find its »historical sign (*signum rememorativum, demonstrativum, prognostikon*)«, as Kant (1979, 151) puts it, until the French Revolution. For this reason, Arendt argues, the radically new thing that entered the world with the revolution was not only political, but also temporal in nature. This insight has immediate implications for the form of revolutionary narratives insofar as the processes triggered by revolutions far exceed the span of a human lifetime. Narrative is therefore necessary for the recognizability of progress on a transgenerational scale.

Hobsbawm points out the difficulty of determining not the beginning but the end of a revolutionary process. To solve this problem, he takes as one of his benchmarks the moment when one generation first passes on its narratives to the next, which is already growing within the new order. That generation, which receives these dominant narratives from their predecessor, must in turn deal with effects of temporal processing such as desire and nostalgia, but also fear and loathing, in order to be able to continue telling them. Often, memories based on experiences

of violence do not permit themselves to be linked into a coherent narrative. This principle holds for experiences of revolutionary violence. Nevertheless, memories of revolution often exert not repulsion but rather a strong force of attraction upon their recipients. At least two narrative strategies have emerged for dealing with the intricacies of story time of revolutionary narratives: the contraction of time to the moment of the present, as in the case of the revolution-fetish, or the expansion of time to a frame determined by the beginning and end of the revolutionary process, which can far exceed a person's lifetime, as in the case of nostalgia.

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