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Crumb's Nostalgia: Critique, Melancholia, and Cultural Obliteration – or – drawing the "Horror of America"

A famous R. Crumb graphic: twelve drawings presented in a four by three grid, an encapsulated view of America's transition from pastoral to industrial society. The first: a sylvan landscape—grassy meadow, a stand of trees in the background, a flock of birds flying by. The last: an asphalt-covered horrorscape of liquor stores, fast food joints and tawdry housing subdivisions, sky tinged yellow on the horizon and girdled by power lines. In between Crumb presents the history of America's progress from first railroad line to lone homestead to rural settlement to small town to the final terminal stage of motorized consumption. That Crumb takes a dim view of American progress and yearns for a mythical "olden days" is no secret: it saturates much of his work, from his portraits and stories about folk, bluegrass and blues musicians to his autobiographical musings on cultural destruction. Even the comics about his own childhood sexual awakening possess something, albeit in an absurdist vein, of a paradise lost. The subject is also a frequent topic in Crumb's interviews, where he holds forth on the superiority of music and culture prior to the Second World War and the corresponding horror of the contemporary moment. And while it is worth noting that one might, in extremis, describe Crumb as a critical artist, he is no fan of contemporary art discourse or theory in general. On the other hand, describing Crumb's *Weltanschauung* as nostalgic should not be taken as suggesting it coheres neatly with a conception of nostalgia as escapist or reactionary. His vision of the past and his deeply pessimistic view of the present are a mixture of different elements, some carefully thought out and some deeply atavistic, combining distaste for the artificiality and crudeness of the many different presents he has confronted with habits first developed during a childhood where old records, old comics and old clothes were a compensatory mechanism to cope with social awkwardness and a dysfunctional family life. In his self-imposed exile from the conventional, homogenous world of saccharine 1950s waspishness, Crumb reconstituted an alternative universe out of the flotsam and jetsam of the past—despairing, yet nourished by the belief that, as Edward Said phrased it, "Only to those who are excluded from the social nexus comes the idea of raising a question of the limits of human nature because they need a human that includes them."[1]

To be clear, my intention in approaching R. Crumb through nostalgia is to consider him both as artist and public figure, one who represents and to a strong degree *figures* broader tendencies in postwar American (and to a lesser extent European) popular culture. This is evident in his work (his remotivation/appropriation of styles taken from newspaper comic strip of the 1920s through the 1940s; his frequent use of the confessional mode), his public utterances (which, on the value of interwar popular culture, are remarkable consistent) and the dapper, mustachioed persona he maintained for many years. His taste for outmoded fashion and music, and his dyspeptic point-of-view are almost as influential as his work.

But if I claim a strong strain of nostalgic yearning runs through both Crumb's work and public statements, it remains to define this loaded term. Broadly speaking, there are two discourses where nostalgia figures. The first, taken from premodern medical pathology, has in more recent times been applied to a melancholic psychological state and is associated today with Romantic literature and its descendants. The second more recent usage is found in postmodern cultural theory—in particular, that strain of Marxist cultural criticism associated with Fredric Jameson. While these two usages in some sense are diagnostic and share certain features—including a degree of overlap in the figures of reference (Benjamin, Said, etc.)—there are also substantial differences in the degree to which authors apply a pejorative

1 Edward Said: "The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile," *Harper's* No. 269 (1984), p. 53.

meaning to nostalgia and, from this, assign a pathological symptomatology to its manifestation. In aggregate, this pejorative connotation has come to cling to nostalgia as an idea, or the idea of the psychological state of nostalgia, implying "the useless yearning for a way of life from which one has been irrevocably severed."[2] As Andreas Huyssen writes, "[The] predominantly negative coding of nostalgia within modernity [and, one might add, its descendants] is easily explained: nostalgia counteracts, even undermines linear notions of progress, whether they are framed dialectically as philosophy of history or sociology and economically as modernization."[3]

The term nostalgia has its origins in nosology and was coined in the late seventeenth century by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer. In 1688 he defended his dissertation on "a disorder of the imagination" causing exiles to languish and waste away when removed from their native land—a matter of some concern to employers of paid mercenaries upon discovering soldiers under their command had been overtaken by an unaccountable lethargy. To assign a word to this feeling, Hofer combined the Greek word for return (nostos) with algos (sorrow or pain), although the German term *Heimweh* (home-pain) more closely conforms to the causation of the condition.

With his dissertation Hofer *created* a disease, inscribing a particular feeling into nosology. And while nostalgia as a term has long ago escaped from medical nomenclature and entered into common parlance, at the time of its seventeenth century coinage medicine had not yet departed from a general concern with association and a medieval notions of the humors inherited from classical medicine, where environmental effects were accorded a substantive causality in diagnosis. As Jean Starobinski writes, "diseases were explained by means of the laws which control the inanimate bodies of the physical world; the science of the time authorized the search for the physical causes of psychic disturbances … [the] psychological influence on the physical and influence of the body on the soul."[4] Following this logic, the effect of music as particularly potent in inducing a nostalgic feeling was studied in the eighteenth century by John Locke and Francis Hutcheson to explain affective and involuntary memory, especially those connected to youth. Both authors assayed the idea that associative thinking gives rise to phobic mentations where idea and accidental occurrence are so closely tied together that every repetition revives the related idea. This topic was explored in a general sense by the Scottish Enlightenment polymath John Gregory and in more specific terms by Rousseau, who in his *Dictionary of Music* described the effect of the *ranz-des-vaches* (a "certain rustic cantilena, to which the Swiss drive their herds to pasture in the Alps") to which he attributed an exemplary associative power, noted 70 years earlier by one Theodore Zwinger of Basel, who witnessed the melancholic effect hearing the *ranz-des-vaches* had on Swiss soldiers serving in France and Belgium:

[Its] effects … come alone from custom, reflections, and a thousand circumstances, which retraced by those who hear them, and recalling the idea of their country, their former pleasures, their youth, and their joys of life, excite in them a bitter sorrow for the loss of them. The music does not in this case act precisely as music, but as a *memorative sign* [my italics]."[5]

Into the eighteenth century— a time when large national armies were being mobilized— nostalgia remained a disease greatly feared within military circles, due to the diminished utility of soldiers who, removed from their place of origin, had been asked to serve an idea (the nation) far more abstract than it is today. But by the end of the century doctors were according a substantive etiology to psychological disturbances, "by virtue of the 'solidist' theories which state that the nervous system is master of all the phenomenon of life."[6] It was only with progress in the field of pathology that nostalgia finally lost its importance as a diagnostic term, entering into the as-yet speculative nomenclature of psychiatry. By mid-twentieth century, its usage even in this field had fallen into disuse.

2 Jean Starobinski and William S. Kemp: "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Diogenes* No. 14, Vol. 81 (1966), p. 101.
3 Andreas Huyssen: "Nostalgia for Ruins," *Grey Room* No. 23 (2006), p. 7.
4 Starobinski and Kemp: "The Idea of Nostalgia,", p. 88.
5 Quoted in Starobinski and Kemp: "The Idea of Nostalgia," p. 92.
6 Ibid., p. 98.

Psychiatrists had replaced nostalgia as a term with several others, while their analysis of the behavior of so-called nostalgic people had itself radically modified the idea of the disease: "The emphasis [had] changed. When we speak of 'depressive reactions of social maladjustment,'" writes Starobinski, "the name given to the phenomenon has ceased to designate a place and a history, as in the case of nostalgia; we no longer follow the hypothesis that repatriation will result in a cure."[7] Similarly, the causal significance of a lost place to depression had been replaced by Freud, following Kant, with the notion that the nostalgic's desire was less concerned with recovering the actual geographic milieu of childhood than with recapturing the feeling of childhood itself.

One marker of nostalgia's assimilation within the popular lexicon is that it is no longer at all associated with its medical origins—having moved from the realm of medical pathology to the open vista of culture with scarcely a trace of this passage—and now refers to a prevailing cultural condition of loss. In the process, the feeling became a way of perceiving the past scaled up to the nation-state—for instance through notions of cultural heritage, first encoded within eighteenth century state policy, or the symbolically formalized, ritualized and proscribed "invented traditions" Eric Hobsbawm ascribed to that century, in contradistinction to "customs" which cannot "afford to be invariant because even in the traditional societies life is not so."[8] One ancillary effect of this regimentation of popular culture within statist policy was that for the first time a concern with the "authentic" began to inform concerted efforts by state institutions to concretize an image of the past—for instance by stripping away vestiges of later architectural styles from medieval buildings. According to Svetlana Boym,[9] this new nineteenth-century sensibility, with its sense of historicity and discreteness, was an economy of preservation running parallel to the industrial economy that had dramatically remade city and countryside in response to cyclical economic exigencies, having overthrown entrenched craft and trade traditions. This development coincided with the emergence of tourism as a real commercial engine.

If the urge on the part of late-nineteenth century states to codify, sanitize and "restore" the past is a response to an accelerating modernity, the question arises: what precisely do we mean by modernity and the modern? Boym distinguishes between modernization as state policy and modernization as social practice, referring to the critical project of modernity as a response to and dialogue with technological progress. Modernity thus possesses several interlinking and at times contradictory temporal modalities. There is the modern conception of "unrepeatable and irreversible time" that informed positivistic science and technological progress, overturning the cyclical, iterative time of pastoral communities,[10] but also the superimposed and coextensive heterogenous temporalities at work within the critical modernist project, where a fascination for the present and longing for the past intertwine. In Walter Benjamin's work, this fascination/longing couple were given a dialectical gloss: an *idea* of the future wrapped up in the garments of the past—a "dialectical image" in which archaic images persisted within the industrial environment—making it possible "to identify what is historically new about the 'nature' of commodities,"[11]whose ideational elements remained unreconciled rather than fusing into one "harmonizing perspective."[12]

7 Ibid., p 101.
8 Eric Hobsbawm: *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1983, p. 2.
9 Svetlana Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, New York 2001, p. 29.
10 Ibid. p. 24.
11 Susan Buck-Morss: *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Banjamin and the Arcades Project*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1989, p. 67.
12 Benjamin's notion bears a sympathetic correspondence to Julius von Schlosser's hypothesis that "archaic practices … survive in the most prosaic manifestations of contemporary popular culture in a more or less decomposed form"; a concept

The psychological implications of this convoluted, tragic temporality, in which apprehension and obliteration, identification and ambivalence, were inextricably intertwined are manifold. The modernist subject's very temporal sense, his or her relationship to the vanishing past and uncertain future, was informed by the very real and irrevocable disappearance of what modernization disposed of in its headlong pursuit of "progress." The archetypal

modernist could thus be imagined as both "a collector of memorabilia and a dreamer of future revolutions."[13]

Treacherous though it may have been, before World War Two these nostalgic tensions were still visible in everyday experience. By the time of postmodernism's heyday in the early 1980s, the memorabilia collector had been shorn of his/her revolutionary potential, becoming instead an object of derision. In the late capitalist economy of privatized mass culture (informed by the modality of consumer/observer rather than producer/participant), nostalgia shifted from the realm of preservation policy to forms of privileged delectation dependent upon "the power to master signs of styles and periods, the ability to read/construct 'codes of distinction'—a reading that is still, most importantly, 'from a distance.'"[14] Hegemonic and oppositional nostalgias, working class and middle class nostalgias, nostalgia within mass culture and the nostalgia for unique localities are described by Kathleen Stewart as a "three-ring circus in the arenas of life-style, spectacle, and loss," a cultural cul-de-sac. "We are 'baby boomers,'" she writes, "searching for a place and a past in Norman Rockwell's paintings and Walt Disney's main street and carried along on the wave of Wall Street."[15] For Jameson, the structure of postmodern nostalgia resembles Plato's cave, driving cultural production back into the mind of the monadic subject, who, no longer possessing the capacity to apprehend the world directly, is "condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach."[16] In such readings, a pervasive sense of irreality occasioned a corresponding disbelief in the socius as a concrete place, replaced by the hyper-reality of oscillating significations. In becoming raw material for capitalist recoding within serial revivals of dead cultural forms, artifacts of the past can be read as symptomatic of this loss, a nostalgia for an earlier age "that had not lost [the] power to imagine other futures."[17]

Nostalgia's uncertain place between psychological state, cultural modality and escapist compensatory mechanism certainly informs R. Crumb's own story. His nostalgia is stereotypically, even clinically, rooted in childhood experience and archetypally American in its response to what Georg Lukacs called the "transcendental homelessness" of modernity. The objects and traditions around which his obsessions revolve are American—as is his pervasive sorrow for a vanished American pastoral. How is this manifested in his work? Examples exist, in fact, in such abundance that one might claim nostalgia is overdetermined in Crumb's oeuvre. His work is peopled by leftover figures from other eras, as are his published volumes of sketchbooks or the ephemeral sketches collected in his *Waiting For Food* volumes.[18] His comic about Blind Lemon Jefferson is even called *Mister Nostalgia*, while other works, like "Jelly Roll Morton's Voodoo Curse" from Raw Magazine #7 (1985), taken from a 1940s interview with the musician, are rendered in a high-contrast style reminiscent of film noir. Then there are his many works on folk and blues musicians of the 1920s and 1930s, begun in the 1970s after Nick Perls, owner of Yazoo Records, a re-issuer of old blues recordings,

central as well to Aby Warburg, who in his "pathos formula" reads a history of human catastrophe encoded in the repetition of gestural motifs derived from the classical age.
13 Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 39.
14 Kathleen Stewart: "Nostalgia: A Polemic," *Cultural Anthropology*, No. 3, Vol. 3 (August 1988), p. 232.
15 Ibid., 227.
16 Frederic Jameson: "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" in: Hal Foster (ed.): *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, Wash. 1983, p. 135.
17 Huyssen: "Nostalgia for Ruins," p. 5.
18 Crumb's attention to the reality of the past he is trying to depict—for instance by using source photographs to correctly render details of an era—speaks to a historicist impulse often overlooked by critics overawed by the visionary character of his 1960s work.

offered to trade him rare blues records for cover art,[19] his band, the Cheap Suit Serenaders, and the estimated five thousand 78 rpm shellac discs of folk, country, jazz and blues records amassed over many years of collecting.

The nostalgic worldview Crumb regularly articulates in interviews also suggests a coherent critique of culture in general and popular music in particular. His views on these topics are well-known, popularized in the 1995 documentary *Crumb*—directed by his close friend Terry Zwigoff—and presaged by a BBC *Arena* documentary, *The Confessions of Robert Crumb* from 1987, for which Crumb and his wife Aline received a writing credit. Significant topical overlaps are evident, including identifying the impetus for Crumb's lifework within social ostracism and family dysfunction—a topic Crumb himself has not been reticent about—as well as the matter of his compulsive collecting, which, as stated in a *Paris Review* interview from 2010, began at the age of nine, when he suddenly became a fanatical collector of comic books, marbles, playing cards, matchbooks, bottle caps and back issues of *The Catholic Weekly*, to enumerate a far from comprehensive list.[20]

Social ostracism and the collector's bug were self-reinforcing tendencies that fed upon and nourished one another. As a teenager Crumb came to embrace his outcast status, walking around in a frock coat and stovepipe hat, "defying people to ridicule me or think me eccentric."[21] He relates in Zwigoff's documentary that his teenage attempts to mimic conventional behavior "just came out all wrong and weird," leading him to abandon all efforts to adjust and fit in. "[I] just became a shadow and I wasn't even there. People weren't even aware that I was in the same world they were in, and that kind of freed me completely, because I wasn't under those pressures to be normal." Crumb's "shadow" state allowed him to pass, as he says, into worlds he would otherwise have been too socially constrained to explore. In the *Paris Review* interview, Crumb speaks of how, inspired by the 1939 book *Jazzmen*, he began going door-to-door in the African American section of Dover buying old records: "Some of the people I visited lived in old, unpainted houses, and still didn't have electricity. I'd go in there and they'd have a wind-up phonograph sitting in the middle of the parlor and there on the turntable would be a 1920s blues record."[22] Doing "things like that that would be unthinkable," he recalled in the *Crumb* documentary, "if you were going to be a normal teenager."

The "old" jazz and blues music, that would only reach a mass audience a decade later, "grabbed" the young Crumb and got under his skin with its cadence and rhythm. It fed the visionary experiences he had on psychedelics, unlocking, as he would later recall, "all these archetypal cartoon figures kind of floating around in the collective subconscious." White Man, The Old Pooperoo, Angelfood McSpade, The Vulture Demoness, Honeybunch Kaminski, Mr. Natural, Flakey Foont … the characters he would use over the next years "fit right into this vision I was having … [this] revelation of the kind of seamy side of America … It was all like a horror show … a drawing of the horror of America,"[23] a nightmarish, hyper-normalized anodyne world figures like *Ozzie and Harriet* and Perry Como that the generation who had gone through the Great Depression and World War Two fervently embraced, as if cultural whitewashing could eradicate the cruder but more vital cultural forms of the prewar era.

19 Wanting to proselytize for this music, they were "done with a kind of reverence." Crumb recalled in his *Paris Review* interview that he would play old records for anyone who entered his house, but after a time realized the music did not "grab" most people. Robert Crumb: "The Art of Comics" (Interview with Ted Widmer), *Paris Review* No. 193, 2010, p. 12).
20 Ibid., p. 5.
21 Ibid. p. 8.
22 Ibid. p. 7.
23 Terry Zwigoff (Dir.): *Crumb*, 1994 (Min. 36).

One might suggest Crumb in childhood developed a precocious sense of this caesura. He could read the onset of spectacle culture in the quality of the detritus he found on the streets and the old 78 record albums he had begun collecting. It was a matter of pacification and passivity, the withdrawal of vitality from collective modes of social life and expression, and their replacement by distributed forms of mass entertainment. It is no mystery why Crumb, like others of his generation, gravitated to the folk expressions of an older, less reified America. What is notable is that Crumb would end up linking his attraction to these vital manifestations of popular culture to a more sweeping analysis of culture as such. Crumb's critique of rationalized postwar society and the culture it produced is both systemic and qualitative, directed equally against the cultural industry and the sanitized versions of the vital musical vernaculars it produced. It is also social: informed by a sense of loss for whole cultural ecosystem that had once sustained this music. As he told Hans Ulrich Obrist in 2006,:

… music is such a powerful thing. It's like religion; it's a very powerful force in people's lives. It's been taken over by commercial interests, almost entirely; at least the recording of it and the dissemination of it has been, since World War Two. It's changed, it's changed the whole nature of music: electronic music and the commercialism of music. … So for me the music recorded before World War II, in the western world anyway, has a much more authentic, popular sound; it is from the real world. These are people who sang in situations, or bands that played in situations that were part of their own social milieu and you can feel that in the music, [it's] part of some real world of real people, I don't know, it's very hard to describe, but I always listen for that when I buy these old records.[24]

The removal of the means of expression from the realm of the everyday, its concentration within large, impersonal economic concerns, is inimical to social becoming—that network of habits, institutions, folkways and traditions making up the leisure time of working people, manifested as much in a dance style or melody as a hand-hewn chair. As a result, several generations in Europe and North America, who in their leisure time would have once played music themselves or patronized local dance halls, were deskilled culturally and impoverished socially. He told Obrist in the same interview quoted above that:

I met an old man in Paris years ago, he's dead now, in the 1980s. He was young in the 1920s and 1930s. He said he and his wife would go out dancing in these *bal musettes*, they would go out dancing five nights a week because it was in the neighborhood, it was cheap, it was social and the music was live. Imagine a culture in which this goes on every night in the neighborhood. Imagine what that is going to do to the musician. He is part of the scene; the dancers are as important to him as his instrument. I played for dancing myself. It's very inspiring when people are dancing to your music; it inspires you to give it more rhythmic drive, you see the people moving, you become part of something, you lose your ego.[25]

Or as he told journalist Jacques Hyzagi in a 2015 profile which appeared in *The Observer*:

My mother, born in the 1920s, remembered walking in the street in the summertime in Philadelphia, and in every other house, people were playing some kind of live music. Her parents played music and sang together. … In the U.S. at that time there were

24 Hans Ulrich Obrist (ed.): *Hans Ulrich Obrist & Robert Crumb: The Conversation Series*, Walter König Verlag, Cologne 2006, p. 22 – 23.
25 Obrist (ed.): *The Conversation Series*, p. 24–25.

thousands and thousands of bands, dance halls, ballrooms in hotels, restaurants had dance floors, school auditoriums, clubs in small towns. A small town of 10,000 would have at least a hundred bands. In the mid '30s radio spread very fast in America and the depression killed a lot of the venues where live music was performed. You could go to the movies for 10 cents. Then in the '50s, TV finished it all off. Mass media makes you stay home, passive. In the '20s there was live music everywhere in the States. I talked to old musicians who played in dance bands. The old musician bandleader Jack Coackley in San Francisco told me that in 1928 when you went downtown in the evening on the trolley car to play at a ballroom, the streets were full of musicians going to work, carrying instruments in cases.[26]

Early on in Zwigoff's documentary Crumb says: "I listen to old music, it's one of the few times I actually kind of have a love for humanity. You hear the best part of the soul of the common people, you know, their way of expressing their connection to eternity, or whatever you want to call it. Modern music doesn't have that, [it's a] calamitous loss that people can't express themselves anymore, you know." This last point might even be taken as a sign of Crumbian conservativism, for one of the more common tropes of modernism is its disenchantment of the sacred. But it is important to note in this regard that the objects of Crumb's nostalgic adoration are also thoroughly modern. The lateral-cut disc records he collects are industrial products, relics of the period (1925 to the early 1930s) when musicians were recorded *en masse*, as Michael Denning points out, to fuel a speculative market in gramophone manufacturing—a boom in itself made possible by the expiration of the basic patents in lateral-cut disc recording technology, facilitating the entrée of multiple companies onto the market and leading to innovations in sound-recording technology (like the vacuum tube-amplified microphone) and a higher quality product. Until the market collapsed at the onset of the Great Depression, agents of industrialists scoured the globe indiscriminately producing "product" in order to encourage the purchase of these gramophones. For Denning, this period is the most revolutionary in the history of twentieth century world music, with far more profound consequences than the innovations of the European avant-garde. In the unprecedented circulation of subaltern voices and vernacular musical forms (before the onset of the homogenization processes Crumb finds so objectionable), voices of the masses circulating on 78s created a sort of modernist discrimination where "deference and defiance met,"[27] fueling the onset of decolonization and remaking the popular musical ear. (Denning's periodization, coincidentally, is echoed in Crumb's interview with Hyzagi, where he stated: "The America that I missed died in about 1935. That's why I have all this old stuff, all these old 78 records from that era. It was the golden age of recorded music, before the music business poisoned the people's music, the same way the 'agribusiness' poisoned the very soil of the earth.")

Crumb's critique is, in effect, a poor man's version of Adorno's critique of popular music and the culture industry. While he certainly would take umbrage with Adorno's assessment of the formulaic structure of folk music, he would no doubt agree with Adorno description of the listener, accustomed to a regime of recorded playback, as pacified and distracted, and the nature of social relations under it as impoverished in comparison to live recitation. It is an intuitively Marxist analysis of culture by a figure too iconoclastic to feel comfortable with radical politics (in the *Paris Review* interview he recalls being brought to demonstrations by his friend Marty Pahls and made uncomfortable by the chanting in unison, saying he "usually disliked the smash-the-state kind of guys, even though I agreed with them politically"[28]).

But is Crumb, in the final analysis, a modernist flâneur or a reactionary idealizing a vanished past? Terms coined by Svetlana Boym are useful for situating his nostalgia on an

26 Jacques Hyzagi: "Robert Crumb Hates You," *The Observer* (October 14, 2015).
27 Michael Denning: *Noise Uprising: The Audiopolitics of a World Musical Revolution*, Verso, New York 2015, p. 4.
28 Robert Crumb: "The Art of Comics," *Paris Review*, p. 10.

ideological spectrum of progressive and regressive tendencies: restorative nostalgia (regressive) and reflective nostalgia (progressive). Characteristic of the nostalgia upon which nationalist ideologies and conspiracy theories are built, restorative nostalgia trades in simplified story lines, reconstituting myths of past wholeness and reconstructing the ostensibly lost socio-cultural edifice, paving over memory gaps to serve future ends. Reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, dwells on the mediating distance between the lost home and the present of contemplation, on human finitude and historical irrevocability, on the ruin rather than the project of reconstruction (like Benjamin's idea of allegory, with which reflective nostalgia bears a theoretical affinity, it always bleeds out towards the edges of fragile impermanence rather than reconstituting solid, stable shapes). Ruminative, philosophical and personal, Boym asserts this brand of nostalgia possesses within it a critical function that, by cherishing shattered fragments of memory and temporalizing space, reveals longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another. Crumb's nostalgia, on the other hand, indulges restorative nostalgia's tendency to reconstitute past myths of wholeness while also voicing a critique linking what he finds wrong in the present to what he remembers from the past. (Writes Boym on a cautionary note: "The rapid pace of industrialization and modernization increased the intensity of people's longing for the slower rhythms of the past, for continuity, social cohesion and tradition. Yet this new obsession with the past reveals an abyss of forgetting and takes place in inverse proportion to its actual preservation."[29])

I would suggest a third term more accurately describes Crumb's attitude towards past time: resistant nostalgia. More ambivalent than either of Boym's two tendencies, while the resistant nostalgic may dream along with the restorative nostalgic of reconstituting a better time, there is no political program attached to their desire. And while their musings readily lend themselves to ruminative fantasies, as with the reflective nostalgic, these also possess some of the anger and sense of personal injury informing restorative nostalgia's jeremiads. Alternately crankish, sentimental and vituperative, what chiefly informs this type of nostalgia is an abiding sense of despoliation, and the compensatory need to conjure what has been lost in an image or artefact.

Crumb is in large part a satirist, whose image of the past confronts the racism and exploitation within American history in ways that mix longing and critique in uncomfortable propinquity. But the resistant nostalgia Crumb expresses demonstrates a critical potentiality postmodern theorists would find absurd. In mourning the loss of a whole social world, his nostalgia resonates, rather, with the attachment to alternative futures Andreas Huyssen identifies as one of nostalgia culture's critical faculties; the nostalgic attachment to ruins—in this case the ruins of a modernity that once held the promise of unrealized, alternative historical trajectories. As Huyssen writes: "However justified it may be to criticize the nostalgia markets and their ideological instrumentalization of authenticity claims, it will not do to simply identify the desire for authenticity with nostalgia and to dismiss it as a cultural disease."[30] The ever-so-slight aperture between critiques of a simulacral postmodern culture and the nostalgic yearning for more authentic cultural forms is the site where one can finally locate the critical potency of Crumb's resistant nostalgia.

29 Boym: *The Future of Nostalgia*, p. 30
30 Huyssen: "Nostalgia for Ruins," p. 12.

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