

from Alison Landsberg,
Prosthetic Memory:
The Transformation of
American Remembrance
in the Age of Mass Culture
(NY: Columbia, 2004)

Like those birds that lay their eggs only in other species' nests,
memory produces in a place that does not belong to it.

—Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

INTRODUCTION

MEMORY, MODERNITY, MASS CULTURE

THE SPECTACULAR TRAIN WRECK in Cecil B. DeMille's 1925 film *The Road to Yesterday* initiates an extraordinary occurrence: Bess Walsington Tyrell, one of the film's protagonists, is "whirled back along the Road to Yesterday—into the life that was hers three centuries before." In a reversal of the journey undertaken by many immigrants at the time the film was made, Bess is blown back across the Atlantic. Interestingly, she lands not in present-day Europe but in the seventeenth century. Through the mechanism of the train wreck, Bess gains access to memories of events through which she did not live but which she will take on as her own and which will inform her identity in the film's present. The film thus poses a series of questions about the shape and purpose of memory in an age of mass culture: In the face of the dislocations of modernity and postmodernity, how does memory's role change? To what extent do modern technologies of mass culture, such as film, with their ability to transport individuals through time and space, function as technologies of memory? In what ways do these technologies of mass culture challenge the distinction between individual and collective memory? How do these technologies introduce the "experiential" as an important mode of knowledge acquisition? And finally, how might individuals be affected by memories of events through which they did not live?

Released in 1925, *The Road to Yesterday* betrays the influence of two developments that were then paving the way for a new form of public memory: on the one hand, the unprecedented movement of peoples brought about by modernity and industrialization and, on the other, the emergence of mass

culture.¹ Not only did the United States experience its largest waves of immigration from Europe in the first decades of this century,² but it also witnessed the beginning of a mass migration of African Americans to the industrial centers of the North. These movements of peoples ruptured generational ties, rendering the traditional modes for transmitting cultural, ethnic, and racial memory—both memories passed from parent to child and those disseminated through community life—increasingly inadequate. At the same moment, new technologies like the cinema, along with the emergence of a commodified mass culture, transformed memory by making possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives about the past. Just as the train wreck enables Bess to “remember” a distant past, DeMille’s film makes it possible for the audience to acquire new memories.

This book argues that modernity makes possible and necessary a new form of public cultural memory. This new form of memory, which I call *prosthetic memory*, emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history, just as Bess does with her “memories” of seventeenth-century England. In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics.

This book explores the formation of prosthetic memories in three cases in which memory transmission, for historical reasons, became enormously problematic: the case of U.S. immigrants in the 1910s and 1920s, who were separated from their European communities and for whom memory of the “homeland” was never uncomplicated; the case of African Americans after slavery, for whom the legacy of what Orlando Patterson calls “natal alienation” had specific implications for memory and genealogy; and the case of the Holocaust, in which the eradication of witnesses and the death of survivors have complicated both remembering and testifying.³ In each of these cases, the links between parents and children and, perhaps more significantly, the links between individual persons and community—kinship ties—were broken, and alternative methods for the transmission and dissemination of memories were required. As this book explains, the memories forged in response to modernity’s ruptures do not belong exclusively to a particular group; that is, memories of the Holocaust do not belong only to Jews, nor do memories of slavery belong solely to African Americans. Through the technologies of mass culture, it becomes possible for these memories to be acquired by anyone, regardless of skin color, ethnic background, or biology.

Prosthetic memories are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory that are premised on claims of authenticity, “heritage,” and ownership. This new form of memory is neither inherently progressive nor inherently reactionary, but it is powerful. This book contends that rather than disdain the new memory-making technologies, we must instead recognize their power and political potential. Taking on prosthetic memories of traumatic events and the disenfranchisement and loss of privilege that such an experience often necessitates can have a profound effect on our politics.

To clarify the ways in which prosthetic memory differs from earlier forms of memory, I first explore some important precursors from earlier historical moments. Next I discuss modernity and mass culture, the developments that have made prosthetic memory possible. I then examine the ways in which early theorists both feared and anticipated the radical transformation of memory caused by the new mass cultural technologies of reproduction. Finally, I define the concept of prosthetic memory and, in so doing, situate this work within the contemporary debate on memory. The unreliability of memory in the modern age, combined with the ruthlessness of the present, compels people to engage in memory projects—projects of narration and genealogy—that make the past “recognizable” and potentially interpellative. The mass cultural technologies that enable these memory projects also create a new possibility: the construction of prosthetic memories might serve as the grounds for unexpected alliances across chasms of difference.

OTHER TIMES, OTHER MEMORIES

Taking on memories of events through which one did not live is not in itself a new phenomenon. Like Bess, people at other historical moments—albeit through different means and mechanisms—have been able to “remember,” and thereby be interpellated by, events of the distant past. Rather than offer a catalog of previous forms of public or cultural memory, I instead point to two specific historical moments in which memory or memorial practices assumed broad social significance. In part, I hope to underscore the idea that “memory” is not a transhistorical phenomenon, a single definable practice that has remained the same over time. Rather, like all other modalities, memory is historically and culturally specific; it has meant different things to people and cultures at different times and has been instrumentalized in the service of diverse cultural practices. At times, these shifts in the meanings of memory and in the shape of memorial practices have been catalyzed by technological innovation. But despite these shifts, certain common threads are

detectable in both the social conditions that called for memory and the role that memory was asked to play. In the broadest possible sense, memory in its various forms has always been about negotiating a relationship to the past. More specifically, in the two moments that I discuss here, Europe in the Middle Ages and the United States and Europe in the nineteenth century, memory was invoked as a strategy for consolidating important new group identities. Furthermore, certain elements that enable identity formation through memory appeared in both these periods, such as a reliance on affect and experiential practices in fostering memory. A brief examination of these earlier forms of memory facilitates both an appreciation of these recurring features and a more precise understanding of the novelty of prosthetic memory in the twentieth century.

As Mary Carruthers observes, “medieval culture was fundamentally memorial.”⁴ In the Middle Ages, memory served as a technique for enhancing the ethical development of people and, more dramatically, a strategy for consolidating a new sense of religious kinship and fraternity. Carruthers argues that medieval poets and scholars believed that ethical thinking could be enhanced by memory practices. Memorizing a text, she asserts, was seen as a creative and intellectual activity. In the process, a person was to digest, ruminate on, and ultimately incorporate the text’s meanings into his or her own archive of experience.⁵ Petrarch, for example, was known to devour the words and ideas of the authors he read, which helped shape his moral character. In one of his three dialogues with St. Augustine, he offers an interpretation of a passage from Virgil’s *Aeneid*, in which he demonstrates the importance of being able to control anger. As Carruthers points out, Virgil’s words and the ideas they communicate actually reshape Petrarch’s subjectivity. Furthermore, internalizing those ideas affects how Petrarch will act in the world: “The recreated reading becomes useful precisely because in the heat of passion Petrarch’s emotions replay the process of change, for he can remember what the right action *feels* like.”⁶ Even when written material became more prevalent from the eleventh century on, memory remained an important technique because an important “identification of memory with the formation of moral virtues” had taken place.⁷

The process of reading described by Carruthers was not explicitly religious, even though scriptural study, too, could take this form. In fact, according to some scholars, memory was instrumental in both producing devout Christians and fostering the spread of Christianity.⁸ Religious remembrance during the Middle Ages was supported by the development of church art and architecture and the elaboration of religious rituals. Encouraging these religious memories served imperial purposes in addition to more sacred ones. The spread of Christianity to a culturally diverse population throughout Europe

“required assiduous evangelism, and constant administrative, spiritual, and sometimes military support.”⁹ In the face of vast cultural and linguistic differences, church art and architecture became powerful devices for establishing a common religion across Europe.

St. Gregory the Great famously asserted in the sixth century that “pictures were the books of the unlettered.” As many art historians have noted, this claim was rehearsed again and again throughout the Middle Ages to justify church art.¹⁰ Pictures served to teach parishioners the stories of the biblical past. According to art historian Emile Mâle, church art and architecture comprised all the history that a Christian was believed to need. Through them, a Christian learned the biblical stories from creation to revelation and about the lives of the saints and biblical personages.¹¹ Indeed, the awe-inspiring Gothic cathedrals with their soaring verticality were meant to “remind” people of the power of God. When entering a church, these people were prodded to learn or “remember” certain biblical stories. Early Christians were meant to feel a connection with the images they saw depicted and thereby to take on memories of the remote biblical past.

As Benedict Anderson, among others, notes, European sacred art of the Middle Ages depicted religious or biblical personages in contemporary dress rather than in the historically and culturally appropriate attire and seldom as Semitic: “The shepherds who have followed the star to the manger where Christ is born bear the features of Burgundian peasants. The Virgin Mary is figured as a Tuscan merchant’s daughter.”¹² This strategy, of course, encouraged the worshiper’s identification with the biblical stories represented. But it also had the effect of collapsing the past into the present, of flattening time. Indeed, this particular mode of address suggested to Anderson that medieval Christians had a different sense of history and time:¹³ “The mediaeval Christian mind had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present.”¹⁴ Reducing the worshiper’s sense of temporal distance from the past facilitated his or her identification with biblical characters and events. But it also made such a relationship seem less like memory.

Religious ritual also served to create “memories” of the Bible and its teachings, but it, too, had the effect of flattening time. Religious rituals such as Communion resemble mnemonic devices in part because they are, by nature, repetitive. Repetition gives recognizable form to a practice or an idea, and through repetition one might eventually apprehend or come to own or feel connected to some aspect of the biblical past. For medieval parishioners, ritual played a key pedagogical role.¹⁵ But ritual was powerful for another reason as well: it opened up the possibility that one might have an experiential relationship—or at least come to empathize—with a biblical personage or a biblical teaching. This was

certainly the case with flagellation. As John Bossy discovered, flagellation began to replace pilgrimage as a mode of penance in the mid-fourteenth century because it offered “a more realistic and dramatic identification with the sufferings of Christ.”¹⁶ Such an identification with biblical figures, though, might ultimately have had the same effect as depicting biblical characters in contemporary dress. In other words, it too collapsed the past into the present, thereby erasing the difference between the worshiper and Christ.

During the nineteenth century, memory and memorial practices once again assumed broad social significance.¹⁷ In particular, scholars argue that the establishment of nationalism in the West in the nineteenth century relied on a new form of public memory. Pierre Nora’s epic work *Les Lieux de mémoire*, for example, takes as its premise that one can study national feeling by examining the principal places or sites in which collective memory was rooted.¹⁸ And as Anderson observes, nationalism and national memory were dependent on certain technological advances in the eighteenth century. The establishment of print capitalism and, with it, the wide dissemination of newspapers was crucial to constructing the “imagined communities” on which nations were based.¹⁹ Furthermore, the fast pace of social change during the nineteenth century, brought about in part by the Industrial Revolution, led many people to seek security in the past. In England, visiting ruins became a national pastime. Because of the large-scale social, economic, and political changes, which eroded the religious and metaphysical beliefs of the previous centuries, people began seeking origins and the sense of stability that origins promised.²⁰ Andreas Huyssen contends that monumentality as we know it is itself a nineteenth-century phenomenon.²¹ What distinguished monuments in this period was the way they were instrumentalized, “tied as they were to the political needs of the bourgeoisie.”²² In the nineteenth century, Huyssen notes, the monumental was at first embodied in Greek and Roman monuments, since they were effective in enabling European nations to anchor themselves in a particular cultural past.²³ It was later that these newly formed nations strove to create deep national pasts by emphasizing distinctly national monuments that would “guarantee origin and stability as well as depth of time and of space in a rapidly changing world that was experienced as transitory, uprooting and unstable.”²⁴ Monuments were intended to serve as guarantors of national memory; they both created the illusion of a stable, recognizable past and promised to serve as a bulwark against further social upheaval. These monuments were overwhelming and led people to recognize the power and “always already” quality of the nation-state. Ironically, the very monumentality of monuments might have undercut the monument’s memorial effect, standing in for memory rather than provoking it. As Robert Musil declared, there is nothing so invisible as a monument.²⁵

In the case of the United States, the erection of monuments to establish a recognizable and coherent past was most apparent in the late nineteenth century. According to Michael Kammen, after 1870, the United States witnessed the “use of monuments, architecture, and other works of art as a means of demonstrating a sense of continuity or allegiance to the past.”²⁶ This particular use of monuments, Kammen argues, began in the late eighteenth century when nationalism and political ideologies began to usurp the role that religion had played earlier in American culture. This engagement with monumentality marked a new relationship to the past. Not only did history become “the core of civil religion during the spiritual crisis of the Gilded Age,” but national history also was called on to serve pressing ideological needs stemming from the massive immigration: “National history became the means used to transform un-American identities into those of compliant citizens with shared values.”²⁷

Memory served the needs of nation building in other ways as well. As Laura Otis describes, the period from 1870 to 1918 saw the emergence and diffusion of the theory of “organic memory.” Building on the Lamarckian paradigm, this theory “proposed that memory and heredity were essentially the same and that one inherited memories from ancestors along with their physical features.”²⁸ While a cultural form of memory was being articulated, it nevertheless relied on the body as both the receptacle for and the transmitter of memory. As Otis observes, this theory was meant to operate on both the individual and collective level: “A culture, like an individual, absorbed new characteristics and passed them on to subsequent generations.”²⁹ More than just a scientific theory, though, organic memory was a “way of thinking” that captured the attention and interest of philosophers, nationalists, and creative writers, in addition to physiologists and neurologists. Betraying a fascination with origins, this theory was motivated by some of the same forces driving nationalism.³⁰ Even after it lost scientific legitimacy, this organic model of memory—which I later refer to as a “biological” or “hereditary” model of memory—has had a great deal of staying power. Indeed, many forms of identity politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century continue to rely on this logic.

Whether in the form of “organic memory” or national history, memory in the nineteenth century was commonly imagined as collective, handed down from one generation to the next. Early in the twentieth century, Maurice Halbwachs offered perhaps the most influential account of collective memory.³¹ In his account, memories are a social phenomenon; individuals acquire their memories in society. Halbwachs thus contends that memory is wholly dependent on what he calls “the frameworks of social memory,”³² in particular, family, religion, and social class. These existing social frameworks not

only enable groups to reconstruct their past,³³ but without them even individual recollection would be impossible.³⁴ In other words, for Halbwachs, all of one's memories, even those that feel private, are actually collective.

Halbwachs is careful to point out that social frameworks are not created after the fact but are "precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society."³⁵ One implication of this claim is that the present affects the way in which societies remember the past. According to this theory, collective memory is culturally specific, responding to the needs of a particular society at a particular time. The social frameworks of memory often serve the purpose of social cohesion and thus are tied to a culturally and historically specific group of people. This explains why "a moderately cultivated Frenchman finds it hard to understand the array of political ideas of countries like England or America, so that a simple description of their constitutions at best leaves in his mind only verbal recollections."³⁶ Because Halbwachs emphasizes the collective frameworks by which a culture might share and order its recollections of the past, his account implies a geographically bounded community with a shared set of beliefs and a sense of "natural" connection among its members. In this sense, Halbwachs's model seems to work as an account of public memory in the Middle Ages and the nineteenth century. In both cases collective memories were invoked to reinforce the identity of a particular group: in the Middle Ages, collective religious memories were created in sacred art and ritual in order to consolidate Christianity and interpellate "Christians," while in the nineteenth century, national memories were promoted by monuments, with the aim of establishing and maintaining a national identity among the local inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the forces of modernity and the changes wrought by modern mass culture have made Halbwachs's notion of collective memory inadequate. As I will illustrate, the cinema and other mass cultural technologies have the capacity to create shared social frameworks for people who inhabit, literally and figuratively, different social spaces, practices, and beliefs. As a result, these technologies can structure "imagined communities" that are not necessarily geographically or nationally bounded³⁷ and that do not presume any kind of affinity among community members. Of course, this modern form of memory—prosthetic memory—shares certain characteristics with memory in earlier historical periods. With prosthetic memory, as with earlier forms of remembrance, people are invited to take on memories of a past through which they did not live. Some of the strategies and techniques for acquiring memories are similar, too. Memory remains a sensuous phenomenon experienced by the body, and it continues to derive much of its power through affect. But unlike its precursors, prosthetic memory has the ability to

challenge the essentialist logic of many group identities. Mass culture makes particular memories more widely available, so that people who have no "natural" claim to them might nevertheless incorporate them into their own archive of experience.

As this book argues, a commodified mass culture opens up the possibility that people who share little in the way of cultural or ethnic background might come to share certain memories. Mass-mediated memories are not premised on any claim of authenticity or "natural" ownership. One's engagement with them begins from a position of difference, with the recognition that these images and narratives concerning the past are not one's "heritage" in any simple sense. Nineteenth-century monuments produced memories that unified people across differences of class, ethnicity, gender, and region. But they did so by constructing a common national identity that was supposed to supersede these differences. By contrast, prosthetic memories do not erase differences or construct common origins. People who acquire these memories are led to feel a connection to the past but, all the while, to remember their position in the contemporary moment, an experience quite different from that of medieval Christians, who were invited to experience the biblical past as if it were part of the present.

As this book will demonstrate, prosthetic memory creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the "other." In this way, prosthetic memory shares some of the ethical dimension of medieval book memorizing. Prosthetic memory, though, is not available only to scholars and poets, but to a much larger segment of society. In DeMille's *The Road to Yesterday*, Bess engages with and becomes immersed in the seventeenth century, but she knows all the while who she is in the present. Ultimately, her engagement with the past helps her rethink and reshape her contemporary self.

MODERNITY, MIGRATION, MEMORY

It is not incidental that the characters in DeMille's film are transported both across the ocean and back in time by the railroad, the technological wonder of the industrial age. For the latter half of the nineteenth century, the steam-driven locomotive, as Alan Trachtenberg notes, symbolized the economic and political changes associated with modernity.³⁸ These changes were themselves catalysts for radical social dislocations and ruptures. In Marshall Berman's words, the "ever-expanding, drastically fluctuating capitalist world market" produced "immense demographic upheavals, severing millions of people from their ancestral habitats, hurtling them half way across the world

into new lives.³⁹ Not only were Africans uprooted from home and family as white slave traders sought to capitalize on African “resources,” but later, in the United States, slavery further broke apart African American families as mothers, fathers, and children were sold for economic profit. Even after Emancipation, economic pressures forced African Americans to go north in search of work in urban and industrial centers.⁴⁰ Likewise, at the start of the twentieth century, immigrants fleeing poverty or persecution in Europe flocked to America, severing their ties with the Old World. Finally, the near destruction of European Jewry during the Holocaust epitomized the traumatic dislocations of the modern era. Part of the experience of modernity, then, was the disruption of family, kinship, and community ties.

In the contemporary world, large-scale migrations, prompted by economic necessity, continue. Recent scholarship on postmodernity, globalization, and transnationalism has brought important insights into the ramifications of migration for the dissemination of cultural memory.⁴¹ Some scholars have used the concept of diaspora to theorize and explore the relationships and forms of kinship that develop when people are geographically separated from their homelands. In these conditions, places, like generations, can no longer be counted on to provide an experience of continuity. Contemporary theorists of diaspora recognize that memory often is no longer transmitted in a straightforward, hereditary fashion. In an essay on Mexican migration, Roger Rouse considers the parental role of preparing children “to operate within a dichotomized setting spanning national borders” because migration is no longer simply a one-way journey.⁴² In a diaspora, cultural memories, identities, and practices do not flow simply or predictably from one generation to the next or from the homeland to the diasporic people, but paradoxically in both directions. That is, certain memories and traditions and rituals flourish in the diaspora in ways they never did in the homeland. In the work of Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, the structural logic of diaspora emerges as a progressive model for maintaining cultural identity across geographical ruptures.⁴³ Similarly, Arjun Appadurai finds that the global cultural economy has opened up new possibilities for individual agency. From the complicated global flow of capital, media, ideology, and so forth, people glean the materials and ideas from which they actively script their lives and their worlds.⁴⁴ In a global cultural economy, the theory of collective memory as articulated by Halbwachs seems inadequate, for the very notion of global flows challenges the idea of stable shared frameworks.

These insights into the effects of diaspora on culture in postmodernity are equally useful for interrogating the beginning of the twentieth century. While the reach of global capitalism is more extensive now, the system itself emerged in the nineteenth century and was fully in place by World War I.⁴⁵ Appadurai wishes to distinguish the present historical moment from earlier

ones on the basis that global flows of capital, information, ideology, and media have reached unprecedented velocities. But even if true, this claim obscures the relevance of his insights to the unprecedented emigrations and migrations at the turn of the nineteenth century. Those ruptures of family and community might be productively theorized as diaspora is today in terms of complicated multiple cultural affiliations and unexpected modes—many mass cultural—for the dissemination of cultural memory. In other words, I regard modernity and postmodernity not as radically different periods but as a continuum.⁴⁶ Both conditions complicate the process of memory transmission in similar ways.

In response to the urgency of twentieth-century memory projects, technologies of mass culture have been called on to play a new and important role in circulating images and narratives about the past. Interestingly, the role of mass culture in these memory projects has had unintended consequences. Like those of earlier eras, these projects have been largely undertaken with the aim of preserving group memory in the face of historical dislocations. Yet the turn to mass culture—to movies, experiential museums, television shows, and so forth—has made what was once considered a group’s private memory available to a much broader public. In this process, memories have ceased to belong exclusively to a particular group and instead have become part of a common public domain. Moreover, this opening up of once private or exclusive group memories might not be negative or damaging, for the act of publicizing a group’s memory increases its chances of attaining social and political recognition. Mass culture has had the unexpected effect of making group-specific cultural memories available to a diverse and varied populace. In other words, this new form of memory does not, like many forms of memory that preceded it, simply reinforce a particular group’s identity by sharing memories. Instead, it opens up those memories and identities to persons from radically different backgrounds.

CINEMA AND THE BIRTH OF MODERN MASS CULTURE

While aboard the train in DeMille’s film *The Road to Yesterday*, Bess is taken back into a remote past that she comes to understand as her own and that she will “remember” when she returns to the present. To achieve this effect, DeMille employs the flashback, a cinematic device that creates the illusion of time travel. Film scholars like Maureen Turim emphasize the flashback’s utility as a device for revealing “a character’s motivations or traits as determined by formative past experience.”⁴⁷ Indeed, flashbacks most often do serve such

ends. However, the cinematic flashback also functions as a device for providing continuity between disparate spaces and temporalities. In several of DeMille's films this is the case. Unlike the standard flashback that returns a character to an earlier moment in his or her *current* life, DeMille's flashback returns the character to an earlier moment in his or her *past* life. DeMille referred to this device as the "historical flashback." His "formula" was "to tell an absorbing personal story against a background of great historical events."⁴⁸ In DeMille's historical films, flashbacks perform an analogy for the effect of the cinema on the spectator. Like the historical flashback, the cinema transports people into lives that they have not lived in the traditional sense but that they are nevertheless invited to experience and even inhabit, albeit briefly.

From its inception, the cinema sought to make visible what, for economic or social reasons, remained beyond an individual person's reach. In part its project was revelation, in both senses of the word, but it was also transportation, the capacity to carry viewers to faraway places and alternative temporalities. Tom Gunning emphasizes the revelatory powers of the early cinema in his groundbreaking analysis of the "cinema of attraction." Early cinema's project was in large part the "harnessing of visibility, this act of showing and exhibition."⁴⁹ In the early days of film, Gunning notes, the attraction was as much the cinematic apparatus as the films screened; people went to be dazzled by the new technology, to "see machines demonstrated."⁵⁰ But Gunning also intends that the word *attraction* speak to the content of early films: they were not dominated by the narrative impulse that would later characterize classical Hollywood cinema. The "cinema of attraction" was first and foremost an exhibitionist cinema, a cinema celebrating its unique ability to show the viewer something new, something he or she might never have seen before.

This was particularly true of the "travel film," a popular genre in cinema's earliest days and one that arguably had its origins in Daguerre's diorama.⁵¹ The travel film was part of a larger category referred to as "actualities." Depicting news stories and popular amusements, in the style of a newspaper, actuality films outnumbered fictional films in the years between 1896 and 1906.⁵² The "travel genre" was enormously popular in the pre-nickelodeon era, offering viewers actual footage from such distant and inaccessible places as India, Arabia, Japan, and Africa.⁵³ These films brought foreign worlds and experiences into the lives of everyday people. As economic pressure gradually forced film companies to move away from actualities to story films, travel elements were increasingly incorporated into story lines.⁵⁴ In August 1903, for example, the Edison catalog advertised its film *Rube and Mandy at Coney Island* as "interesting not only for its humorous features, but also for its excellent views of Coney Island and Luna Park."⁵⁵ Even as story and narrative began to take precedence over travel, the impulse to transport

viewers to distant lands continued. Here I point to the "cinema of attraction" and the travel film to underscore cinema's original project of moving people across time and space. This project remains very much alive today. The recent success of historical films like *Gangs of New York* (Martin Scorsese, 2002), *The Pianist* (Roman Polanski, 2002), *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), *Amistad* (Steven Spielberg, 1997), and *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) suggests that geographical and chronological "transport" continues to be a crucial element of the cinema's appeal.⁵⁶ Like *Rube and Mandy at Coney Island*, these films weave elements from the travel genre into the fabric of the narrative. An even more direct descendant of the travel film is the I-Max or Omni-Max film that promises to carry its viewer to Antarctica, Mount Everest, and other remote locales.

If the cinema has always been concerned with "transportation," it bears an intimate connection, as some film theorists have observed, with the railroad, another modern technology designed to transport people. The Lumière brothers inaugurated the cinematic era on December 28, 1895, at the Grand Café in Paris, with the projection of *Arrivée d'un train*, a film depicting a train rushing toward the camera. Many other early films were shot from the side window of a moving train, and shortly thereafter cameras placed at the front of moving trains conveyed the thrill of movement.⁵⁷ The plethora of train films underscores the similarities between the two technologies.⁵⁸ In particular, both the railroad and the cinema had a physical effect on the bodies of their patrons. Lynne Kirby examined this connection between early cinematic spectatorship and railroad travel, arguing that "shock" is part of both experiences.⁵⁹ Noting that passengers in the late nineteenth century were afflicted by physical reactions and conditions that derived from the jostling of the train, Kirby posited that the railroad condition, "traumatic neurosis," might have an analogy in cinematic spectatorship. The physical sensation of one's body being moved was a fundamental aspect of cinema from its very earliest days and is apparent in cinema's myth of origin, what Tom Gunning described as the "primal scene" at the cinema.⁶⁰ According to legend, when the Lumière brothers screened *Arrivée d'un train*, "spectators reared back in their seats, or screamed, or got up and ran from the auditorium."⁶¹ Whether or not those early spectators were actually fooled, they were by all accounts *moved* by the larger-than-life cinematic images in front of them. From its origin, the act of film spectatorship has engaged viewers' bodies and transported them. Indeed, this ability to move spectators, to engage them in a visceral way, bears some resemblance to the grand medieval cathedrals, even though the size and shape of the audience are quite different. Film spoke to people across boundaries of geography, nation, and belief and was able to address more of them than even the largest of the grand cathedrals.

Many critics have argued that when the novelty of cinematic experience wore off, so too did its capacity to shock viewers. Certainly, by the second decade of the twentieth century, viewers were sophisticated enough to recognize the cinematic illusion as such. In the Edison film *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (1902), a country rube watches three short films, and in each one he confuses the cinematic images with reality. In the first, a train races toward the screen, causing him to leap out of the way; in the second, he jumps out of his seat to dance with dancing girls, and in the third, he tries to intervene when he sees two people in an embrace, and in so doing he pulls down the screen, revealing the cinematic apparatus. This comic film invites the spectator to find humor in Uncle Josh's naïveté and to take pleasure in his or her own sophistication. However, the fact that viewers were able to distinguish between cinematic images and "reality," between a train rushing toward them on screen and a train rushing toward them on a platform at a station, does not refute the power of the cinematic image. In the space of the cinema, spectators experience a mimetic relationship to the images before them.

This encounter among spectator, cinematic image, and apparatus has generated a great deal of scholarship. In fact, a predominant mode of film analysis pertains to spectatorship: how the spectator is articulated and positioned either ideologically or physically by the film.⁶² What I find interesting in this work on spectatorship is that film is imagined as an instrument with the power to "suture" viewers into pasts they have not lived.⁶³ The cinema offers spectators from diverse backgrounds and ancestries a shared archive of experience. As Miriam Hansen contends, theaters in the beginning of the classical period were neither ethnically segregated nor segregated by class but were a place for crossing over.⁶⁴ From its beginning, then, the cinema has authorized and enabled people to inhabit subject positions and pasts through which they might not themselves have lived and to which they have no "natural" connection. The cinema, then, might be imagined as a site in which people experience a bodily, mimetic encounter with a past that was not actually theirs. In this sense, the cinema is the archetype of the new technologies of memory created in the twentieth century. Like cinema, television and experiential museums also provide the occasion for individual spectators to suture themselves into history, to develop prosthetic memories. This, of course, brings us back to Bess in *The Road to Yesterday*, who is taken back in time to a "life that was hers three centuries ago." If mass cultural technologies make it possible for large numbers of people from a wide range of ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds to create memories of events through which they did not live—as Bess and the other characters in *The Road to Yesterday* do—they create the conditions for a new, prosthetic form of memory.

MEMORY IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL REPRODUCIBILITY

In DeMille's film, it is not the train itself but the train wreck that transports the characters back into their previous lives in the seventeenth century, suggesting a connection among cinematic technology, the past, and a great social disaster. The image of the train wreck points to both the brute power of the technologies of modernization and their potential danger. The train wreck thus betrays an anxiety about what a burgeoning, technologized, American mass media might mean for "authentic" memory. These new technologies of reproduction threatened to dissolve the difference—or an individual's ability to discern the difference—between "authentic" and mass-mediated memories, between individual and collective memories. The enormity of this threat was not lost on the first modern theorists of memory, who wrote against the backdrop of vast social changes. Their writings, some consciously and others not, began to grapple with the implications of the new technologies of reproduction for memory. Even so, these theorists underestimated the effect that mass culture would have on public memory, given its power to disseminate visions of the past on an unprecedented scale.

Of all the modern theorists of memory, none was more influential than Sigmund Freud. In theorizing the unconscious as the site of repressed memories and desires, Freud explored the crucial role of memory in the structure of the individual psyche. An individual's personality, according to Freud, is quite literally the product of specific memories from childhood, both those consciously remembered by the ego and those buried in the unconscious. However, despite Freud's fundamental premise that specific memories from childhood play a formative role in the adult psyche, he nevertheless understood memory as a modality operating at the interface of history and fantasy.

Freud developed this insight most explicitly in his work on the "screen memory" (Deckerinnerung). In his 1899 essay of the same name, he describes a "screen memory" as a composite memory in which an early memory acts as a screen for a later event that has been repressed.⁶⁵ That is, a screen memory is a compromise between two forces: one that recognizes the importance of the event and one that, as resistance, tries to protect the subject from it. Freud notes that in the synthesis of an earlier memory and a later event, the earlier memory might very well change.⁶⁶ He thus acknowledges the difficulty in locating something like "authentic" or genuine memory. Moreover, Freud seemed to recognize that this problem arises from the fact that memories are mediated through representations. The malleability of childhood memories, as he describes it, is intimately connected to their visual character: "In my own case the earliest childhood memories are the only ones of a visual character:

they are regular scenes worked out in plastic form comparable only to representations on the stage."⁶⁷ Clearly, Freud is not referring to mass culture, and yet by emphasizing the "plastic" and visual component of early childhood memories and by problematizing the quest for authenticity, his account of screen memory suggests the role that mass cultural technologies might play in mediating an individual's memory.

Writing a year later, Henri Bergson described memory not as stored visual images but as stored bodily actions, a physical trace of how the body acted under past stimulations. This form of memory, which he outlines in *Matter and Memory* (1908), is different from both perception and what he calls "pure memory."⁶⁸ "Pure," or nonphysical, memory does not exist in the present, and for Bergson, anything that does not exist in the present, like action, is powerless. Moreover, he objects to the abstractness of "pure memory" because it "interests no part of my body."⁶⁹ His rejection of "pure memory" in favor of a bodily, experiential form of memory that is triggered by sensation might very well be a reaction to the new technologies of mass culture that worked to engage the body. If the thrill and "attraction" of cinema in its earliest days were its capacity to move spectators, it might have served as a catalyst for the kind of memory Bergson described.

The Frankfurt school theorists Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin explored the technologies of mass culture more explicitly. On the surface, Kracauer seems distrustful of the photographic medium. He begins his 1927 essay "Photography" by comparing a photograph of a contemporary diva with one of a grandmother when she was the diva's age. Whereas the diva is immediately recognizable by both her contemporary style and her location at the Lido, the grandmother threatens to fade into obscurity. "Were it not for the oral tradition," Kracauer writes, "the image alone would not have sufficed to reconstruct the grandmother."⁷⁰ With this comparison, Kracauer demonstrates the way that photography relies for its legibility on an indexical link to the world. "Once a photograph ages," he writes, "the immediate reference to the original is no longer possible."⁷¹ By the end of the essay, however, Kracauer finds that the alienating quality of the photograph is precisely what gives it the ability to "stir up the elements of nature."⁷² In other words, what began as a critique metamorphoses into a utopian vision of photography that, with its ability to reconfigure nature, opens up new possibilities for social change. Photography emerges as a tool for retraining vision, for enabling the individual to see through—and recognize the contingency of—the reified, "naturalized" structures of society. But the ramifications of photography for memory are grim. "Memory-images are at odds with photographic representation," since memories organize details in a meaningful way according to their significance, whereas photographs depict and record a spa-

tial continuum.⁷³ Despite the radicality of photography's ability to cause a change in consciousness, "in a photograph, a person's history is buried as if under a layer of snow."⁷⁴

Like Kracauer, Walter Benjamin is interested in the social and cultural implications of technologies of reproduction. Benjamin was keenly aware of the relationship between a period's visual technologies and its structures of understanding and perception. In particular, as Benjamin suggests, technological advances play a key role in ushering in new forms of vision. Drawing on Freud's work on the unconscious, Benjamin proposes the "optical unconscious" as a way of describing film's ability to "reveal entirely new structural formations of the subject."⁷⁵ The camera, he explains, "by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by explaining commonplace milieus . . . extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives."⁷⁶ For Benjamin, the camera enables one to see what might be otherwise wholly impossible: "Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously permeated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."⁷⁷ Benjamin sees the camera as a privileged device for making visible what, through repression, remains invisible to the naked eye.

Like Kracauer, Benjamin is less sanguine about the implications of technologies of reproduction for memory. Reflecting on the stakes of photography (and film) for memory, Benjamin takes up Marcel Proust's distinction between *mémoire involontaire* and *mémoire volontaire*. As the realm of unwilling, unmediated, involuntary recollection, the *mémoire involontaire* is defined in opposition to the accessible realm of the *mémoire volontaire*, a conscious, willed, artificial archive operating "in the service of the intellect."⁷⁸ Like Proust, Benjamin tends to privilege *mémoire involontaire* as richer and more authentic while relegating photography and film to the less "authentic" realm of *mémoire volontaire*. Though optimistic about the ability of photography and film to disintegrate the aura emanating from traditional works of art, Benjamin remains pessimistic about the implications of mechanical reproduction for memory, arguing that volitional memory, "encouraged by the technique of mechanical reproduction, reduces the scope of the play of the imagination."⁷⁹ However, as Benjamin himself began to realize toward the end of his life, while working on the epic Arcades project, the opposition between *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire* no longer obtained in an age of mass media and mass culture.⁸⁰ With these new technologies it becomes possible to have a mediated memory that one nevertheless experiences as real or genuine. Benjamin's desire to privilege *mémoire involontaire* as "authentic" might be a compensatory measure reflecting his anxiety about the potential consequences of mass-mediated memory.

