

Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities

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Enuf*

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Tapestries Editorial Collective

"Memory is a tough place. You were there. If this is not the truth, it is also not a lie. There are benefits to being without nostalgia. Certainly nostalgia and being without nostalgia relieve the past."

p 64 Citizen: An American Lyric by Claudia Rankine

Welcome to the 6th volume of Tapestries. In shaping this journal, we thought deeply about nostalgia and memory. The following dialogue mimics our workshop discussions and illustrates both our coinciding and conflicting perspectives.

What is nostalgia?

EW: Nostalgia to me is encapsulated time. It is this bubble of unreality that we can't help but think of as real. All the negative pieces related to that moment settle like precipitate in a test tube or dirt in the bottom of a glass of water and then just fall out, until all that is left is wishes.

NN: I feel the most nostalgic whenever my family gathers to tell stories about old times. One of the most significant parts of their lives is the Vietnam War, twenty years before I was born. Yet, my piece is written from a place and a time far removed from my family. The generational gap between my parents and siblings and I is wider than usual. As a first generation college student, I am also the first in my family to have the language to articulate our experiences as refugees and immigrants. Therefore, I wrote this piece with a sense of nostalgia of wanting to be included in my family history. However, the nostalgia I will be writing about is complicated by the fact that it is about the sorrow of the Vietnam War for South Vietnamese who are forced to leave their homeland.

KX: For me, nostalgia is both haunting and sentimental. Most of the time, I have nostalgia to go back and change something that happened in my past. These are haunting memories of wrongs that I have done and moments where I wished I had been more critical.

On trusting memory:

NN: I rely a lot on photographs to guide me through the memory of my family's history. In a way, photographs are proof of something that happened. I wonder then, how one interrogates memories through photographs. Sometimes I feel like I am speaking for my father and my uncles through my analyses of their photographs, but how reliable is my "memory" of them?

RH: Technology like photographs and video really does help in the process of memory. In most cases, these types of media provide an objective truth. That's a kind of truth that can't really be contested. But of course, we as human beings don't

just live in objectivity. Memories are more emotion than just raw actions. There's a reason we remember certain moments over others, because we attach emotions-good or bad- to them. But then again, it's the feeling that can be difficult to trust. Could it really be that our brains like to fool us with mistruths about our memories?

MYW: If something isn't true, that doesn't mean it didn't happen. If something is true, that doesn't mean it did.

EW: I have complicated feelings about memory. *We remember with perfect clarity things that never happened.* Flashbulb memories are those important events that feel seared into our minds, like where were you on 9/11? The science says that we tend to forget and misremember flashbulb memories just like any of our more mundane memories. But traumatic memory is a different thing entirely. Psychologists studying mundane memories found that people can be easily influenced or forget and misremember details of their memory. Unfortunately this science has been used to suggest that traumatic memories (such as those of sexual abuse) can be influenced and therefore might not be entirely accurate. That belief can be incredibly harmful and can lead to people not believing that traumatic memory is "real" and that it could in fact be made up.

I have struggled with traumatic memory. I have a memory that I spent over 14 years thinking that I "made up." I believed I must have been influenced, that this memory was a story I told myself, until it felt real. But the thing about traumatic memory is that the language center of the brain shuts down while the traumatic event is happening. It is not a narrative memory like *yesterday these things happened*, it is an implicit memory, a behavioral knowledge of an event without conscious recall. You don't remember traumatic events; you re-experience the emotions as if the traumatic event is happening again in the present moment. That kind of memory is a haunting, a ghost of the past that lives inside your body.

So for me, interrogating memory is a loaded practice because it is the practice of "proving" what "really" happened. I think it is important to interrogate our nostalgic memories, to deconstruct the unreality of them and complicate them back into something approaching the truth. But it also fills me with a sense of terror, that I will somehow find that my experience was not real, that I cannot trust my own self.

Is nostalgia enough?

RH: Nostalgia is the desire to sink back into a happy, familiar space. For me, I often see people relying *too* much on nostalgia. I understand its abilities to help those in times of grief or trauma; sometimes the present may be too hard for one to handle. But oftentimes that past is an oversimplification, a romanticization of the "past." It can't become a crutch with which to stand on. We can't live the past. We have to exist in the present, willing to persist for the future.

In terms of Hip-hop, I think there's definitely an emphasis on callbacks of the past. People give their props to Tupac and Biggie, or even further, claim to be the next second coming of them, a reference to a bygone era where many still believe the culture was "at its purest". When people think of the greats, the gamechangers, it's always the same people. I say that not to diminish their accomplishments but rather to critique public perceptions of Hip-hop's past. It wasn't just the popular acts or those we immortalize in paintings, songs or artwork. Instead, there existed a whole valley of artistry beyond the dominant narrative. People have socialized Hip-hop to be gangster-riddled, misogynist, hyper-violent, and male-dominated, amongst other things. However, that's not all Hip-hop has to offer. Especially currently, Hip-hop has expanded so far as to reach any and almost every niche available. Burgeoning artists have realized the problematic narratives and carved out spaces for themselves.

KX: I wish I could go back to my high school years where I was one the "smart" students on the A honor roll, played on the varsity tennis team, participated in the National Honors Society, and served as the Vice President and President of the service club. But what if that was not the reality that I had? My piece explores another aspect of citizenship and patriotism that I did not experience: the creation of "s"itizenship. The only requirement for "s"itizenship was to be seen as outside the norm of patriotism and citizenship. This was a reality for many students who were deemed disruptive to the learning environment of those around them. Would my nostalgia for high school still exist had this been my reality?

Coming to college has definitely made me aware of the realities that I was so willing at the time to turn a blind eye to. I have become more critical of my experiences and more willing to take other experiences into perspective. It isn't enough to just remember the good things and be trapped in nostalgia. Instead I need to challenge, critique, expand my perspective and ask myself questions to reflect on my experience. Why was it that I had a different experience from someone else? Why was I accepted into the PHamily? My piece attempts to explore my different intersectionalities and critique why my nostalgia for high school isn't enough.

MYW: Sometimes I think nostalgia is enough; it has to be. In a way, we are nothing more, nothing less than our nostalgia. Our past determines our present. And how could we change that? Our perspective toward our past can shift and spin and circle, but when winter settles and bookstores fill with freshly cut calendars, we are who we are because of our nostalgia. Our nostalgia changes shape, sure, but it doesn't dissipate. It shapes us.