



All this must be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel.¹

The subject of nostalgia comes into the picture: it belongs to the precarious hold that a person may have on the inner representation of a lost object.²

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather, it remains behind and before that experience. Nostalgia is like any form of narrative, and hence, is always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack.³

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceeded radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share. ⁴

The photograph as souvenir is a logical extension of the pressed flower, the preservation of an instant in time through a reduction of physical dimensions and a corresponding increase in significance supplied by means of narrative. [...] Temporally, the souvenir moves history into private time. ⁵

The souvenir involves the displacement of attention into the past. The souvenir is not simply an object appearing out of context, an object from the past incongruously surviving in the present; rather, its function is to envelope the present within the past. ⁶

If a person very close to us is dying, there is something in the months to come that we dimly apprehend—much as we should have liked to share it with him—could only happen through his absence. We greet him at the last in a language that he no longer understands. ⁷

Cisplatin, Pemetrexed, Avastin. ⁸

Endlessly I sustain the discourse of the beloved's absence; actually a preposterous situation; the other is absent as referent, present as allocution. The singular distortion generates a kind of insupportable present; I am wedged between two tenses, that of the reference and that of the allocution: you have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you). Whereupon I know what the present, difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety. Absence persists—I must endure it. Hence I will manipulate it: transform the distortion of time into oscillation, produce rhythm, make an entrance onto the stage of language (language is born of absence: the child has made himself a doll out of spool, throws it away and picks it up again, miming the mother's departure and return: a paradigm is created). Absence becomes an active practice, a business (which keeps me from doing anything else); there is a creation of fiction which has many roles (doubts, reproaches, desires, melancholies). This staging of language postpones the other's death: a very short interval, we are told, separates the time during which the child still believes his mother to be absent and the time during which he believes her to be already dead. To manipulate absence is to extend this interval, to delay as long as possible the moment when the other might tipple sharply from absence into death.⁹

I wanted to do a show that would disappear completely. It had a lot to do with disappearance and learning. [...] Freud said that we rehearse our fears in order to lessen them. In a way this "letting go" of the work, this refusal to make a static form, a monolithic sculpture, in favor of a disappearing, changing, unstable, and fragile form was an attempt on my part to rehearse my fears of having Ross disappear day by day right in front of my eyes.¹⁰

The methodological centrality of the personal carries through his complete oeuvre. He has commented: "It is not hard for me to tell things about myself personally—that's the easy part. The hard part about making personal work is not to make it one man's problem—not to make a film that just refers to my own grief. Who cares about that? I want people to be able to enter the film through their own lives ... But by myself being open I think they can be open to themselves. That's what I think a personal film has to do—has to show a trust but then it has to become more meaningful than what that story is about. It has to be bigger."¹¹

We found by way of explanation that in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object. We may imagine that the ego is occupied with analogous work during the course of melancholia; in neither case have we any insight into the economies of the course of events.¹²

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.¹³

Nothing sorts out memories from ordinary moments. Later on they do claim remembrance when they show their scars.¹⁴

It is now a commonplace assumption to believe that something essential is lost, or at least attenuated, in the process of growing up. Whether it is called vision or imagination, or vitality, or hope, lives are considered to erode over time (the idealization of childhood and adolescence is reactive to this belief). And it is, of course, integral to this story to conceive of death as an enemy—as something we fight, something that makes surprise attacks—and not as of a piece with our lives.¹⁵

[Little Prince] “You know, when you are feeling very sad, sunsets are wonderful ...”

[Narrator]: “On the day of the forty-four times, were you feeling very sad?”

But the little prince didn’t answer.¹⁶

It is a good thing, he thought, that out of consideration for the reader, there should pass through the essay’s discourse, from time to time, a sensual object.¹⁷

The temporality of everyday life is marked by an irony which is its own creation, for this temporality is held to be ongoing and nonreversible and, at the same time, characterized by repetition and predictability. The pages falling off the calendar, the notches marked in a tree that no longer stands—these are the signs of the everyday, the effort to articulate difference through counting.¹⁸

For both art and life depend wholly on the laws of optics, on perspective and illusion; both, to be blunt, depend on the necessity of error.¹⁹

Being is a becoming. And this becoming does not achieve stabilization even with death. Long after a given being has ceased to be physically in the world, it remains there, mnemonically, “housed’ in all of the psyches that have ever affirmed it. In each of those psyches, it is not a coherent and stable entity, but a constellation of diverse and highly particularized sounds and images, caught up in a ceaseless process of flux and transformation.²⁰

And even when the bird walks, one still knows him winged.²¹

Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue.²²

1. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 119.
2. D.H. Winnicott, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," in *Playing and Reality* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 16.
3. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, The Gigantic, The Souvenir, The Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23.
4. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80-81.
5. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 138.
6. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 151.
7. Walter Benjamin, "One-Way Street," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 70.
8. Recommended first-line chemotherapy for advanced non-small cell lung cancer.
9. Roland Barthes, referring to Winnicott, in *A Lover's Discourse*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 21-22.
10. Felix Gonzalez-Torres, interviewed by Tim Rollins, in *Felix Gonzalez-Torres* (New York: A.R.T. Press, 1993), 13.
11. James Benning, quoted by Julie Ault in "Using the Earth as a Map of Himself" in *James Benning* (Vienna: Filmmuseum Synema Publikationen, 2007), 112.
12. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth, 1964), 252-253.
13. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 255.
14. Chris Marker, *La Jetée*, book version of the 1964 film (New York: Zone Books, 1992), unpaginated.
15. Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 107.
16. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince* (San Diego: Harcourt, 2000), 18-19.
17. Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, 135.
18. Susan Stewart, *On Longing*, 14
19. Friedrich Nietzsche, "A Critical Backward Glance," in *The Birth of Tragedy*.
20. Kaja Silvermann, *World Spectators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 27.
21. Marcel Proust quoting Antoine-Marie Lemierre, in "Saint-Beuve and Baudelaire" in *Contre Saint-Beuve*.
22. Susan Sontag, "The Aesthetics of Silence," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 11.



Published on the occasion of *Ever Ephemeral*
curated by Julie Ault.
Signal, Malmö
September 23 – November 13, 2011.

COVER: Alejandro Cesarco, *Present Memory*, 2010
still from a color video, no sound, continuous loop,
commissioned by Tate Modern, London.