PART I

Mechanics of Obsolescence

1 Embedded Memories

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In 2000, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on the success of the commercial Web site longlostperfume.com.[1] Longlostperfume.com specializes in selling fragrances from twenty or thirty years ago, fragrances that it replicates and advertises on the Internet. (The company's motto is "Perfume beyond the touch of time.") These fragrances are copies of perfumes—such as Afrodesia or Deneuve—that long ago disappeared from the shelves of retail stores. The scents of older perfumes, we are told in the *Wall Street Journal* article, were stronger and more distinct than those of perfumes popular today. As a result, they now appeal to a dwindling group of consumers. Longlostperfume.com successfully pulls together isolated customers for these perfumes, assembling a market sufficiently large to warrant their ongoing production.

This example invites us to explore the Internet's relationship to a cultural past that it reinvigorates and invests with value. The relationship of the Internet to the past is typically talked about in terms of remediation, a process by which new media come to enclose the old.[2] The emphasis in remediation theory is often on the persistence of the old amid the new, in analyses committed to demonstrating the stubborn survival of perceptual frames, affective attachments, or ideological pre-givens. The Internet has, in some fashion, enclosed within itself old and forgotten perfumes, but it obviously does not (or does not yet) transmit or otherwise carry their smells. It does, however, provide the preconditions for their perpetuation as material culture (as liquids in bottles), as sensory artifacts, and as marketable commodities. The Internet does this in two ways. One is that, binding together otherwise isolated interests, it reconstitutes viable markets from market fragments, an often-commented-on feature of Internet commerce. At the same time, the Internet, like other media with virtually unlimited storage capacity, provides the terrain on which sentimental attachments, vernacular knowledges, and a multitude of other relationships to the material culture of the past are magnified and given coherence. Longlostperfume.com has accomplished this in interesting ways. It has revitalized certain perfumes from the past, pulling them into a present marked by their simultaneous availability. At the same time, however, the agglomeration of older perfumes on its Web site

allows us to imagine a "back catalog" of perfumes, to understand perfumes as historical phenomena in the way that we now understand reissued musical recordings or films.

A significant effect of the Internet, I would argue, is precisely this reinvigoration of early forms of material culture. It is not simply that the Internet, as a new medium, refashions the past within the languages of the present, so that vestiges of the past may be kept alive. Like most new media, in fact, the Internet has strengthened the cultural weight of the past, increasing its intelligibility and accessibility. On the Internet, the past is produced as a field of ever greater coherence, through the gathering together of disparate artifacts into sets or collections, and through the commentary and annotation that cluster around such agglomerations, made possible in part by high-capacity storage mechanisms. That we can think of lost perfumes as the objects of collective interest has much to do with the role of the Internet in creating spaces that magnify the significance of such phenomena, making even the most trivial objects the focus of a popular but highly ordered knowledge. Longlostperfume.com makes manifest the Internet's paradoxical relationship to physical artifactuality. It has pulled, from obscure places of domestic or industrial storage, artifacts whose value and intelligibility it manages to restore.

The Internet is clearly not a place in which old fragrances are stored, but neither is it sufficient to say that longlostperfume.com is merely "about" old fragrances or simply a place in which they are described or announced. The Internet is a container for old fragrances in the sense that, within it, these fragrances are given solidity as a category of artifacts, made to persist and to interact with other cultural phenomena.[3] With these other phenomena—with the retro fashion photographs that adorn the longlostperfume Web site, for example—the fragrances resonate to form clusters of cultural knowledge. The Internet carries and transports such clusters as the substance of its own cultural weight and authority. In one respect, the Internet is a distinctive apparatus, producing its own characteristic forms of knowing (particular balances of text, image, and sound). At the same time, by drawing together innumerable forms of scholarly and vernacular textuality, the Internet has become a repository for wide varieties of knowledge that have predated it: the rhetorics of old fandoms, folksy family genealogies, film buff checklists, and so on. Around something as minor as old perfumes, the Internet has gathered together the resources (old photographs, personal reminiscences, and the logos of now forgotten companies) that pull old objects into the limelight of cultural recognition and understanding. The Internet becomes a comfortable place, less because we are adept at handling its futuristic openness than because it has rendered the already familiar all the more coherent and solid. Paradoxically, that coherence and solidity serve to naturalize versions of the past, whose artifacts, we believe, the Internet has merely discovered.

We might think of all media forms as institutions marked by distinct ratios between their capacities for accumulation and the sorts of mobility they enable. In his book *Metaculture*, the anthropologist Greg Urban argues that culture is not something to which movement happens. Rather, he suggests, culture derives from movement, drawings its character from distinctive relationships between

stasis and movement, inertia and acceleration.[4] *Metaculture* is one of several theoretical resources we might mobilize in thinking about media technologies and their role in perpetuating a cultural past. The inertial forces that interest Urban might be specified using concepts developed elsewhere, in writings on urban space and domestic collections. In a book of architectural theory entitled *Anytime*, the Turkish authors Mennan, Kutukcuoglu, and Yazgan offer productive new foundations for the study of cultural temporalilties. "Any culture produces a system of delays," they write. "This system secures the integrity of a culture, which by definition builds upon a set of procedural and behavioral codes that transform it into a machine for delay."[5] Mennan et al. go on to discuss cities as machines for delay, and there is much that is convincing here. The porousness of city life and the multiplicity of urban spaces within which practices may hide and persist—all of these slow or block the drives toward obsolescence and displacement that are more famously taken to characterize urban modernity. Any culture's system of delays may be tied, as well, to what Janelle Watson has called its "mode of accumulation": the manner in which, within that culture, artifacts are "stored, displayed and disposed of."[6] The relationship between a culture's system of delays and its mode of accumulation is easy to imagine. Both ideas suggest the presence of blockages and weighty buildup around which culture must travel in order to move forward.

Let us pursue these ideas through consideration of the video store, one of the most banal and familiar of media institutions. The video store has reshaped cultural time in at least two ways. Expanding the availability of films from the past, it has acted as a drag of sorts on the forward movement of cinematic culture, slowing the disappearance and commercial obsolescence of films as they pass out of their theatrical runs. In this, the video store is an inertial force. At the same time, however, it contributes to the acceleration of first-run film culture. It does so, in part, through the ways in which it has helped reduce the typical run of a film's theatrical release, and so increased the rate of turnover in commercial cinemas. More insidiously, though, the video store has nourished the first-run cinema by ensuring that the background knowledges that new films require as the basis of their intelligibility are perpetually accessible.

In 1988, Barry London, president of marketing and domestic distribution for Paramount Pictures, noted in an interview with the *New York Times* that older people were finally coming back to the movies.[7] Over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, movie industry lore told us, people older than fifty had retreated from the practice of seeing films in theatrical release. This disengagement from first-run moviegoing was seen as a reaction to new, alienating moral standards and stylistic languages within Hollywood cinema. With time, the argument went, this estrangement had become self-perpetuating. Gradually, older audiences had lost familiarity with successive generations of new stars or with the cross-referencing and generic patterns that made new films intelligible. The longer older people stayed away from the cinema, of course, the more unintelligible the current cinema became. By the mid-1980s, the first-run film industry was seen as dominated by teenage moviegoers, whose tastes in films had come to dictate industry decision making.

At the end of the 1980s, however, this trend appeared to be reversing itself. Mike Medavoy, vice president of Orion Pictures, told the *New York Times* that moviegoing by people over fifty had recently risen by 50 percent (although older adults remained a minority within the larger moviegoing audience).[8] Invited to explain this shift, Barry London suggested that the film industry's reconciliation with an older audience was the result of two technologies that the industry had long accused of shrinking movie attendance. "Older people have been re-exposed to movies on video cassettes and cable," London claimed, "and now that they've seen most of those library movies, they're going out to see new movies."[9] Let us pass over London's ludicrously literal image of older people venturing out to the first-run cinema only in that desperate moment when the supply of older films on tape or cable had been completely exhausted. The more significant insight here is that the videocassette has played a role in reuniting audiences with a cinema that they had long believed they could no longer understand. The videocassette carried the aesthetic styles and moral economies of contemporary films into the homes of older audiences. There, older people might test and resuscitate their comfort with current cinema, in circumstances that involved little risk.

Accurate or not, London's analysis invites us to think of the videocassette as a technology through which cultural knowledges are stored and transported. By the late 1980s, the videocassette was disseminating films to larger numbers of viewers than were first-run cinemas. We are used to imagining this dissemination in geographical terms, but London's example points to the demographic distances that the videocassette had been able to traverse. It brought films into age groups from which the normal habits of moviegoing might otherwise have kept them. Something more than the discrete experience of any given film is disseminated in the renting of that film, however. The return of older people to cinemas in the late 1980s suggests the rented videocassette served more broadly as a pedagogical tool that accomplished a reduction of cultural distance. It disseminated those knowledges and protocols of reading through which older people might reacquaint themselves with the contemporary cinema.

In the age of the videocassette, new films in theatrical release displaced those that had come before them, as they always had, but older films piled up behind new releases to an extent unknown in the days before home video. In this accumulation, older films served as perpetually available tools of instruction for anyone wishing to renew a contact with the contemporary cinema. The cultural effects of the videocassette have been discussed primarily in terms of the repetition of unitary experiences that it permitted, for the manner in which it transformed our possible relationships to any given film. We might begin to see the videocassette as functioning more broadly as a tool of orientation, as an instrument for cultural way-finding. In the sequences of their release and consumption, videocassettes solidify the process by which older films enhance the readability and public resonance of those that come after them. They permit those whose relationship to current cinema has been disrupted or weakened to find their way back to that cinema.

Charles Acland has pointed to the multiple temporalities that had emerged in the film industry by the late 1980s as the release of first-run films often served to

announce the video release that would follow. Audiences increasingly "see the current cinema as largely a rough catalogue of future cultural consumption," a means of orienting themselves to the sequence of future releases on video or to television.[10] More broadly, the passage of audiovisual materials across virtually all media over the last two decades may be seen to create multiple vectors of pathfinding across the cinematic field. In the analysis of media technologies, the challenge here is that of developing an account of such pathfinding that operates between two extremes, between, on the one hand, recognition of the specific promotional role played by distinct texts in relationship to each other and, on the other, the banal acknowledgment that films become intelligible within a broadly dispersed intertextual field. At an intermediary level, we may explore the variety of ways in which cultural knowledges are absorbed within particular texts, embedded within media forms and transported across sites of consumption.

The videocassette contains textual forms that are the expressive residues of more broadly based cultural knowledges and aesthetic languages. These residues allow the videocassette to serve as an instrument of instruction for those untrained in the protocols of the cinema around them. Like any container, the videocassette may serve to both transport and stockpile the cultural knowledges held within it. It will transport these across geographical and demographic boundaries, and, through such transportation, contribute to the mobility of contemporary cultural life. At the same time, in stockpiling those knowledges, the videocassette, like any medium of storage, allows them to pile up and to persist. If only because it provides a perpetual presence for the no longer new, this storage may block processes of innovation or commercial turnover within the cultural field. Some of that blockage is evident in the perpetuation of stale careers, to which we turn in a moment. It may be found in the persistence of genres such as the erotic thriller, which required the stabilization of star persona and generic conventions across multiple examples to acquire a generic identity and air of semilegitimacy.

For those older adults whose return to first-run filmgoing was noted in the late 1980s, the videocassette had served to smooth the transitions of a history that might otherwise have remained marked by significant, disruptive discontinuities of form or tone. The videocassette and the video store helped reorder that history in ways we might imagine in cartographic terms. The vast quantity of movies circulating on videocassette by the late 1980s offered multiple points of entry to the current cinema. Videocassettes provided numerous bridges or mediating series of texts through which a generation gap within the filmgoing audience might be traversed. These routes might be circuitous—taking viewers, perhaps, from *Driving Miss Daisy* (Bruce Beresford, 1989) to *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989), and from there on to—who knows?—*Drugstore Cowboy* (Gus Van Sant, 1989) or *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (Steven Soderbergh, 1989). At the same time, the multiplicity of such routes and strings of films had made recent cinematic history sludgier, more porous, and, it might be said, more spatial. The sense of a unidirectional sequence of new releases, pulling further and further away from the sensibilities of an older audience, gave way to a sense of cinematic culture as much more densely populated, offering multiple points of contact and pathways through successive films.

Another example from film industry discourse is pertinent here. In the early 1990s, industry observers noted that the typical careers of actors and actresses seemed longer in the age of the videocassette than had previously been the case. This observation came amid industry complaints that actor salaries had become too high—that even the stars of seemingly endless series of flops could command higher salaries than executives felt they merited. Actors like Charlie Sheen, Harvey Keitel or Mickey Rourke, whose careers were often marked by failures, seemed to always live to act another day.[11] They maintained the status of celebrity within the public mind through one failure after another because their names continued to resonate with the public. The sense that they still possessed an unchallenged celebrity persisted. In large measure, a film industry journalist suggested, this was because films that failed at the box office no longer passed from public view, rendering their performers invisible through that failure. The videocassette had become an institution of cultural memory. Like photos of missing persons, videocassette versions of films kept failing actors within the public eye. A pattern of ongoing disappearance had given way to a logic of accumulation, through which failed movies and their performers piled up on videotape and within the inventories of video stores. Rigorous displacement over time had given way to sedimentation and piling up across space. It is not simply that videotape and the video store might give a second commercial life to failed films, as often happened—famously, in some cases, like that of *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994). More subtly, failed films and failing stars retained their visibility through the videocassette, which ensured that they were glanced over by customers at each visit to the video store. Home video, in this account, had slowed the disappearance of films and of their stars, maintaining them within a long-term if not permanent visibility and availability. At the very least, the failed theatrical film, now out on video, remained a carrier for the iconography of its lead actors and its own title. Even when no longer rented with any frequency, it sat in a relation of partial contiguity to more successful recent films, in the visual and artifactual landscape of the video store, and derived at least minor legitimacy from this.

As a technology, the videocassette was often imagined in terms of its lightness and velocity of travel. This fueled the fantasy that the rise of the videocassette would expand the pluralism of cinematic culture because marginal films could move more easily and with reduced investment around the world and across a variety of viewing contexts. Harold Innis, of course, would ask us to examine the variety of ways in which that same lightness contributed to the solidification of film industry structures and patterns of dominance.[12] It is not simply that the videocassette extended Hollywood's reach into demographic or geographical corners that might have resisted it. The piling up of videocassettes, within video store inventories and entertainment culture more broadly, allowed for the knitting together of multiple lines of association between films—lines of association that, most of the time, served to enhance the intelligibility and reduce the strangeness of any single one. The multiple mazelike sequences through which people rent sequences of films will almost certainly lead them, at various points, into the center of Hollywood film culture, and the knowledge learned

there will lead them out across other lines of connection. If the themes and stars of failed Hollywood films still seem to resonate, however weakly, within the busy semiosis of the video store, this enhances the legitimacy and legibility of any new film that might employ those themes or stars. One result of this, since the mid-1980s, has been a weakening of processes of obsolescence as new films have resuscitated others backward in time or across the markers of shared personnel and genre.

The videocassette's capacity to reorder the continuities between films was first noted with the success of sequels like *Terminator II*, whose first-run audiences were greater than those for their predecessors. The first *Terminator* film was a hit in its first-run release, of course, but its circulation on video helped more broadly to circulate the knowledges on which the appeal and intelligibility of its sequel depended. This back-and-forth reinvigoration of films old and new still left room on the margins for independent or international films with unknown stars or unfamiliar themes. Arguably, however, the weaving together of most of the others within compact relations of mutual reference and interconnection has reinforced the sense that cinematic culture has a center. Every videocassette or DVD transports the particular text that marks its distinctiveness, but each, as well, transports and stores sets of cultural knowledges that may be mobilized in the viewing of other texts. This is a commonplace of cultural analysis but might be profitably reworked within a theory of media storage and transportation. As Greg Urban notes, new texts reinvigorate elements of the surrounding cultural texture in ways we are often invited to see as novel, as initiating cultural movement. Each such mopping up, however, represents a storage and retransmission of these clusters of meaning, a reassertion of their cultural presence and authority.[13]

Roughly halfway into the film *Austin Powers: Goldmember* (Jay Roach, 2002), a long scene transpires within a mid-1970s New York disco. In this scene, the 1970s blaxploitation figure Foxy Brown kibitzes with 1960s British spy figure Austin Powers. Their interplay is mediated by the Broadway actor Nathan Lane, whom, it is assumed, large numbers of audience members will recognize. The scene ends as Austin ventures into a private room at the club, to meet his father, played by Michael Caine in a send-up of his own image from *Alfie* (Lewis Gilbert, 1966) and from a number of mid-to-late 1960s British spy films. Like the film as a whole, this scene is chronotopic, in the sense that it enacts a particular joining of historical time to geographical place. The Austin Powers films participate in a widely dispersed labor of imagining, which, across dozens of films and musical revivals, has cast the period of the mid-to-late 1960s as essentially British, or at least most emblematically so. The mid-1970s, likewise, have come to take shape, within a broadly shared cultural sensibility, as essentially American and urban and funky.

The smooth intelligibility of the scene I have just described is easily explained in terms of an intertextual background that has settled into U.S. cinema over the last two or three decades. This background has been strengthened with each James Bond movie, which revives interest in the series as a whole and stimulates the recirculation of iconography from that series. It has been solidified in large measure

through the regular parodies, remakes, and revivals of 1970s blaxploitation films we've seen over the past twenty years. There is an ever-increasing thickness to these renderings of the 1960s and 1970s, it seems to me—a sense that the overlaying of films and other texts that cast these periods in particular ways has made it difficult to move around them through alternate routes. Even Roman Coppola's attempt to reimagine the late 1960s as French, in his film *CQ* (2001), could not escape the temptation to flirt with Austin Powersisms.

A common way of talking about the *Goldmember* excerpt would invoke a theory of readability. The intelligibility of *Austin Powers: Goldmember* presumes a set of cultural knowledges that have taken shape elsewhere, which each viewing of *Goldmember* is intended to evoke. I would like to desubjectify this process, however—to move it away from a theory of reading and to look at the film itself as a container for cultural knowledges. *Austin Powers: Goldmember* serves as a storage device, through which a set of historical references are held, delivered to various places, and allowed to occupy cultural space. In particular, the film gathers up a flurry of recent ways of remembering the mid-1970s and warehouses them, then sets them down in the middle of a global popular cultural field. In so doing, it renews their cultural centrality and reinvigorates the value of the texts from which they are drawn. The film is not simply the recapitulation of these ways of remembering; it is a device for carrying them forward in time and, through the film's own monumental success, extending the cultural space that they occupy.

There are worse ways of imagining the mid-1970s, of course, and I will happily take that offered in *Goldmember* over one that installed Cat Stevens or Ryan O'Neal at its center. The movement of blaxploitation culture to the heart of a collectively imagined mid-1970s has involved time and cultural labor, and it is as welcome for being African American as it is suspicious for being so exclusively American. Nevertheless, I have watched similar films and sequences in Brazil, where colleagues noted the displacement of their own, quite different imaginings of the 1960s and 1970s—imaginings that have been given cultural form only in relatively isolated, disconnected texts, such as *City of God* (Katia Lund, Fernando Meirelles, 2002). This cultural logic operates all the more strongly when a film like *Goldmember* accumulates within the video store, no longer disappearing—to give way to new renderings of the 1960s and 1970s—but accumulating alongside other films that circle back on each other to render their own version of these historical periods weighty and durable. *Goldmember*, in this sense, is a kind of weighty delay, set up like a roadblock against transformative processes of cultural reimagining. We do not need the technology of the DVD or the videocassette for *Goldmember* to do this work—for it to set down a densely packed reading of the mid-1970s around which alternative readings have to tiptoe and circle. The *Austin Powers* series, nevertheless, is a group of films whose original points of reference—swinging London in the 1960s—were relatively obscure for the audiences at which they were directed (and the first film in the series performed weakly at the box office). Through the back-and-forth viewing of originals and sequels, however, it has drilled a set of historical and cultural reference points deep into the cultural field.

The inertia that marks these reference points is the result in part of two ways in which new media technologies, such as the videocassette or DVD, have reshaped cultural temporalities. In the first place, these technologies have set in place a spatialization of audiovisual culture. Within this spatialization, the principal relationships between texts are those of interreference and mutual support rather than succession and displacement. Secondly, the enormous storage capacity of the video store lets *Goldmember* take semantic nourishment, for years and years, from the *Pulp Fictions*, blaxploitation parodies, and different reiterations of itself that linger on and regularly resuscitate each other. This effect is different from that claimed in many analyses of "recombinant culture," which find, in processes of pastiche and juxtaposition, evidence of the random and fleeting character of cultural citation.[14] On the contrary, one result of the processes just described is that new media come to be characterized by a sluggishness, a lump weight. This sluggishness stems, in part, from the tendency for new media artifacts to come embedded within durable material forms that accumulate, rather than succeeding each other as events (as did the broadcasting of old films on television from the 1950s through the 1970s). This is true as much of the Web site as of the DVD or CD. It is not simply that, in their durability, new media artifacts pile up and, in so doing, increase the dense overlayering of all the artifacts available at any one time. It is also that, as I noted with respect to the video store, the circuits of reference that bind one artifact to another reverse chronologies or cross sequences of development in a way that muddies any sense of historical time. Processes of obsolescence, through which artifacts might regularly disappear, so that novelty within the cultural field might be perceptible, have been slowed.

At the same time, it is common for each new example of such media to possess higher bandwidth than that which preceded it: from vinyl album to CD, videocassette to DVD, and from all of these to the Internet. Of the many things said about this expansion of bandwidth, one of the least acknowledged is the extent to which it has altered the weight of the cultural past. New technologies do not simply take over from earlier technologies, but, increasingly, they build on a previous technology's work of collection or agglomeration. As Robert Cantwell notes, the vinyl LP gathered up dispersed examples of folk music or vocal jazz, helping produce the coherence and historical weight of these styles by allowing them to resonate with each other on the space of the long-playing record.[15] CD reissues continued this process of absorbing and reordering musical history within an abundant, simultaneous availability. The Internet perpetuates and magnifies this even further.

The effects of these processes warrant extended consideration. They have given us innumerable collections of music, films, or written textuality from the past, which, in their careful arrangement and elaborate annotation, have served to historicize these cultural forms in almost fetishistic ways. Each successive technology has enhanced the significance of older cultural artifacts by allowing them to be joined to others that clarify and embellish them, in packages more and more characterized by extensive textual—almost curatorial—documentation. At the same time, the backfilling of a weighty and finely differentiated past

has diminished the ripples that any instance of present-day novelty is able to set off. As a result, historical sequence has been slowed and muddied. The most interesting effects of increased bandwidth, then, are these: the consolidation of historical archives that goes on within new media, the mopping up of dispersed texts from the past into collections of music or film, the expansive annotation that embeds such collections within complex knowledges, and so on. In all these processes, the weight of the past relative to the present seems to increase.

We might map this as a global process in which the gathering up and convergence of cultural artifacts in places of storage and annotation produces particular clusters of cultural authority and weight. In the global recording industry, the fate of national musical heritages is at play here. The CD, the retail superstore, the decline of tariffs, and other factors have all rendered national musical markets more open to an abundance of transnationally circulating musical forms. This openness threatens to diminish the weight of national musical traditions within abundant inventories of music from elsewhere. At the same time, however, in countries like Brazil and Mexico, dispersed catalogs of small or regional recording companies within these countries have been brought together within the reissue strategies of a few large companies that have bought them up. Boxed sets and annotated compilations of 1930s Brazilian samba or 1960s tropicalia now embed these musics within packages marked with scholarly prestige and characterized by a semiotic and physical weightiness. New storage media, like the CD or the Internet, are creating weighty, meaningful clusters of agglomerated cultural artifacts, clusters whose grounding in region or nation is often striking. The same processes have given weight to the packages that arrive from a cultural center—the box sets of *Sopranos* seasons arriving from the United States, for example—but they have also created various kinds of cultural ballast in these other countries. Regional or national cultural expression is gathered up in the boxed sets of Brazilian telenovelas or reissues of Shaw Brothers films from Hong Kong.

The CD, the DVD, and the Internet are technologies whose "newness" should not obscure their role in renewing the economic and semiotic life of older artifacts. Reinvigorating the past, and slowing down processes of obsolescence, new technologies have consistently rendered the past more richly variegated and dense. This has reduced the sense of relentless change that might otherwise have marked their introduction and dissemination. Indeed, as is sometimes claimed, the reliance of each new media technology on repertory from the past may be one of the features of new media that reduce their potentially intimidating novelty. At the same time, these pasts are put together with variable solidity and weight. New media, of course, will contain the music or films of a multitude of cultures. The solidity and perceived significance of given kinds of music or cinema, however, will have much to do with the lines of interconnection that flow between them across various media forms—the annotation, commentary, and packaging that accompany them as they circulate.

There is another dimension to these processes that merits comment, however. Longlostperfume.com reminds us that a key effect of storage media is the convergence of various sensory experiences within the realm of the visual. The Internet

reassembles artifacts from the past within a space of simultaneous availability, but the locus of that simultaneity is the visual (and only very rarely the audiovisual). In the processes just described, the perfumes of the past become part of the visual culture of the present, inasmuch as their presence on the Internet has taken the form of graphics, photographs, and texts. Just as the Internet has renewed the economic value of innumerable cultural artifacts from the past (from the high school yearbooks sold on eBay through the Old-Time Radio programs available on Web sites), so it has hastened their convergence on the realm of the visible. In the realm of the visible, they come to be adorned with textual commentary and forms of graphic display that have become the basis of their public presence. On the Internet, aural, tactile, and other forms move toward the visual as the manner of their self-announcement. Textual artifacts from the past, similarly, migrate toward the gridlike graphic visuality of the Web page.

The visual has become the mode of public presence of cultural forms in their commodity or memorial state. This is true for music, written textuality, and so on. This was long true of the department store catalog, for example, as it was of the encyclopedia and of the paintings through which we acquaint ourselves with the material culture of the past. This is one of the conditions that allowed the surrealists, the situationists, foundmagazine.com, and innumerable other movements to fix on the sublimely disorientating character of the found object. The visual bias implicit in this idea of being found is what allows all these movements to imagine cultural artifacts, originally marked by distinctive forms of sensual expressivity, as occupying space in roughly equivalent ways. The Internet, with its graphic renderings or annotations of perfumes, Pez machines, 1960s soul music, or forms of ballroom dancing perpetually reinstalls the visual as the realm of historical cultural understanding. This is all the more paradoxical in the case of longlostperfume.com: an archive whose principle of selection is the intensity of odor cannot convey this odor in its public presentation.

Arguably, new media diminish the fetishistic properties of the old, through the simultaneous and ongoing availability that they permit and through the pacifying forms of annotation and commentary that have come to surround even the most lurid or passionate of cultural artifacts. At the same time, however, new media forms train us to make the connections through which the coherence of historical styles comes to be recognized. It is in the congealing of such styles that fetishism makes its return. In the second volume of his *Recherches*, Marcel Proust writes the following:

> All the products of one period resemble one another; the artists who illustrate the poetry of their generation are the same artists who are employed by the big financial houses. And nothing reminds me more strongly of the installments of *Notre-Dame de Paris* and of various works of Gèrard de Nerval, that used to hang outside the grocer's door at Combray, than does a registered share in the Water Company.[16]

The affinities that Proust notes, however, between stock certificates and illustrations to Nerval, are not inevitable. They would only be noted in a culture

whose abundance of accumulated and discarded artifacts allowed the passage of time to be noted in deeply sedimented and richly resonating clusters of objects. We need large inventories of such objects in order that they may knit together within densely intertextual packages, so that the affinities among the hairstyles, record album jackets, movie posters, and childhood toys of, say, 1985, start to assume a historical solidity. New media, in the ordered ways by which they gather together historical artifacts and thus endow them with historical weight, are perpetually producing the past in various forms of coherence.

It is here, though, that global political-economic analysis of these processes seems warranted. In the journal *October*, Christian Thorne argued that the retro fascination with postwar lounge culture, ratpack style, and diner breakfasts was an "unabashedly nationalist project" that sought to create "a distinctively U.S. idiom, one redolent of Fordist prosperity, an American aesthetic culled from the American century, a version of Yankee high design able to compete, at last, with its vaunted European counterparts."[17] The solidification of these motifs and practices within a weighty and coherent cultural sensibility takes shape through the dialogue between cultural artifacts, which, I suggested earlier, is part of the spatializing mutual sustenance through which such artifacts speak to each other, in the video store or on the Internet. Retro, Christian Thorne suggests, "is the form that national tradition takes in a capitalist culture."[18] The Internet, like the video store, is about abundance, but it is also about the inertial movements that bring commodities and images together into clusters and networks whose solidity decides their cultural and symbolic weight. This weight is one of the stakes in local, regional, and national struggles over cultural authority.

Notes

1. Robert Johnson, "Fragrances of Yesteryear Are Back, in Supermarkets and on the Web," *Wall Street Journal,* November 2, 2000, B1.

2. See, for the major statement on remediation, David J. Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), esp. p. 19.

3. A paper by Jonathan Sterne on the MP3 helped focus my interest in the "container" character of media, an intermittent concern, as Sterne reminds us, within the theoretical work of Lewis Mumford and others, and one that has found further elaboration in the work by Kittler and others on the storage activity of media. I am grateful to Jonathan for this inspiration, and he bears no responsibility for any misuse. Jonathan Sterne, "Cultural Origins of Digital Audio: The Case of the MP3," public lecture, McGill University, Department of Art History and Communications Studies, January 23, 2004.

4. Greg Urban, *Metaculture: How Culture Moves Through the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 6.

5. Zeynep Mennan, Mehmet Kutukcuoglu and Kerem Yazgan, "title," in *Anytime*, ed. Cynthia C. Davidson (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: Anyone Corporation and MIT Press, 1999), 71.

6. Janelle Watson, *Literature and Material Culture from Balzac to Proust: The Collection and Consumption of Curiosities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40.

7. Aljean Harmetz, "Hollywood Catches a Wave," *New York Times*, January 20, 1988, C15.

8. Ibid., C15. See also Aljean Harmetz, "Hollywood Pays Court to the Young Adult," *New York Times*, May 13, 1990, C15.

9. Aljean Harmetz, "Hollywood Catches a Wave," *New York Times*, January 20, 1988, C11.

10. Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes and Global Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 65.

11. Doug Desjardins, "Video Stars," *Video Store*, October 30, 1994, 15.

12. See, for example, Daniel Drache, ed., *Harold Innis, Staples, Markets and Cultural Change: Selected Essays* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 366 and passim.

13. Urban, *Metaculture*, 61.

14. See Todd Gitlin, "Flat and Happy," in *Media in America*, ed. Douglas Gomery (Washington. D.C., and Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 222–32.

15. Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 36.

16. Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C. K. Scott Mongrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 34.

17. Christian Thorne, "The Revolutionary Energy of the Outmoded," *October* 104 (Spring 2003): 103.

18. Ibid.

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