

with its unknown atrocities waiting up the road ahead. So when appeals are made to progress, they are often scoffed at. Few would endorse the notion that things could get better. But there are still ham-fisted attempts to revive the dead corpse of progress. Tech corporations rhetorically weave their inventions into the narrative of progress and historicize them as the next great leap forward, whether they're driverless cars, digital currencies, or virtual reality platforms. It is hard to take them seriously. Only the most delusional technocrats would ever believe that the invention of the electric vehicle triggered a paradigm shift as transformative as the invention of the incandescent light bulb.

Since progress aged poorly into an unreliable myth, something was needed to solve the nostalgia reaction, something coeval with the exigencies of a therapeutic society, a cure masquerading as symptom. If progress wouldn't suffice, there needed to be another way to keep nostalgia at bay, one that wouldn't leave the past behind but that also refused to embrace the future. Instead, it would reboot the past. It would promise to eliminate the possibility of loss by keeping the past alive in the present, and as a result, nostalgia would finally be conquered.

nostalgia as alienation
b/c constant presence of the past is not nostalgia

Foreverism

Because nostalgia shapes a great deal of our culture and politics today, the usual move is to accuse our culture — producers and consumers alike — of being stuck in the past, of being too nostalgic, but if nostalgia is the emotion experienced when something normally absent becomes momentarily present, in our minds or in everyday life, then the constant presence of the past in the contemporary doesn't amount to "nostalgia" as much as something else.

I'm calling this discourse of keeping the past present *foreverism*. Foreverism gives people everywhere the notion that ours is a past-gazing society; to accept this as truth is to see only one side of the coin: foreverism's purpose is to eliminate nostalgia, just like yesterday's juridico-medical discourses. It does this sneakily, through the illusion of consumption and choice. Foreverism can trick us into regarding the present-day explosion of nostalgic content as proof of our longing for the past, but just because we have near-endless access to nostalgic content doesn't necessarily mean we are nostalgic. Maybe, in a world of retromaniacal plenty, when we have more access

foreverizing culture - reanimate from
- rebirth, 1/15/20

WHEN NOTHING EVER ENDS

to the past than ever before, we haven't felt nostalgia in ages.

The discourse of foreverism sanctions a process I'll call *foreverizing*. Expanding cinematic "universes," cloud archiving, and even voice cloning technologies are all in the business of foreverizing, that is, of revitalizing things that have degraded, failed, or disappeared so they can remain active in the present forever. To foreverize something is not merely to preserve or restore it but to reanimate it in the present and ensure its future survival, forever. It is the rejuvenation or rebooting of things lost, the breathing of new life into moldering corpses. Rebooting older films, reviving bygone fashion trends, digitizing "memories": these developments prevent the old and (out)dated from disappearing into the past, so that we won't miss them anymore . . . so that we won't feel the pain of longing for the past — in other words, so that we won't feel nostalgic for it.

We have not arrived at a relaxed acceptance of nostalgia, nor have we tamed any nostalgic intensities once raging. The West is as anxious about nostalgia today as it was in the past, when medical professionals endeavored to find a cure

- protection for aging

digital & future (No actually)
from net

WHEN NOTHING EVER ENDS

for it. We have, instead, found new weapons for eradicating it. These weapons do not register as coercive, intrusive, or disciplinary, but they are covert and just as antinostalgic as the medical and punitive discourses that impugned nostalgia for centuries.

I have chosen the terms *foreverism* and *foreverizing* intentionally. I first encountered the word *foreverizing* on the website for *iMemories*, a digital transfer company. "At *iMemories*, we understand how important your memories are to you and your family," the "About Us" section states. "That's why we don't just digitize your old videos, movie films and photos to be playable now — we foreverize your memories to be relived over and over again."¹⁷ This intrigued me. Why would the company, or its customers, associate the digital with the forever? That is, with permanence, accessibility, and organization? Because *iMemories* chose to use that term to distinguish itself from other companies that merely digitize analog "memories," it makes a claim about human memory that's become quite popular in the digital age, namely, that the digital ensures the security and playability of recorded memories that are otherwise difficult to ensure.

Shortly after that, I came across the term *foreverism* in the most unlikely of places: a marketing publication. In 2009 consumer trend firm TrendWatching issued a briefing titled "Foreverism: Consumers and businesses embracing conversations, lifestyles and products that are 'never done'." It argued that the "forever" should be as meaningful a concept for the marketing world as the "now" and outlined three characteristics of foreverism for businesses to consider: forever presence, forever beta, and forever conversing. The publication pointed out that the now hadn't disappeared, but the forever looked increasingly appealing. "Let's face it: many things *are* inherently transient and short-lived, and consumers like it that way," the briefing noted. "And in the loooooong run, *nothing* lasts forever. But FOREVERISM and NOWISM aren't mutually exclusive. The opportunity lies in figuring out which processes, services, products currently are ephemeral when consumers would perhaps prefer some sort of FOREVERISM."¹⁸

The briefing explained the benefits of maintaining one's forever presence: that is, publicly sharing one's digital identity and keeping it updated. It suggested that forever presence is possible today

thanks to "technology that allows [consumers and businesses] to find, follow, interact and collaborate forever with anyone & anything," like social media, which TrendWatching likened to "an eternally up-to-date encyclopedia of individuals." Social media profiles "will live on forever," along with "billions of other digital crumbs scattered across cyberspace," because "younger generations will never want to dispose of their groomed online presence to begin with." Those who use social media — "which in mature consumer societies will mean 99% of the population" — will have a "forever presence." This is a positive development, according to the briefing, because "What's forever present, is forever findable and trackable, too."¹⁹

Individuals online don't just stay forever present, they can converse with each other forever, too. This "conversation revolution" started by social media platforms has facilitated conversations among "friends, family, strangers, foes, and yes, brands, in every possible combination until the end of times." The briefing contended that consumers have always conversed with companies, but the "real-time, in-your-face, mass public conversation" occurring online has proven to be a

better way for consumers to interact directly, and constantly, with brands (as well as celebrities). If someone wants to make a suggestion, file a complaint, or ask a question, they can tweet at the company or tag them in a post. And others can join the conversation, too, if they see the tagged post on their home page.²⁰

Finally, the briefing called for an endless collaboration between consumers and companies, for thinking of the process as the product, and for prioritizing the unfinished over the final — in short, for adopting a “beta attitude.” In a section titled “Forever Beta,” it suggested that providing feedback to brands will publicly reveal their flaws but that brands should be open to “introducing and revealing themselves, flaws and all.” If a user posts about a mistake a brand makes, the brand will have to acknowledge and rectify it. A “looping, continuous dialogue” will occur between consumers and brands, and to maintain a good relationship with consumers, brands will need to operate in a “humble, transparent, unpolished, almost human-like FOREVER BETA mode.”²¹

This short memo from the ad world proved to be quite prescient. Intended to help marketers come up with new strategies, it described

unfinished, it updates (y F&S)

a discourse with enormous influence today. Individuals who are forever trackable, conversations that are never finished, products that are constantly being updated — these were capitalist ideals long before the TrendWatching briefing, and they continue to be perpetuated under capitalism. The briefing merely put a name to a set of statements, beliefs, attitudes, values, and processes already circulating. However, it failed to consider the potential pitfalls of these ideals. What are the consequences of remaining forever present, operating in a forever beta mode, and conversing forever? How do the tenets of foreverism shape both the corporate sector and our lives? Does the forever work alongside or against the instant “now” culture of capitalism? And what happens when nothing ever ends?

It might seem vulgar to adopt a term created by marketers to describe some of the conditions of late capitalism. But marketing and advertising terms can describe negative conditions without necessarily meaning to. I’m reading the same words in the TrendWatching briefing as any marketer would, but where they might see possible strategies to promote brands, I — as a critic of consumer capitalism — see possibilities for

(Forever Beta mode)

exclusion, control, and oppression. This amounts to a difference in perception but also a disagreement over the purpose of marketing, which, for TrendWatching, is to serve businesses. But for me, the purpose of marketing is to maintain corporate dominance over our lives, to package brands with specific discourses that speak to the public but that serve ultimately to disenfranchise the working and middle classes and funnel wealth to the minority of individuals who own major corporations. In short, I find *foreverism* to be a useful term, just not in the same way TrendWatching does.

My argument in this book is that foreverism has replaced the older positivist discourses against nostalgia by proving to be a vital solution to a longstanding problem under capitalism: how to extinguish nostalgia while also profiting from it. But although foreverism appears less harsh than the punitive measures proposed by yesterday's positivists, its mission is still to suppress any emotional expression that might threaten the capitalist directives to work and produce, including the work needed to keep the past alive in the present. When nothing ever ends, the feelings associated with endings are muted — positive

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feelings such as the contentment and relief felt after finishing something, but sometimes also sadness, pain, grief, and of course nostalgia, especially when something ends that we didn't want to end. Foreverism promises to relieve those feelings while also making it quite difficult for us to rest knowing that the work is done, the case is closed, the story is over.

In what follows, I aim to explain why foreverism has become a dominant discourse in contemporary culture and politics, the effects foreverism has on our conception of nostalgia in particular, and the consequences of living in a time when nothing ever ends.

Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost

There is a difference between preservation and foreverizing, and a difference between foreverizing and restoration, that should be noted. All three are less punitive strategies to alleviate the nostalgic subject's bittersweet longing for the past, but they are no less tenacious in their mission to loosen nostalgia's grip — and they usually end up reinforcing the very longing they try to cure.

Preservation, Restoration, Foreverizing

Preservation starts with the impulse to save things. Decontextualize an object and place it behind glass, seal it in amber, lower the temperature to a

degree freezing enough to halt all organic activity, enclose it in a vault, collect it with others and arrange them to be visible and admired, then charge admission. The process has its origins in the nineteenth century's "economy of desire": the spectacularization of objects, the commodification of the winsome, when the quaint and very small became fetishized.¹ The dizzying spiral of keepsakes, souvenirs, curio cabinets — these private objects turned living spaces into museums, where "domestic daydreaming and armchair nostalgia" could be indulged.²

The problem is that which is preserved must "die," so to speak, to be protected. It must be frozen in rigor mortis; it cannot exist in its context without risking patination. Neither can it truly live. "A culture that is merely preserved is no culture at all," Mark Fisher told us.³ This presents a problem: one longs to be able to interact with the preserved thing, to live with it, but it must be protected from time, must exist so close but so far away. Restoration, on the other hand, involves cleaning up something old to make it look new, or better than new. But the restoration can only last so long before it will need restoring once again.

Let me provide an example from popular music to illustrate the differences between preservation, restoration, and foreverizing: the long-running American rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd. Formed in the 1960s, Lynyrd Skynyrd has enjoyed success thanks in part to its willingness to foreverize itself against aging and death, as well as the fan labor to keep the spirit of the band alive through time. To preserve Lynyrd Skynyrd's music is to keep the band's physical media safe from aging, perhaps by framing one of their vinyl records and hanging it on a wall. Prized Lynyrd Skynyrd memorabilia can also be preserved by placing it behind glass or in a museum. Some of the band's original tapes are stored in an air-conditioned room in a house belonging to Tom Markham, regarded as the first to record the band in the late 1960s.⁴ These are all preservation tactics; the point is to freeze pieces of the band in time. To restore Lynyrd Skynyrd's music is to remix and remaster it to meet modern-day audio standards. As a result, the music sounds cleaner and clearer, maybe even louder and better, than it originally did. It's a more interactive approach than preservation and gives the feeling that one is encountering them for the first time again. But to foreverize

Lynyrd Skynyrd is to add new members to the band when older members leave or pass away, something they've been doing in earnest since their reformation in the late 1980s following the deadly 1977 plane crash that killed three of their members. Lynyrd Skynyrd could also foreverize themselves by allowing contemporary producers to remix their hits for marketing purposes. The 2022 TOTEM remix of "Free Bird" is a perfect example of foreverizing. TOTEM describes itself as a "boutique music library" that produces cinematic music for theatrical marketing.⁵ Its remix of "Free Bird" is designed to penetrate new marketing channels and generate new sources of income, ultimately aiding in the franchising of the band. The remix sounds like Hans Zimmer covering Skynyrd: pounding drums, huge strings, and a plummeting moment of silence before the guitar-led outro kicks in. Across its 3:00 runtime, you can almost see the trailer to a blockbuster action film flash before your eyes.

One is reminded of the Ship of Theseus story when encountering a foreverized product. If all the original parts of a ship are replaced with new ones, is it still the same ship? Is Lynyrd Skynyrd still Lynyrd Skynyrd with the members of their

feelings: the nostalgia for the original, the anxiety for the future.

Foreverism isn't immaterial. Although the concept of forever carries transcendent implications, while the now appears so much more tangible, material, and bodily, these are always shifting associations. The imperative to "live in the present" is perhaps as transcendent as the promise that one's love will last forever. They are not so different. Both the now and the forever have planetary consequences that affect us *now*. But when the past is collapsed into the present, and everything is future-proofed, you might feel powerless to take action.

Trapped In The Present

Living according to foreverist ideals — to be forever present, upgrading, and conversing — can be an exhausting existence. You experience the feeling of stasis, of being stuck, as if nothing ever gets done (nothing's ever *done*), as well as the jetlag of constant motion. You must always remain vigilant so you don't ever "miss" anything, always improving, perfecting, grinding, hustling, and moving up, so you're never done with work. As TrendWatching noted, the "process is the product." Betterment, however, does not mean change in a foreverist society. You must grow but also be continuous with yourself, to keep your "forever presence," because foreverist societies would like to maintain continuity to keep

things trackable. Individuals are incentivized to brand themselves on social media, exchanging a performance of inflexibility for likes, followers, partnerships, endorsements. Staying true to one's brand, and unable to exercise much autonomy, a person trapped in a foreverist society can feel as though they are a character in a cinematic universe, or an icon in a game played by someone else, or like they're laboring in a virtual simulation. Players search for exits out of the "game" but are confronted by borders, bureaucracies, checkpoints.

Maintenance of the status quo is privileged over progress in a foreverist society. Legislation to improve the lives of the working class isn't passed; debt keeps people stuck in place, unable to move forward; people feel out of control in their own lives. Meanwhile, capitalism maintains growth of profit for the elites while telling the rest of us that insignificant, incremental updating is the best that can be done. Action is limited, predetermined, forecasted. It seems there is nothing you can do.

Not If, But When

This feeling of inevitable entrapment is often expressed in a phrase that commonly repeats in public discourse today: "It's not a matter of if, but when." I started noticing the phrase sometime during the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020. I remember the Centers for Disease Control warning Americans that it wasn't a matter of *if* COVID-19 would disrupt our lives, but *when* it would. The phrase, with its threat-level aura, was then applied to every conceivable danger: cyberattacks, economic crashes, data breaches, the next pandemic. I heard my father say it during a conversation about one of the COVID variants in 2021. Friends have said it, usually frustrated by some inevitable change coming to their careers: "My hands are tied at work. It's not a matter of if my job will be restructured, but when . . ." *destined crisis*

According to the statement, these crises were destined to happen. The speakers of the phrase, assuming the role of negative prophets, were telling us that bad things were going to occur whether we liked it or not. At best we could hunker down and accept our fate. When a Medscape article declared that it wasn't a matter of if a radiation

oncology department would be the next victim of a cyberattack, but when, the author was demonstrating that these attacks are “increasing in frequency and magnitude” — which is to say, they’re already here, they’re getting worse, and we might be too vulnerable to stop them.¹ Prevention is futile. Only resilience can save us now.

To utter “not if, but when” is to announce a determined future into existence and to silence any objections. At best, it can give attention to the concerning issues bearing down on us, but rarely are any alternatives offered to thwart, or at least mitigate, the harm of *when*. Rather, it promises relative stasis: we must maintain through the harsh season, the endless winter. To the degree change is possible, it is negative: things will change, but the change will be for the worse. Meanwhile, corporate and military powers will make necessary changes to maintain the operability of markets, while the most vulnerable are expected to adopt a tough disposition, to make the necessary cuts to survive, and to do so without question and certainly without longing for the past.

The phrase reflects a weird viewpoint in the digital age: it is as if reality itself can be viewed

agency lock-in

like an ongoing series or cinematic franchise with each development framed as an inevitable plot. Characters die off, older narratives are rebooted, but the overarching structure of the series remains the same. The status quo remains forever present, while people are expected to survive — or even somehow to derive growth from — extreme, life-threatening conditions. Our perception is that someone else is controlling our lives, and why would it be any different? “Not if, but when” essentially locks us into assigned positions for the foreseeable future. This agency lock-in, combined with expectations that we quantify performance at work and home, navigate convoluted bureaucracies, and compete to earn salary raises, can make a person feel as if they’re trapped in a game, controlled by a remote sadistic gamer.

Those of us feeling trapped are not automatons; rather, we are like characters in a story who have become aware of our entrapment. Some might enjoy living in a predetermined universe, one that’s pre-written for them. Unless, of course, the universe is hostile; then they might endeavor to scale one level up from the simulation and into the real world. They would experience profound horror knowing they were locked in the wrong

universe, the backwards world, the meaner reality.

Redshirt John Scalzi's novel *Redshirts* provides a picture of what might happen if characters come to this shocking revelation. In the book, a group of intergalactic ensigns aboard the spacecraft *Intrepid* start to suspect that they are actually characters in a television series. Andrew Dahl, the novel's protagonist, notices that the lower-ranked crew members die more often than the senior officers, who either escape dangerous situations unharmed or endure an exaggerated amount of trauma without dying. Crew members avoid the officers as much as they can, for if they accompany them on an away mission to the surface of a planet, they're likely to die in bizarre ways: "Death by falling rock. Death by toxic atmosphere. Death by pulse gun vaporization," to name a few.² Dahl is shocked to learn the veteran crew even has a name for this phenomenon: the Sacrificial Effect.

He observes other strange behaviors aboard the *Intrepid*. When he's tasked to produce a "counter-bacterial" to cure a plague ravaging an alien planet, he's given a box resembling a microwave oven in which he places a vial, closes the lid, and waits a few hours until it dings. He's then

instructed to run to the bridge, present the gibberish data scrolling on his tablet to the science officer in person, and leave the bridge as soon as possible. He also notices that fellow members will occasionally act more dramatically than usual, only to snap back to normal, and he's told to avoid "the Narrative" by a recluse on the ship.

Along with a group of fellow ensigns, Dahl learns the truth of what's going on: their lives are being influenced by the writers of *The Chronicles of the Intrepid*, a series that premiered on basic cable in 2007 and ran for several seasons. Everything that happens in the show in some way happens aboard the *Intrepid*. When a writer kills off a character in the show, their double dies in real life in the future. Dahl and the others are worried that they too will be killed in horrible ways unless they travel back in time and stop production on the show.

The first half of the novel, before the twist is revealed, explores the frustrations of military bureaucracy, the lack of concern senior officers have for their crew, and the sycophantic behaviors ensigns must display to the officers. When ensigns are killed off, they're quickly replaced by new ones. There is a steady pipeline of talent

funneling into the *Intrepid*, perpetual fodder for the death machine. Dahl is flabbergasted at how inefficiently and rigidly the *Intrepid* is run and questions why lower-ranking officers would even need to accompany senior officers on dangerous away missions. He also asks the other longstanding crew members if they've ever reported the unusually high casualty rate to the Military Bureau of Investigation, or to journalists, but nothing has come of it because there is no evidence that the leaders of the *Intrepid* are incompetent. It is just how things are: to be an ensign aboard the *Intrepid* is to inevitably die an untimely death, and there is nothing any of them can do about it. Their fates are sealed — or, as Dahl notes, “It’s not a matter of *if* I get killed, it’s when.”³

Particularly disconcerting to Dahl is the sheer trauma that an officer, Lieutenant Kerensky, has endured every two months for three years without dying. “He should be in a fetal position by now,” he tells a fellow ensign. “As it is, it’s like he has just enough time to recover before he gets the shit kicked out of him again. He’s unreal.”⁴ Kerensky is the model of resilience in the novel: able to suffer extreme injury but unable to die, the

perfect worker in an uncaring system, a character with no time to experience painful emotions. He will endure whatever trauma is necessary to advance the plot.

The characters in *Redshirts* discover that all the systems of power have coordinated against them to keep the story in which they’re trapped forever present. Some individuals are expendable and die quickly; others are expected to stay alive without tears or nostalgia for the ones they’ve lost. Facing such strange circumstances, they do about the only thing they can do: converse with each other constantly.

Scalzi writes almost the entire novel in dialogue. Characters are always saying something, always quipping and commenting, usually about the absurd things happening to them. The language Scalzi writes for his characters is similar to Whedonspeak, a style of dialogue popularized by writer Joss Whedon, whose credits include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *The Cabin in the Woods*. Whedon is notorious for writing his characters as if they are vaguely aware they are acting in a fiction, or, at least, as if they are familiar with the dramatic tropes of television and feel the need to constantly comment on them. Characters in

Whedon's stories rarely stay silent but, rather, make references assuming the other characters — and the audiences watching — know what they mean. They substitute specificity with filler words like “stuff” and “things,” and everyone understands the meaning. A particularly egregious example of Whedonspeak in *Redshirts* occurs after we're introduced to the microwave oven-like box, when an ensign, Collins, admits to Dahl that things aren't what they seem aboard the *Intrepid*:

What are we going to say, Andy? . . . “Hi, welcome to the *Intrepid*, avoid the officers because it's likely you'll get killed if you're on an away team with them, and oh, by the way, here's a magic box we use for *impossible things*”? That would be a lovely first impression, wouldn't it?⁵

In a world in which ensigns feel powerless to change anything, sarcasm is their only weapon, and it's dished out in continual conversation. Dread, nostalgia, or sorrow might creep in if the dialogue stops.

I like to think of Whedonspeak as a language spoken by foreverized characters, that is,

characters that are trapped in stories from which escape proves difficult. The best they can do is wink at the audience, letting us know that *they* know their context is fake and that, perhaps, some unseen force is influencing them to act according to a script or logic — but there might not be anything they (or we the readers) can do. Instead, they will remain forever present and forever conversing within a closed system without being able to change it.

Numerous superhero, sci-fi, and fantasy media incorporate Whedonspeak to enliven their dialogue: *The Avengers* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (both written and directed by Joss Whedon), the *Marvel's Avengers* video game, *Dungeons & Dragons: Honor Among Thieves*, and, perhaps infamously, Netflix's *Cowboy Bebop* reboot, to name only a few. (I'll delve into the *Cowboy Bebop* reboot in a later section.) Characters in these media don't just make quips about the events happening to them. They also just talk a lot, like the characters in *Redshirts*, because without explaining every detail about who is doing what, everyone but the diehard fans would be lost. Scriptwriters know that over-explaining motives and prior events helps fans remember

why a plot is developing the way that it is and brings newbies up to speed. As a result, silence and contemplation are rare.

While characters in these films fill the silence with dialogue, fans do their part by continuing the conversation in real life. Fans not only consume their favorite media franchises but also talk about them on social media, host podcasts dissecting plot and character developments, and so forth. They do this to keep the intellectual property alive, and also to salute it as one would a flag or a leader — to honor the great works of the past as if it were one's duty. It might not register as work, but it is work nonetheless: a constant job of conversing.

“Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves,” Deleuze said, “but rather force them to express themselves. What a relief to have nothing to say, the right to say nothing, because only then is there a chance of framing the rare, and ever rarer, thing that might be worth saying.”⁶ In other words, constant communication reduces the possibility of a meaningful point being made. And simply being able to converse with others all the time means nothing if we don't consider what we're communicating about and on whose

terms. These are especially crucial points to consider when communicating on social platforms. The ability to engage constantly with others is one of social media's main attractions, yet free speech is not equally distributed online. A social platform is not a public space. There appears everywhere online the democratization of speaking one's voice, but doing so is always on the terms of the digital platform, which demands that users contribute so that data is produced for media corporations to better micro-target their ads at audiences for the next reboot.

A foreverized world seems to stretch without end. It is tiresome to live in one, to stand up and be counted as crew members, who are framed as disposable and subjected to violence, while leaders escape harm aboard a dangerous ship hurtling toward oblivion. We are encouraged to brand ourselves, to “sell” ourselves to companies, and as a result we are pressured to conform to inflexible roles, to perform as empty-headed sitcom people who never feel loss or pain, speaking to each other in the cynical language of Whedonspeak: aware of our fate but unable to do more than signal to others that we're aware. There is no time for nostalgia in a world like this, no tolerance

for mourning loss or longing for stability. But loss comes for us all. It's not a matter of if, but when.

If Spring Will Ever Come

So far, I've examined how foreverism attempts to suppress nostalgia by keeping the past forever present. But coerced forgetting is just as anti-nostalgic as forced remembering, and can also aid in locking people into the present.

The horror of a world forced to live without a past appears in Yōko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, published in 1994 and translated into English in 2019. In the novel, the inhabitants of an unnamed island slowly lose their memories as things around them disappear. There is no grand announcement; the inhabitants merely awake one morning to suspect something has disappeared, and then, gradually, they realize what's missing. Any person found hiding a vanished object, like flowers, hats, or perfume, is disappeared by the Memory Police, an efficient, emotionless force in jackboots. The people of the island carry out the disappearances themselves not only because they

are afraid that the Memory Police will come for them but also because once the memory of an object has died, the object has no use. Of what use is perfume if you cannot smell it, if it does not conjure memories, if it does not make one nostalgic? What good is a novel if words and stories read like gibberish scrawled on paper?

The novel begins with a fading memory: the narrator asking her mother about the disappearances. "One morning you'll simply wake up and it will be over, before you've even realized," her mother tells her. "Lying still, eyes closed, ears pricked, trying to sense the flow of the morning air, you'll feel that something has changed from the night before, and you'll know that you've lost something, that something has been disappeared from the island."⁷

When the calendars disappear, the island succumbs to endless winter. Snow falls continuously. A couple of people worry that winter will last forever. "I wonder if spring will ever come," a former hatmaker comments. "Think about it. With the calendars gone, no matter how long we wait, we'll never get to a new month . . . so spring will never come."⁸ Without spring there won't be any crops. Nothing new will bloom.