Remembrance of Things Present:
Scattered Notes on the Apocalyptic Dreams of Modernity and Time Capsules

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Abstract:
This paper investigates the representational potential of "time capsules," a truly modern cultural practice of burying a container under the ground with "things" placed inside to make the future generations "remember" "us." The article is made up of scattered notes on a number of fundamental philosophical concepts like "thing," "time," "sign," "apocalypse," "void," and "fate," all of which could very well be the subject of a separate article, or a book. The choice of these concepts is not accidental. All of these concepts appear in the texts associated with time capsules and the practice of burying them in some way or another. It is argued that passing the message of civilization across time and across fate marks the grand objective of time capsules. This "grand objective," however, borders foolishness. Instead, a time capsule reflects the hopeless desire to remain the same through time. On the one hand, the things placed inside the capsule do not turn into frozen signifiers. On the other hand, memory is, by definition, an accidental faculty for it presumes forgetfulness. Time capsules attempt to wipe out the contingent dynamics of remembrance and forgetfulness in order to make future generations remember what they did not forget, or, dictate them what to forget. Aside from this, the latent assumption of burying time capsules v/itness the hidden desire for a sudden rupture in the evolution of "our" civilization so that the container would make sense in the distant future.

Kaybolmamış Şeyleri Hatırlamak:
Zaman Kapsüllerine Modernliğin Kıyamet Düşleri Üzerine Dağınk Notlar

Özet:
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Question

Toward the end of the last millenium, I came across with a striking invitation put out by The New York Times Magazine. The magazine was inviting its readers—and everyone surfing its Internet pages—to name a thing to be placed in the "Times Capsule." Apparently the magazine was borrowing a tradition to build, fill up and bury a time capsule, a tradition rooted back in the nineteenth century World's Fairs. The "device" is meant to be opened in the next millenium, in the year 3000, containing things-as-messages addressed to "our" descendants who are supposed to be living around Washington DC, and curious about "us." in the spirit of democracy and over the interactive dialog box of the magazine's Internet page, it was made possible to suggest an item, a thing to be placed in the Times Capsule. Quite an opportunity to join this millennial event which comes once in a thousand years. As a person having some acquaintance with this genuinely American practice of burying time capsules, my suggestion had been "a recovered time capsule" to be placed in the Times Capsule as a message to the year 3000.

Later on, reviewing the contents of the Times Capsule, I realized that my suggestion is turned down. Perhaps irrespective of the modesty principle, I interpreted this refusal as a necessary gesture since, as I will attempt to explain throughout this paper, (1) time capsules cannot (re)turn objects into "things"; (2) thing-as-message is an impossibility; (3) as voids themselves, they cannot contain voids in the form of "used up" capsules; and finally, (4) they cannot impose an origin to a pre-determined future in the form of "frozen signifiers." Semiosis does not halt even in the dark pit where the time capsule is buried. We need to follow a rather tedious path to explain why a time capsule is, in short, an impossibility.
and how theory can re-appropriate it as the locus of Western metaphysic's fundamental notions of like "time," "thing," "representation," "memory," and "remembrance." But above all, time capsules provide a fertile ground to think why modernity is bound by a dream—a nightmare indeed—consisting of its own deterioration and downfall. Time capsules are, then, metaphysical devices and thus a proper understanding of them calls for a philosophical inquiry involving a critique of semiology, modernity, and Western metaphysics in general.

What is time capsule? it is, obviously, an artifact, a container, a method to tell our temporal others about ourselves, an invention for passing a message across time, "a device for sending cultural information into the future" (Pollan). But what exactly is it? What is its essence? If it is "a device," as the New York Times author Michael Pollan calls it, by definition, what purpose, or will, or desire does it serve, exactly? Sending a message across time; but why? Why let others, someone, or anyone know about us? And what exactly does "us" refer here? How do we know that our temporal others will be willing to take all the pains to find the time capsule, open it, and learn about «? More importantly, how do we know that they will "dechiper the things" the way we intend them to lend themselves? How can we be sure that the "things" placed in the capsule will reflect the "civilization" from which they are cut off? And are not we already telling our stories, recording, preserving, and transferring them from generation to generation in various formats? Are not telling, recording, preserving, and transferring the very acts that constitute what we ordinarily know as culture or civilization?

Before answering all those questions, aren’t we obliged to ask, önce more with full force, with full capacity of our inquisitive powers, that what really is a
time capsule? Is it a thing? Are the objects placed inside the time capsule things? Do we, by forcefully extracting them from their "natural" environment, the civilization, and from those who have figured out, invented, produced, used, fulfilled a certain specific goal with, made them their object of desire, from those who we may rightfully call "subjects," that is, do we by isolating objects from the subjects as such, turn them into mere things? So that they can speak for themselves one hundred, five hundred, or one thousand years later?

What is time capsule, once again, and beyond its divisive capacity as a device? That is, what does a time capsule represent? To what, or to whom its supposed representational potential is directed at? To our temporal others? Those whom we are sure about to be present around here, say the Central Park, New York City, or The American Museum of Natural History, Washington DC, United States of America? But who will they be? Since, by any stretch of imagination, we, as we know ourselves here and now, will not be present then to make the things speak for us, to explain as to whether or not they stand for this or that quality of our civilization, will they not, our temporal others, make things speak for us? Transfer them into some chain of signification in operation, say, 40 generations later? How can we be sure that they will understand what we understand here and now? As there is no guarantee as to the dynamics of the symbolic realm which suddenly engages with things popping out from below the ground, can we ever be sure about the representational potential of our time capsules, long after we ourselves headed toward the same place we have forced our device to rest. One thousand years later...

Let me, take the risk of boring you to death and ask my question once again: what is time capsule? What is its essence, its use, and what desire it fulfills? And let me, once again, open up my question by re-posing another one of my previous questions: To what, or to whom the time capsule's supposed representational potential is directed at?

Are we not expecting future generations to learn from it, from its thingly contents? So isn't the answer to this historico-pragmatic question clear? Have not time capsules buried so far addressed future generations? Taught us about them?

I am not going to choose the easy way and ask: what have we been learning from the time capsules recovered so far, and what from those that are not recovered at all and seem to be lost forever? The answer to this historico-pragmatic question would be a fantastic and colossal zero. To begin with, it
should be carefully noted that the historical story of previous time capsules, the ones buried during the reign of World’s Fairs for instance, have all been very well documented. In 1976, when President Gerald Ford was opening the very first time capsule buried in the grounds of Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition by the Civil War widow Mrs. Charles Deihm in 1876, knew very well that some Mrs. Deihm had buried a time capsule to be "found" and opened a century later. Pollan reports that President Ford opened what was then called "century safe" right on time. From its purple velvet interior he removed a watch, a complete tea service, and a few leather-bound books. He was smiling in the commemorative photographs, "possibly at the color and condition of the items." In other words, we have been reading the stories of time capsules all along the time they have been resting in peace, say, for one hundred years, and when the time was ripe enough, that is, when their time of opening arrived, we opened them and, to no one's surprise, we recovered their contents exactly as they were placed inside one hundred years ago—no enigmas, no real shocks, not a bit of a doubt as to, say, the nature of industrial revolution or the contents of a Bible. What, perhaps, was a little bit of a shock was the very fact that our ancestors were, forgive me for the crass choice of the word, stupid enough to want to send a message to future generations with birth control pills, garter belts, coke cans, condoms, Bible, nylon panty hoses, tea services, and so forth. Another shock must have been felt when, all of a sudden, a time capsule popped out in a construction site, pretending to be a nuclear warhead and thus alarming the entire community. All these examples, historico-pragmatic ones as I called them, point at one thing: time capsule is a shock object not in the way it is intended to be. A time capsule is a shock object only in terms of modern man's relation to time functions. To put it rather succinctly, it is an object-symptom of the modern unconscious—but we will come to this in a moment. The impossibility—let slip the stupidity—of time capsules is finally admitted semi-officially now, at exactly the point in time we are justified to call fine-de-millennia, by simply delaying the destiny to a millenium later, that is, instead of one or two hundred years. In other words, we got smart this time by providing enough time to really forget the capsule—or have we?

Thing

Things don't represent. We only turn things into objects through representation, placing them in a civilization, assigning them a utility or declaring them useless,
or simply letting them be present for the sake of presence as it is the case for some art objects. Other than that, the thing is not even nothing, as Lacan remarks: it "literally is not. it is characterized by its absence, its strangeness" (Qtd. in Schwenger 112, emphasis added). The thing itself, despite its nearness-to-us and everyday familiarity, is perhaps one that befits most to any tight definition of uncanny. We are surrounded by things which we simply are so well accustomed and familiar with, that no need is felt at all for any effort to justify the not much questioned extent, scope, and seemingly limitless taxonomic coverage of the word "thing." Yet things never show us their face as themselves; every thing is in fact something, a thing with some utility, association, history, force, et cetera. The thing is not, precisely because it lacks a presence outside the language, outside a chain of signification, outside the symbolic. For Heidegger, "The nature of the thing never comes to light, that is, it never gets a hearing ... in truth,..., the thing as thing remains proscribed, nü, " and in that sense annihilated. This has happened and continues to happen so essentially that not only are things no longer admitted as things, but they have never yet at all been able to appear to thinking as things" ("The Thing" 170-171). The reality of a thing, as Heidegger's jug or Lacan's vase, or Derrida's pit symbolize, is the void it contains at its very center, or in Lacanian terms, the originary loss insistently waiting, calling for, irresistibly pressing us to be named, classified, utilized, and made part of a story.

We can now understand the need to seal things; "to seal," not as a rhetorical strategy or discursive trope, but actually physically seal them inside granite, lead, stainless steel or whatever time-proof material available. We can now grasp the nature of sealing things off the world, off the time, off everyday life. World, time, everyday life all refer to one possible realm of representation: Language. Time capsules actually attempt to seal things off language which incessantly and persistently make them into objects. There certainly is no place for the subject inside of a time capsule. Nor is there a place inside the time capsule for another time capsule, torn open when its time was due, or, as is the case for many time capsules, found and opened untimely, by accident. Time capsule is an attempt to stop re-presentation; a futile attempt to be sure, for when the subject ceases to exist, the "re-" prefix does not automatically disappear to leave behind a püre, neutral, impartial, and real presence. Then again, a time capsule containing a (used, second-hand?) time capsule would be a void containing another void witnessing the impossibility of the project.
of sending a message to the future, the message that we are, indeed, inside the time capsule, representation does not halt. A time capsule popping out of a time capsule, empty and more useless than it has ever been, would make it clear that its contents have long went to the garbage dump or to some museum of history, which is, curiously enough, sometimes nicknamed a "time capsule." in fact, we need to stop here for a moment or two to explore the implications of the apparent doubling, or spacing inside the space.

A time capsule inside another bears witness to a logic contrary to the logic of the modern whose time line or chronology is based on the idea of progress. in other words, modern cannot tolerate the idea that, in the origin, there is nothing but void, repetition, or circularity. A time capsule inside another breaks this logic of progress and reminds one (while reconstituting) the originary loss in the attempt of sending a void-message across time, thus sending nothing. it will, therefore, remind that the void has never been and will never be forgotten in fact. The suggestion to place a used up time capsule inside a brand new one matches with what Derrida calls "a logic that is other" where "repetition is 'original', and induces, through an unlimited propagation of itself, a general deconstruction" (The PostCard 351-352). Elsewhere in The PostCard, in the context of criticism of Lacanian essentialization of the proper place of Phallus, the feminine void so to speak, he provides us with the rule of thumb: "the lack does not have its place in dissemination" ("Le Facteur" 467). I, therefore, as stated before, immodestly take pride in being turned down, as if receiving a gift given to me by myself, for a time capsule has no space for void in its own void.

What we need here is to understand the constitutive role played by the void. So the real question transcends that of the utility, the content, or the message a time capsule might be claimed to have; the real question has to do with the divisiveness of the device called the time capsule. in this vein, it would be useless to try to determine if the message had reached to its destination in prior attempts, or if it would ever. We could, in fact, assert in a Derridean gesture, that the message of time capsule has always already reached its destination even before it was buried, or even before it was "deviced up." in a sense, a recovered time capsule can only act as its double; as the double of already arrived message simply by trivializing the fetish quality of modern commodities. Even those items such as the messages from Einstein become a property of time, a particular time of modernity, get fetishized via appropriation. We should not forget that
along with the items placed inside, the capsule itself also "arrives" in the future, reminding the recipient that the bulk of things at hand have always been represented even in the absence of the appropriating subject. In this respect, the time capsule itself acts as the excess or the supplement of the message, breaching the initial contract imposed upon thought saying that in the atemporal darkness of the underground semiosis stops.

**Time**

The experience of time has always concerned philosophers, human scientists and "people of letter" from Plato, Husserl and Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty, from Levinas to Derrida and Ricoeur, from Goethe and Octavio Paz to Virginia Woolf, and from Malinovski to von Weissäcker. Bernhard Waldenfels mentions a tripartite character of the representation of time which resulted from "the transformation of the classical representation of time": (1) time turns out to be a generator of identity; (2) it proves to be differing in the sense of postponement; and (3) it frees itself from the timeless instances, that is, "it becomes entangled in itself in the form of a self-reference that leads to a self-doubling and self-duplication" (108). The phenomenological observation demonstrates that the human experience of time always involves a "lag," a state of always already being behind. This is significant in terms of the existential experience of time which brings about the fundamental insecurity and weakness regarding what the time might bring to us. "We are never entirely at the top of time; rather we arrive upon the scene a little late, and our speech reverberates against us like an echo of ourselves. Our speech would only be fully at home with itself if there were a first word without before, a last word without an after" (Waldenfels 111).

The complex relationship of humans with time involving an impasse in the form of belatedness has found various responses from philosophers such as Saint Augustine who saw for the first time the gap between the flows of consciousness and phenomena. For him, the subject is "spun between memory and expectation, past and future, with the present reduced to a non-tangible, punctual, impossible". Jean-Jacques Rousseau also noticed the lack of presence as an "existential danger," indicating that human being "is lagging behind the world, being always too late with his responses to stimuli which ... come always too soon" (Bielen-Robson 72).
impasse with respect to a phenomenology of past and future and of forgetting and remembering.

in the press release of the American Natural History Museum (AMNH) regarding The New York Times Capsule Exhibit, it is claimed that the time capsule can "tell people in the future something about us that they might not otherwise know." That is, it might make the future generations remember what they have forgotten. Without doubt, forgetting has a priority over remembering for "without forgetting, no remembering." in this sense, in order to remind something, one must first make it forgotten which is contrary to the basic phenomenology of time. Because, "(f)orgetting is an unwieldy phenomenon; it does not fit into the current schemata of meaning and validity. Forgetting concerns us, but it will not be understood as intentional act or rule-governed comportment." That is to say, forgetting is by definition accidental, "is not freely at our disposal," and it "may only be described as a loss—loss of a knowing, a being able to, or feeling—or as a darkening, withdrawal" (VValdenfels 114-115). in time capsules we sense the desire to overcome the impossibility of forgetting at one's will, a desire to forcefully repress what is out in the open. Furthermore, there is the basic phenomenological question regarding the location of forgetting. Forgetting always happens in the here and now of the subject for it simply "breaks into experience like an accident, a lapse, as in Plato." in other words, there cannot be a forgetting in the future, in some designated date like the year 3000, or May 28, 8113. For Husserl, forgetting does not begin just any time and place; it begins here and now. We hold onto in memory what threatens to slip our minds, what we do not have firmly "in our grasp" (VValdenfels 115). Time capsule designates not only the content (what must be forgotten), but also the time and place of forgetting. Same observations goes for remembering as well. it does not, like forgetting, obey a pre-determined plan, for it too is not intentional. According to VValdenfels, "(r)emembering is awakened, not made. in this the foreign comes into play, that which does not stem from our own initiative" (116).

The idea of time capsule, then, appears in stark contrast with the phenomenological experience of time. The contrast surfaces in that which called "a technical domestication of time," after VValdenfels. The basic motive behind the construction of a device in fight with time, so to speak, neglects the experience of time and its existential consequences that bothered philosophers from Plato onwards. The domestication of time means domestication of the subject's
spatio-temporal other. in time capsules, the element of otherness emerging from the unknowable is reduced to the same by the very imposition of the material of forgetting and by the designation of the temporal scheme concerning remembrance. There is, thus, a faulty assumption behind this idea: our temporal others will be same as us, for a device to be buried under the ground or kept in a museum will simply stop the flux of time in the form of a frozen presence which by constantly slipping already agonizes subject who is always too late.

But there is something which a phenomenology of time cannot grasp in its full extent. There is something in time capsules which goes beyond the individual perception and experience of time, of remembrance and forgetting. it is the sign of time capsule actually present with its dark hole or cavity in the middle, and which actually carries a chosen content (things) to an experience which is not yet ours. We know that "(t)he flow of time differs and defers—it is a pure flux which cannot be stopped, centered, immobilized, ordered, given origin or end," (Bielik-Robson 73) despite the phenomenological desire for an "ideal limit" or "primordial impression," (as in Husserl) a threshold of experience which occurs "in the realm of a pre-language, a pre-predicative, a pre-discursive realm" (Waldenfels 111). Things-as-signs or things-as-messages belong to a linguistic/discursive realm. in fact, by designating time capsule as a metaphysical device, we have already hinted at its peculiar yet twisted motive to secure a solid origin and an end to the experience of time, an origin at which the "infinite play of differences" will have been stopped. So, the next question must engage with the signifying quality of time capsules anchored in what Bielik-Robson calls the ontological perfection, or the "gnostic pleroma of the eternal, immobilized 'now'—all things appearing in the absolute synchronicity of nunc stans, 'the standing now'" (74). To ask the question we have to refer to Derrida whose image of temporality is the precisely opposite of what is described above.

Sign

in the case of the time capsules, we have a particular form of remembrance. A form of remembrance which resists the conventional backwards movement of mind attempting to recover the material buried in what Hegel calls "a shaft dark as night" or "nocturnal pit" (Krell 216). Instead, remembrance is turned upside down (or inside out): its contents are pushed as far away from consciousness as possible, cut-off from the active
The intervention of subject and transferred into an ad as yet to happen. The time capsule, thus, defers remembrance to the future. If what it does is still remembering, a twisted one to be sure, it does not happen now, it will have happened. As this tense implies, the time capsule deconstructs remembering by opening a wide crack in the middle of its structure, separating the inseparable, replacing what is unconscious with the lowest form of consciousness: the sensible. In an artificial gesture of burying, time capsule switches the sensible into intelligible, while remembering what is not forgotten. It re-members the present.

Since what is not forgotten is set forth to be remembered, the illogical nature of this movement must be justified by means of an artificial distancing and de-subjectifying. The actual persons who decide, select, and place objects/artifacts inside the time capsule must pretend that a communication is about to occur as soon as they seal up the device, not to be opened again for one thousand years. The pretension involved in these series of gestures highlight the artificial distancing and de-subjectifying of the objects. Being placed in the dark pit of time capsule, it is as if the objects will suddenly stop being the objects of a particular culture, and the subjects who play this game will cease to be those who have given a particular meaning to those objects. For the time being. Here, the process of distancing and de-subjectifying is secured in terms as comprehensive and universal as possible such as "time" and "humanity." One thousand years is enough to mention "time immemorial" and the darkness of the pit that houses the time capsule (or that time capsule houses) is subject-less enough to mention humanity in general. The time capsule thus proclaims to belong to the entirety of humanity and to the nameless "future generations," which is in contrast of its thoroughly autobiographical nature and totalitarian self-presencing attitude. If museum de l'homme colonizes the past, the time capsule colonizes the future by the generosity of its offer and by the voluntary curatorial gesture for the future museum of civilizations. Given the eternal character of museum, no wonder that The New York Times Capsule is graciously placed inside of a museum, The Museum of Natural History of Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

Can we not just pass by this object with a smile, as we do with many other objects of popular culture? Of course we can, but only after analyzing the totalitarian gesture it involves since a smile omitting totalitarianism would become everybody's concern. So, why does the time capsule involve a totalitarian attitude? What does it prohibit, proclaim, and rule? The totalitarianism involved...
here has to do with the symbolic realm, or the realm of language and signs. An investigation into this field must begin from the point where metaphysics and semiology overlap, and there is no better place than Hegel in whose "system" the entire Western metaphysics is said to have culminated. Hegel also have a theory of signs resonating deeply with the contemporary notion of semiology which is usually associated with Ferdinand de Saussure. The theory of sign in Hegel has generated the notions of the pit and the pyramid in the form of a true enigma as far as Jacques Derrida is concerned (1982:77).

"The exact nature of time is rather enigmatic," comments Craig Morris, archaeologist, senior vice president and dean of science at the American Museum of Natural History, and curator of the Times Capsule exhibition. He goes on to argue that "as an indication of time's importance, cultures have invented myriad ways to commemorate its passing. One of these is the creation of time capsules to somehow capture a unit of time and transmit its messages from one time to another" (AMNH, "Capturing Time," emphasis added). The figure of time capsule conceived as a universal "human" phenomenon is quite widespread. Michael Pollan also claims that "time capsules have been created by every society." Among the examples he cites we see "12th-century Doomsday Book or those plaintively long oral poems of New Guinea, composed of nothing but the names of the tribal poets who have sung the song. Right now, the Cassini space probe is whisking its way around earth en route to Saturn. On board are the signatures of 600,000 of the earth's proudest residents." Of course the mind that collapses the oral poems of New Guinea with time capsules will not fail short of the most well-known "time capsule," the Egyptian Pyramid.

The Egyptian pyramid has long been Western archaeology's primary object of desire since it represents the pinnacle of the Western need to understand its other. The pyramid, with the entire set of mythologies surrounding it, is enigmatic (and thus calls for resolution in the Western psyche which is utterly intolerant of voids) while at the same time one of the so-called "myriad ways" commemorating the passing of time. in 1936, the president of Oglethorpe University in Atlanta was "inspired" by the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamen to "seal" in an abandoned swimming pool "the crypt of civilization"—an encyclopedic record of human civilization, from Lincoln logs to 640,000 pages on microfilm, from Bible to the Iliad. More than sixty years later, independent writer Beth Livermore would claim that "(t)he practice of
leaving time capsules with messages for people in the future has existed in some sense for thousands of years." Livermore makes her case with the Sumerians who, supposedly, have buried "texts" addressing to future rulers. The entire set of historical references, however, can be read as an attempt to inscribe an origin to human existence, a starting point which captures the archaio of the sign. It is highly dubious that the Egyptian pyramids are meant to be cracked open like a time capsule to reveal the truth they have been hiding for centuries. But the enigmatic nature of time was certainly behind Hegel's mind when he has chosen this particular architectural form as the metaphor of sign. The enigma, however, does not reside in the complicated and lethal shafts of the pyramid. The real enigma of the pyramid, an accidental time capsule if you will, is hidden en route remembrance. According to Derrida,  

"Erinnerving [remembrance]... is decisive here. By means of/Erinnerung the content of sensible intuition becomes an image, freeing itself from immediacy and singularity in order to permit the passage to conceptuality. The image thus interiorized in memory (erinnert) is no longer there, no longer existent or present, but preserved in an unconscious dwelling, conserved without consciousness (bevusstlos, aufbevahrt). Intelligence keeps these images in reserve, submerged at the bottom of a very dark shelter, like the zuater in a nightlike or unconscious pit (nächtliche Schacht, bevusstlose Schacht.), or rather like a precious vein at the bottom of the mine. (1982: 77)"

How does the buried image re-surface? What clue or trace directs intelligence to enlighten the darkness of the pit? The pyramid appears in the text of Hegel for the precise reason that it embraces two conflicting qualities. On the one hand, it is way too obvious for anyone without noticing to pass by, and on the other hand, it does not readily give away its secret to any passer-by. The semiological sign has exactly the same status. In the text, Derrida remarks, "the natural source and the historical construction both, though differently, remain silent." For him,  

"The path... still remains circular, and that the pyramid becomes once again the pit that it always will have been—such is the enigma. We will have to ask if this enigma is to be sought out, like truth speaking by itself from the bottom of a well, or if it is to be deciphered, like an unverifiable inscription left behind on the facade of a monument. (1982:77, emphasis added)"

Thus, the real enigma emerges from within the dichotomy between a truth "speaking by itself" and a truth "to be deciphered" which takes us directly to what Krell means when he writes about the violent move from iconography to engrammatology (228). A comparative
reading of the relevant sections from *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* and *Philosophical Propedeutics* reveals Hegel’s preference of speech over writing (Derrida 1982) or speech over iconography (Krell). The significance of this “violent act,” or in Hegel’s own words, “the slaying (ertrötet)” of image (Qtd. in Krell 228), underlies the embedded phoneticism of the Western metaphysics which conceives time as “the true, essential, past space, space as it will have been thought.” That is, “(iv)hat space will have meant is time” (Derrida 1982: 89, emphasis original). In Derrida’s analysis the proper “signifying substance” of time in Hegel is sound, the phonic sound or the voice (Ton). Because, nothing is closer to the interior of the subject, and nothing better reflects the logic of truth as being-presence. Sound, coming from within the subject, is the first-hand witness of its contents which have been, in turn, interiorized by remembrance. In this respect, remembrance is the first step en route to thinking, conceptual thinking that is, with respect to its being closest to the sensuous experience. It is, in a sense, the opening of the dark shaft of memory (Gedächtnis), the abysmal depth of unconscious where images are imprisoned in what Hegel calls the “universal dungeon.”

Then, how is thinking possible at all if the content of intelligence is encrypted as it passed from outside to inside? This question could only be answered when one feels sure about which side of the “enigma” he/she dwells: will truth come out from the depths of the dark well by itself, or will it be in need of deciphering?

Hegel’s preference of speech (sound) over image or icon becomes crucial here, if we correctly understand the reason why he dismisses the Chinese writing and Egyptian hieroglyphs as inappropriate media for thinking (philosophy) and for science alike. For Hegel, at the top of the hierarchy of writings reside the phonetic writing or alphabetical type: “Alphabetic writing is on all accounts the more intelligent” (Qtd. in Derrida 1982: 95), since it respects, translates, or transcribes the voice, “(Derrida 1982: 95) rather than picturing its meaning as is the case for hieroglyphics. The faculty of “reproductive memory” (Gedächtnis), the one closest to thinking (Das Denken) in the hierarchy of cognitive transition from outside (sensuous experience or perception) to inside (intelligence; Die Intelligenz), is designated with the mission to rescue the interiorized material from the pit in order to be able to give way to thinking. "Yet," remarks Krell, "the rescue and the transfer remain suspect inasmuch as memory reverts to Erinnerung, as indeed thought itself does. The sign, word, and name—the sources of universality and the resources of
reason itself—are after a found, just as an image or a sensation are found, inscribed in stone or ululating in the throat" (229, emphasis original). It is ironic that when we read, we reconstruct not only the sound but also the image of experience, that is, writing reverts back to remembrance. This is exactly why Derrida describes the path of the so-called rescue as "circular" when he says "that the pyramid becomes once again the pit that it always will have been." The metaphor of pyramid as the sign of sign, protects its enigmatic nature for the pit is embedded in it. In other words, there is no "Mausoleum of meaning" to quote a phrase from Krell (229) as Hegel would want us to believe. Krell's analysis reveals, once again, the impossibility of "absolute knowledge," or the highest stage (the last stop) of spirit's relentless voyage, this time with reference to the Phenomenology of Spirit. In Phenomenology of Spirit, Hegel describes "the existence of spirit in space and time as the passage through 'a gallery of images' which "will have been removed from ... the pit and eventually set up in the exhibition hall; the pyramid in which self-consciousness is preserved will have been reconstructed in the workshop or apotheca of a museum" (Krell 235, emphasis added). Krell responds to the metaphor of exhibition hall as the final stage of spirit's voyage by saying that the content or reserve of this exhibition is never final for it "is depleted by the incessant action of n-displacing" by remembrance. The process, thus, starts all over again, despite the philosopher's "ostensible progress from images to words, pictures to names, Erinnerung to Gedächtnis, and memory to thought," all proving to be illusory (Krell 239). The illusion of the Hegelian semiology is exactly the illusion of museum understood as the depository of memories, the "burial chamber of the past." It is clear that the Hegelian system is based on the basic project of finitude, of teleology tailored by the central movement of spirit called sublation or releve (Aufhebung). No better spatial metaphor can be found than the museum to describe the end product of this movement "by means of which the spirit, elevating itself above the nature in which it was submerged, at once suppresses and retains nature, sublimating nature into itself, accomplishing itself as internal freedom, and thereby presenting itself to itself" (Derrida 1982: 76). The play of signification supposedly stops in the museum by a final move of memory, turning time into space and past into a narrative bearing a full-stop at its closure, demarcating its very finitude.

The Times Capsule, a museal object already, thus attempts to overcome the Hegelian enigma involving the journey of spirit. It stops the journey before it starts in a naive gesture of representing the spirit of our times by short-cutting the
long process of interiorization and exteriorization. The time capsule assumes to have stopped the flow of time before even the most primary starter of interiorization, before perception. It assumes that it has placed mere things inside, so that things, after a giant lapse in time, will act as things-as-messages. In this assumption, the idea of time capsule borrows ideology from museum. Our story, however, does not end but start in the museum.

Apocalypse

Pyramid, mausoleum, museum, exhibition hail ceaselessly appear in the metaphoricss of the Hegelian semiology and its consequent analyses. Why? What is the significance of these spaces which seem to have a particular relation with time and temporality? What does time capsule prohibit, proclaim, and rule? These questions must, finally, bring us back to the exhibition halis of the American Museum of Natural History, and to The New York Times Capsule Exhibition where our newest time capsule, The Times Capsule have found itself a final resting place. It is my contention that the capsule actually never rests, for despite the abundance of literature consisting counter-argumentation, neither museum, nor the musealized contents of the time capsule ever bear a final meaning.

Obviously, a couple of hundred years were not enough to stop representational time, that is, the time that allows us to call ourselves "we." Thus, opening the time capsule of early industrial period we only recognized our own trace, the trail that "our things" left behind: the Bible or the American flag has not changed drastically but condoms certainly got thinner and panty hoses fancier. We recognized that we only addressed to ourselves as we have always been ali along. Now, with the Times Capsule, we hope that one thousand years might stop representation, that such an enormous period of time will do the job and we really, this time really. This time we will have forgotten that we have buried a time capsule, that we will be different, that things will finally tell their (our) story without the intervention of the symbolic. Here, the "we" collapses with "them," that is, with our temporal others as I have already mentioned when I raised the issue of the domestication of time.

It is clear that there is an implicit expectation as to the sameness of the addressee of time capsules, a kind of brotherhood or kinship, or of co-sensibility that, upon the recovery, our descendants will immediately recognize the motive behind placing that "thing" under the ground and start learning about "us." On the other hand, as the
failure of all the previous time capsules phenomenally suggest, there is also the expectation that something will happen—will have to happen—between our now and the future that they, our descendants, will learn something about us, something that they will have not already knew. This thing that is supposed to happen in between, that is, between the time of burial and recovery, must be of a certain force that will be exerted on memory. It must be something capable of erasing the cumulative effect of semiosis turning minds into a blank sheet of paper, something of the scale of an apocalypse.

Thus the motive for burying time capsules must be sought in the fundamental temporal anxiety and insecurity resultant of "being-towards-death": the fear of getting lost in the infinite temporal flux. It should be noted that despite attempts to expand the logic of "time capsules" to the universal scale, and despite arguments to describe it as a "human practice in general," the creation of a time capsule as a deliberate message to future generations is uniquely an American practice. The existential anxiety takes a concrete form in the American psyche which endured a Cold War tainted by the fear of nuclear annihilation. The deliberate message is thus about the apocalyptic dreams haunting the American psyche for a good part of the nineteenth century and lurking well into the twenty-first. The end of cold war with the so-called victory of "the free world" did not, however, put an end to the apocalyptic dreams. The dreams of an apocalypse have been and will always be present albeit in forms other than a nuclear disaster: to name a few, there is the global threat of terrorism, the so-called Y2K syndrome, the "digital gap" hypothesis, a devastating worldwide economic depression, the nuclear winter or global warming, the Time Wave Zero scenario, the "end of history" theses along with "the clash of civilizations," or the Matrix paranoia involving an apocalypse in "always-already" format ete, most of which are, in fact, fundamentally technology-related. It is of no surprise that after nearly 10,000 time capsules buried, a great majority of which were lost forever, the Times Capsule fancies a mission for the year 3000 again on the basis of a technological fear. Michael Pollan, quoting Danny Hillis, an inventor of parallel-processing computers, recognizes the challenge of the last time capsule in terms peculiar to our epoch: our epoch is characterized by the notion of "digital gap," which arises out of the fact that for the first time in history, "the basic creations of civilization are being stored on media that won't last a lifetime." In this respect, The Times
Capsule appearing as an aestheticized hi-tech device, feeds on fears of Judeo-Christian eschatological "end of time," and itself provides hopes for a utopian ethos, "a sensibility in which ali roads lead ultimately to paradise," which is nothing but only one of "the pseudo-secularized version of the apocalypse" (Harrison). While the apocalypse is expected to end time as we know it (just like Y2K bug ended time as the computer failing to recognize the year 2000 knew it), a new temporality flourishes after it.

How to explain this paradox of wanting to be the same and different at one and the same time? Same enough to share the code in the year 3000, different enough to get shocked? But is not this paradox deserve to be called a paradox only to the extent that we buy into the promise of time capsules? That is, they (can) send messages via the things across time? If we (and indeed we intend to) refuse this assumption, would not the paradox vanish? in which case, we remain with only one option which is that the time capsule is precisely autobiographical, narcissistic, and totalitarian and fulfill a function only for the time of burial, that is, the subjective time of the civilization which device up such a device. For the first time in the history of time capsules, a time capsule is not buried immediately after it was filled up and sealed. The Times Capsule has become a historical event, a museum display, an exhibition titled Capturing Time: The New York Times Capsule at the American Museum of Natural History. The museum is chosen to be its final "burial chamber" rather than an unidentified burial ground as it has been the case for previous time capsules.

Let us, for the sake of the argument, assume that the assumption is not refuted, and that there is yet another option. Let us assume that the time capsules can indeed "serve as an ambassador to future generations" and carry a message to our temporal others, to those who are same as, and at the same time, different from us. Let us, for the moment, consider the option of difference. What is it that we expect, then, to intervene between now and then, erasing out the intervention? How on earth we will be able to forget what have we been devicing one thousand years ago so that we will justifiably assume to be in a position of remembering? Assume that we will have remember?

I am trying to figure out the nature and power of the intervention erasing out all the traces that things leave behind, erasing all the representations that turn things into objects of a particular civilization. Something with some power to make us forget, to stop us from using, thinking, philosophizing... Something to
intervene to make us unable to remember, just as we have forgotten the ancient civilizations, pre-historic creatures, or "dead" languages. Perhaps something in the capacity of an interstellar collision, a meteoroid hitting the earth, or the domino effect of a series of nuclear explosions. Something apocalyptic as we said. According to the Press Release of Times Capsule, we have every reason to have an apocalyptic dream since "after lifetimes of millions or billions of years, ali individual stars eventually exhaust their nuclear fuel and die. Some destroy themselves in cataclysmic supernova explosions." However, we have other and more concrete reasons than cataclysmic supernova explosions to have apocalyptic dreams. I am talking about disasters in the making that mark the millenium.

**Void**

We need to open a parenthesis here to discuss the notion of apocalyptic void before dealing with the void in time capsules. The terms like apocalypse, remembrance (and forgetting), and void form an immediate and disturbing affinity with a number of contemporary events involving apocalyptic decisions and post-apocalyptic constructions, all tied up with void and remembrance: The downing of Twin Towers, the "hole" in Pentagon, the dynamiting of two Bamiyan Buddha statues in Afghanistan, the Oklahoma City bombing, and the controlled implosion of the Pruitt-Igoe Housing project in St. Louis. Our reference will be, without doubt, Andreas Huyssen and his work on the monumental voids, or the voids (which can be?) called a monument (Huyssen 1995; 1997; 2002).

There is an undeniable tension between remembering and forgetting of past events that involve man-made catastrophes like the Holocaust or the downing of the Twin Towers. We are told by the science of psychology that we have to remember and re-construct past traumatic events in order to be able to deal with the horror and the psychic damage inflicted by them. In other words, we are invited to remember the event which caused the trauma and which, at the same time, might have caused amnesia ("repressed memory" in psychoanalytical terms). However, we also want to forget the traumatic event for it has such an immense haunting force that could prevent one to function "normally." These two forces, forgetting and remembrance, always stay in an uneasy and conflictual relation with each other, one engendering an abysmal need for the other. We forget but we know (or are subconsciously urged) that we have to remember to get healed, and we
When it comes to larger groups, or the entire community or race, the issue of remembrance and forgetfulness gain a further dimension which can be called "memorialization. In order to remember the event and mourn the void left behind by the dead people, we construct "memorials" like the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC, The Martyrs of Dardanelles Memorial in Çanakkale, Turkey, or the Jewish Museum in Berlin. The abysmal tension between remembrance and forgetting acquire a further complication in the case of the public memorials. How can one represent the loss or the void created by the traumatic event without doing injustice to the memory of those who died and left behind a void? Can the presence of an object (a monument for instance) re-present the absence in such a way that it allows us to reconstruct the catastrophic dimensions of the event? More importantly, how can we assign a name to the void, a name that belongs to presence such as "Vietnam," "Jew," or "Türk," so that its re-presentation address exactly to those whom the monument-object is dedicated? Disturbing as it may, does not Vietnam War Memorial glide in the name of "Vietcong," the Jewish Museum the name of "Nazi," The Martyrs of Dardanelles, the name of "ANZAC"? How can one avoid the ill memory, or the specter of terrorists while looking up at the monument to be erected for the victims of "nine/eleven"?

The difficulty involved here is, as stated in the context of the phenomenology of time, that re-presencing does not involve any rules, nor can anyone construct a selectively patterned remembrance, or forgetting for that matter. Unless, of course, one forcefully and with a totalitarian attitude, makes his way out of this dilemma. The nearly universal practices and habits of selective memory and memorialization, including but not limited with those that happen in the realms of historiography, iconography, and museology, share the common desire to exclude, mark off, and repress the other in favor of "us." Stili, however, the dead who are deemed worth-to-memorialize is constituted by the unworthy (the enemy, the infidel, the non-human, etc.), and by the evil acts of the unworthy, that the traces of void haunt the memory and, in a sense, deconstruct the "intended message."

This is exactly why Huyssen proposes, or rather "quixotically wishes," to keep the void as it is. Keep the void left behind the Twin Towers for a period of time, for example. For him, "neither
rampant nationalism nor the raw emotions of injury and anger have ever produced persuasive monuments or memorial sites in urban space” (2002:10, emphasis added). The suggestion to keep the void as a void for a period of time sounds (to the author) “quixotic” for a reason. Because the void is proliferative; it calls for contemplation. Void does not anchor any particular meaning but encourages one to contemplate on the multiple layers of meaning and multiple symbolisms it embraces as it is exactly the case for the Twin Towers—what was the symbolic articulation of Twin Towers before their destruction? Global capitalism, finance capital, phallus, global inequality, the New York City, etc. The void would allow us to keep the avenues of meaning open. This is, again, why Huyssen, pondering on the destroyed Bamiyan Buddha statues, takes comfort “in the fact that in the back of the cave, the human outline of the destroyed statue is still visible” (2002:13). The idea is that nothing can better re-present the irreplaceable loss of thousands of years of cultural heritage, along with the regime that destroyed it, than its own void.

The negative epistemology of the void resists anchoring of meaning, as it should, since the disappearance of the thingly dimension of objects does not mean the disappearance of the symbolic realm it fed on once. The void protects as void would enable the gaze to critically intervene any attempt to justify this or that version of historicizing or any general truth claim for that matter.

The "quixotic" wish to protect the voids of Twin Towers, the Bamiyan Buddha statues, or the Postdamer Platz in reunited Berlin are, bound to remain as a wish and there certainly is no possibility to convince any public authority to realize it. The "real" forces of our epoch obsessed with memory and memorialization is not tolerant of any voids in the midst of profit oriented global capitalism taking over urban spaces. Postdamer Platz is one example. in the middle of a once divided city, there is this one kilometer long wasteland, an urban wilderness, an urban void to be exact, which is irresistibly calling for "development."
The German-Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind's reaction to the intolerance to void is striking:

Take the open area at the Postdamer Platz. I suggest a nuderness, one kilometer long, within which everything can stay as it is. The street simply end in bushes. Wonderful. After all, this area is the result of today’s divine natural lam: nobody wanted it, nobody planned it, and yet it isfirmed implanted in ali our minds. And there in our minds, this image of Postdamer Platz void will remain for decades. Something like that cannot be easily erased, even if the whole area is developed. (Quoted in Huyssen 1997: 73)
What is it that produces the void? The question itself attests to an oxymoron for void is, by definition, opposite of production. However, if a bomb destroys a building, what produces void is not the bomb but the erasure of the thingly dimension of an object leaving behind the system of signification mixed with the forces of remembrance. So, in a sense, the void is not altogether empty nor can it be called non-productive. The difficulty of understanding void involves the representational regime of a given culture that declares void as negative, as an emptiness which must be filled. There is the example of Berlin Jewish Museum designed by the same architect, Daniel Libeskind, who seems to be very fond of voids.

The architect of this project, Daniel Libeskind, defines "lack" or "void" as one of the starting points of his "deconstructivist" and unusual design of the museum (Libeskind 84). The void in this particular instance symbolizes a specific segment of history, namely the Holocaust, which cannot be adequately represented by things, images or words. The unrepresentability of Holocaust is precisely a product of its unthinkability, its destructive yet efficient productivity and the space it occupies in the collective psyche of German and Jewish nations. How can one memorialize an act like the Holocaust? What would one want to preserve of it? These questions are answered in Libeskind's uncanny structure, completed in 1997, resembling a strange warehouse built in the form of a long zigzag with unusual angles. The architect describes the thought behind this space as a "simple" one: "to build the museum around a void that runs through it, a void that is to be experienced by public" (85). The particular historical experience of the extermination of one race, for the architect, cannot be re-presented since the historical presence of such an event reflects an absence, a void. In this void, Reason declares itself the supreme ruler and implements an elaborate program for the elimination of its Other.

Neither during the time of the (ir)rational act of Holocaust, nor afterwards such an act could find itself a proper place in the collective psyche and the memories of the nations involved. This statement, for Libeskind, does not contradict with the fact that Holocaust has been extensively memorialized. Therefore it is a "museum for no museum," a space that does not encompass anything, for what is represented is un-re-presentable. For the architect, this should be a space that stands for absence since a great portion of Berlin's Jewish population is erased from the memories quite literally. Libeskind points out instances of similar
nature such as the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima that constitute other points of repression from the memory of Reason.*

The voids we have considered so far took two distinct but related forms: the ones that emerge out of destruction and the others as an intentional construction, which, in the end, purports to bear a deconstructive gesture regarding forceful or violent replenishment. Both forms implicate the significance of a "politics of void" either in terms of a resistance against the violent act of anchoring a stable meaning and a particular exclusionary replenishment, or the very construction of void itself—an act of conscious imprecision as to what meaning(s) should fill the void. What political status, in this picture, does the time capsule attain?

As we have already remarked, the time capsule is a device (a vessel) which, on the level of intentionality, "sends" the so-called things-as-messages to the future, and on the unconscious level "sends" a void (time capsule itself as the void) to the future. The first conclusion in terms of the operation of the void in the context of time capsules has already been reached: the time capsule is a political device *par excellence*. Then, what kind of a politics is involved here? To answer this question we need, first of all, to identify the kind of void it involves in relation to other voids briefly discussed so far. Secondly, we also need to understand the practice of getting rid of the void in favor of a certain identity claim.

Curiously enough, the void of time capsule incorporates a double gesture of acknowledgement and denial of the notion of inheritance. On the one hand, the idea of time capsule acknowledges the nature of historical inheritance that it is always a promise "to an open future ... due to the productivity of repetition" which is "necessarily plural" (Fritsch 1994: 295). We see this in the apocalyptic expectation or desire on the part of those who contrive the time capsule. The temporal order of modernity involves a past, a present, and a future analytically forming a consecutive string in which the subject seems to be trapped in the middl. The ethico-political translation of such an order reads as follows: we inherit and must be respectful to our ancestors, and we project and thus construct a future whose inhabitants must know and must respect us. Obviously, as Derrida remarks in *Specters of Marx*, that the process of respect, responsiveness and responsibility involves a high degree of selectivity, a "transformative filter" in his terms (1994: 87), regarding our temporal others in the past. We are doomed to be irrespective to our ancestors because of the necessarily plural ways of
"inheriting" and because "a repetition is never a repetition of the same" (Fritsch 295). As we conceive it from the position of entrapment in the present, the history is full of voids which can take the form of denial, intentional or forceful forgetting, conscious or unconscious reconstructions.

On the other hand, the time capsule denies, and it must, that that very act of "killing the dead" (Derrida 1994:102) is contrary to the ethical impositions of modernity, that it contradicts with the consecutive order of time loaded with the notions of respect and responsibility. Therefore, the present task of constructing a future cannot be left to chance, to the play of differences. The only sound way of doing justice to the future (upon the acknowledgement that we can never do justice to the past) is in lieu with the dominant regime of representation based on the logocentric ideology of the exactitude of truth: we have to create our own void and then fill it selectively with what we think best represent us. The terms of representation in filling the void of time capsules are based on the logic of halting the infinite play of semiosis, that, if we manage to stop difference, if we can just succeed in preserving things as things-in-themselves, that is, if we can just be able to send only the thingly nature of things to the future, then we can feel assured that they, upon entering into the symbolic realm of the future, will be reconstituted as they were here and now. This assurance is a comforting one in the sense that reminiscent exactly in terms of the way in which we define (constitute) ourselves today. The message to the future will reach its destination without any distortions since the dark shaft of remembrance, the pit in which the time capsule is preserved will protect and preserve things that belong today.

The important thing to note here is that the time capsule, in guise of "ambassador of time," actually constitutes the present subjectivity (like many other devices such as the museum) denying what Derrida calls le jeu du temps, "the play of time." However, the time capsule does one more thing as important as its autobiographical nature. It denies historical contingency or "fate" by appropriating the future through what we might call a reverse archaeology.

"Fate" as an outmoded and ancient concept represent a particularly significant blind-spot in the modern temporal order. According to Agata Bielik-Robson, fate portrays "the vulnerability of the human subject to contingent events which always come to
the psyche as a shock and surprise ... a blind force which has a double power to shape and destroy" (76). Contingency, in this sense, could bring the best and the worst with equal possibility, and the arrival of death is not a matter of choice but a matter of time. In this respect, death is not really a possibility but an absolute since the matter of concern is not the question if, but when. Death is always already there, approaching with a pace utterly unknown to human being. The close affinity between the approaching death and the notion of contingency is all too obvious and it is possible to test various philosophies against the notion of death, apocalyptic death included, to understand the variations in Western metaphysics' central concepts of life, existence, identity, otherness, and so forth. For Hegel, for instance, the primary task of philosophical reflection is to remove the contingent, for experience is nothing but a scandalous encounter with the thing in itself (Bielik-Robson 77). Heidegger, on the other hand, views the element of contingency and "authentic death" as subject's "essential and singular possibility" which is not only the meaning but also the fundamental source of meaning of being and time (Baugh 74). Under modernity, the human subject seems to be thoroughly disarmed when encountering scandalously with "thing-in-itself" since fate is replaced by scientific exactitude and determinacy. By definition, fate evades control and attests to the fact that the subject is fundamentally weak in predicting his/her own future and the future of its kind. The encounter with the thing-in-itself is scandalous for the subject precisely because of the uneasy relationship he/she enters into with time. In her reading of the Heideggerian notion of "being-towards-death" Bielik-Robson describes modern subject as a fundamentally insecure one:

To be, therefore, means to be in possession of the gift of being but merely on borrowed time: it means to be able to lease it, but with the constant threat of sudden expropriation. This dependency is a source of unquenchable ontological insecurity: the violent gift of Being ... is both destructive and creative (eignen). (81)

The usual mechanisms to cope with that basic anthropological condition of being-towards-death can be found in multiple forms of representations of memory. In the context of "high-tech amnesia" prompted by electronic technologies dominating the cultural environment today (television, video, the Internet to name a few), Andreas Huyssen detects an obsession with memory. Showing itself in what he calls the museum boom, the obsession with memory for Huyssen is rooted in the
modems’ peculiar relation with the past: “it [museum] enables moderns to negotiate and to articulate a relationship to the past that is always also a relationship to the transitory and to death, our own included” (1995:16).

In the context of time capsules, however, we witness a twisted approach to representation and memory since its direction is to the contrary of the “usual mechanisms.” As the obsession with memory in late modern times glorify museums as, to cite Huyssen’s phrase, the new “mass medium,” the time capsule appear to direct its reach towards the future as a medium which is neither “mass” nor “interpersonal.” As indicated before, time capsules displace the subject in time and try to visualize the present from the perspective of the future. This is precisely what I call an attempt to eliminate fate and trespass the anthropological limits set by historical contingency.

There is, of course, a massive literature on the weakness of the subject against time, from Fichte and Hegel to Freud, and from Heidegger to Derrida, but the symptomatic evidence of this utter weakness comes mainly from under the ground in the form of ruins. It would not be a gross exaggeration to say that archaeology as a discipline continually witnesses the so-called “ravages of time” and its destructive impact on the civilizations. It is, in a sense, a discipline of fate, a body of knowledge devoted to the resurrection of past on the basis of thingly traces. An artifact dug out from below the ground is tediously studied to be made into an “ancient object” in such a way as to reconstruct its exact date, utility, value etc. That is to say, “a thing” whose status is barely “an archeological object” is tried to be returned back to its so-called “original status,” to its objecthood which was established by actual people who lived in the past.

In many respects, archaeology (and to a certain extent, paleontology) constitute a perfect model for the ideology of the time capsules. The New York Times author Jack Hitt is keen to observe in Thornwell Jacobs’ Crypt of Civilizations an attempt to “supply the future ... with our own prefabricated ruins,” on the basis of Jacobs’ own description of creating a time capsule as “our archeological duty.” Thus the time capsule, however pathologically, tries to provide evidence (or trace) to the future archaeologist, and does this in such a way as to eliminate contingency. In a sense, the logic of time capsules directs and controls the attention of future archaeologists, making their job a little easier by planting evidence. If this is the “logic,” so to speak, why, we may ask, are the time capsules buried under the ground? Is this simply a gesture...
borrowed from "reverse archaeology," on the basis of the fact that archaeologists usually find things by digging?

The arche of archaeology is concerned with locating an origin, an initial instance to a particular place. In this respect, archaeology is a discipline of locale as much as it is a discipline of cultural objects. Time intervenes between civilizations, and the objects remain as traces of the past; but objects always remain in a particular place which is recognized as the locale of civilization. In this context, it is possible to talk about a geopolitics of the past which is not at all dissociated from contemporary geopolitics (just think of the practice of digging up the graves to understand which ethnic group has the right to the land inhabited today). The debate around the question "who owns the past?" haunts archaeological practice today, without generating any easy and universally justifiable answers. We can reformulate the question in a slightly different format which is more appropriate to our own discussion: does (the passing of) time universalize?

As our preceding discussions on semiological sign and time demonstrates, the time capsule (and specifically The Times Capsule) answers this question in the affirmative. However, despite its uniquely cultural-specific and autobiographical character, and despite its unmistakably American location, time capsules oftentimes raise issues of "humanity" and "time in general" which, once again, marks its exclusionary attitude. The geopolitics of a designated past, which is the here and now of the American geopolitics today, clearly determines the idea of burying a time capsule. Fate of humanity, in this sense, is juxtaposed with the fate which is (or, is thought to be) shaped by the very American fear of modernity's downfall. The downfall of modernity certainly has a resonance with Judeo-Christian eschatology, and with a general metaphysics of presence peculiar to the West.

Beyond

Passing the message of civilization across time and across fate marks the grand objective of time capsules. I tried to entertain the idea in this article that the "grand objective" borders foolishness. It, however, also bears signs of wisdom. It is foolish in many respects but above all because it reflects the hopeless desire to remain same through time. Time capsule is foolish because of its misrecognition of the uncanny nature of things; the thing is always already foreign to us no matter how close we are to them in our everyday lives. Yet the sincere belief in, and the emotional (along
with material) investment for them make up time capsule's wisdom. An "American wisdom" to be sure, marked with the belief in things, in the materiality or the thingliness of things, as representatives of culture, and of everyday life. It is almost possible to hear the cry: we, the ordinary Americans, were here, imprisoned in our thingly lives without understanding its nature. Thus wisdom also surges in the unconscious acknowledgement of utter weakness against the flux of time despite the time capsule's foolish struggle to freeze it in an eternal presence. Michael Taussig asks a question that merges foolishness and wisdom:

How is it that the distinction between subject and object, between me and things, is so crucially dependent on life and death? Why is death the harbinger and index of the thing-world, and how can it be, then, that death awakens life in things? Over there, death, the graveyard lohere things erupt like gravestones, the entity-place. (305)

Inspired by Sylvia Plath's poetics of death, the question itself offers the answer. Death comes out in life in the form of things which become things proper, only after, only beyond life. In a sense, death is alive in things; we pass away, they stay in this or that form, in the form of ruins or relics. Maybe Adorno's "prescription" for Benjamin is the real answer: "the need to become a thing in order to undo the catastrophic spell of things" (Qtd. in Taussig 316). Benjamin's insistence upon the disappearance of subject in the jungle or constellation of things resonates with Blanchot's notion of "subjectivity without any subject" on the horizon of disaster (30). The disappearance of subject is also the case in the logic of time capsules for which "message" is preceded by the expectation or the recognition of a grand disaster. It is exactly for this reason that we should "misunderstand" time capsules, as Adorno once remarked, "misunderstandings are the medium in which the noncommunicable is communicated" (232). The (un)intentional nature morte created by the time capsules can thus be read as a virtuous act without the subject (without the editors of the New York Times for instance), an act which drew Benjamin to the world of commodities, to the Paris arcades or the World's Fair. The misunderstanding of the message of time capsules and the misunderstanding of "time capsules as messages" is an opportunity to understand our era for which "stopped motion and frozen trauma" has become the primary metaphors (Boyne 42).
1 Many designers and architects who entered the design competition of The New York Times Capsule envisioned their capsule to be buried in the Central Park despite the fact that the winning design is meant to be "safeguarded" in the American Museum of Natural History, Washington DC. Apparently the impossible bureaucracy of the city authority does not permit anything to be placed in the Central Park without proper permissions to be taken from at least twenty different and oftentimes contesting local government offices.

2 To Thornvell Jacobs’ time capsule called Crypt of Civilizations (an abandoned swimming pool converted into a time capsule to be opened in May 28, 8113), Albert Einstein has contributed with the following statement: "... people living in different countries kill each other at irregular time intervals, so that also for this reason anyone who thinks about the future must live in fear and terror."

3 It is striking to notice that the seemingly insatiable Western desire to "resolve the enigma of the Egyptian Pyramid" has the same structure with the apocalyptic desire to create a time capsule, a pyramid-metaphor to be unfolded by the "future generations."

4 "Time Wave Zero is a series of mathematical formulae based upon the King Wen sequence in the I Ching, developed by the brothers McKenna in their 1975/1993 book Invisible Landscapes: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching. According to their calculations, at the end of the year 2012 we will encounter what Terence has alternately called the tremendum, the transcendental object, and the historical object; a material accretion of all events past, present, and future — history made manifest" (Harrison).

5 Of course, as Huysen remarks, the "divine natural law" is hardly "natural." The Postdamer Platz is created by "the saturation bombings of 1944-45, which left little of the old Postdamer Platz standing; the building of the wall in 1961, which required a further clearing of the area; the tearing down of the wall in 1989, which made this whole area between the Brandenburg Gate and Postdamer Platz into that prairie of history that Berliners quickly embraced" (Huysen 1997: 73, 75)

6 In his response to Libeskind’s speech, Jacques Derrida implicates an imaginary museum in Jerusalem analogous to Libeskind’s, alluding to the repression caused by the Israeli occupation (Derrida “Response” 93).

7 Very briefly summarized, the dominant regime of representation is that which attempts to eliminate the barrier between res cogitans and res extensa. The contents of mind belongs to, originates from, and is a result of things in the outside world via the mediation of perception. Thought, in return, reflects or re-presents the origin but we can never be sure of its exactitude as to whether or not the reflection is just or "truthful" to its source. In order to make sure that the inside and outside of the mind matches, that thought and being are adjusted, we need to examine the very process of representation which might take several forms. Speech, for instance, as the first step of externalizing the thought must be taken as the most truthful instance of the adjustment of thought and being. Any further modalities of representation, writing for instance, will imply a derivation and therefore a possible contamination. The logic of time capsules (along with any traditional museum display) perverts this process of consecutive contamination by alluding to the things-themselves, to the pure form of thought, to the very origin of thoughts, to the atemporal base where we cannot speak of the subject or objectification. Obviously this is a naive attempt because of the "uncanny nature of things" which can be understood as the fundamental problem of time capsule. As soon as one contrives the thing-itself, the thing gets objectified, ceases to be a thing-in-itself, and therefore a thing-as-message is an impossibility for it has always already entered into the realm of the symbolic. The rest can be seen as a futile trial of "damage control" involving the idea that burying the thing-as-message would result in a forced/forged forgetfulness. The "damage control" also involves the idea that in a subjectless temporality the process of objectification and representation, and thus semiosis would stop.
Works Cited


