

What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Media and Nostalgia?

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Abstract

Nostalgia is often understood as a syndrome and a therapeutic mechanism for healing traumatic past experiences, a retrospective utopia of safety and stability, or a revisionist project of rewriting history in a more user-friendly and appealing way. The literature also highlights different uses of nostalgic sentiments, such as their commercial and aesthetic applications, affective nature, material dimensions, and political relevance, among many others. Previous research has shown that media, popular culture and creative industries are the central platforms for nostalgic productions, which not only allow for creativity but also manipulate users' attitudes towards the past and induce nostalgia in audiences. Such an abundance of perspectives and theories on nostalgia creates conceptual confusion. With this in mind, this essay aims at more clearly elucidating theories on nostalgia. As engagement with broader debates on the role of the media in nostalgic experiences has also been limited, this essay will provide some remarks on the relations between media and nostalgia.

Despite the proliferation of scholarship and public commentary on nostalgia, it has become increasingly challenging to find a particularly rigorous explanation of the term. Moreover, disciplinary and area studies scholarship tend to maintain the definitions usually applied in their specific fields, only sporadically referring to publications originating in other disciplinary areas. Yet, we do find more consistent interdisciplinary in media and communication studies, where media and social psychology research have recently contributed to a rather positive outlook on nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015); meanwhile, more area-specific media studies have maintained a more or less negative outlook on the phenomenon (Abramov & Chestiakova, 2012) due to influence from other disciplines such as political science and sociology, which often tend to focus on trauma and political misuses of memory.

Against this background, this essay aims to present common, cross-disciplinary premises about nostalgia as an organising point around which researchers and others interested in the topic could develop a common language. Besides discussing important developments in the field of nostalgia research as well as the history of the concept and some of the criticisms it typically

generates, this essay will also highlight the positive effects of nostalgia as suggested by psychologists and sociologists. The history of these areas of scholarship will be accompanied by commentary on the gaps, blind spots and inconsistencies in the existing research. At the same time, this paper has added value for media studies scholars as it addresses the ways in which nostalgia is treated by the discipline.

Towards these ends, this essay first presents an outline of current conceptualisations of nostalgia, showing how it is perceived as either a negative, undesired phenomenon or a positive, mobilising force. Thereafter, focus will be placed on the intersection of nostalgia and media.

Defining nostalgia

Many of us would admit to sometimes experiencing sudden memory flashbacks when being confronted with a recognisable smell or a familiar song. Opening shoeboxes that contain various reminders of our individual pasts, such as photos, letters, records, diaries, or travel souvenirs can unleash a flood of cherished memories that together constitute our personal and cultural identities. These various stimuli – recorded media, films and television series, gifts, antique

objects purchased at flea markets – signal the loss of what such items signify. These stimuli affect people's perceptions and emotional apparatuses in unexpected and often contradictory ways, eliciting emotional reactions that encompass both deep sadness and wistful joy – a bittersweet longing which incites memory work. This emotional experience is usually called nostalgia (Hepper et al., 2014; Sedikides et al., 2015; Bachtó, 2007; Havlena & Holak, 1991; Mills & Coleman, 1994; Peters, 1985).

Until the mid-20th century, nostalgia was understood as a spatial phenomenon, “a yearning to return home”, but to a time long since gone. Since then, nostalgia has been increasingly considered as a temporal phenomenon and a reaction to the irreversibility of time and an unsatisfactory present (Hutcheon, 2000, p. 194).

As a reaction towards change, nostalgia signals the need to transform the present and secure a desirable future. Controlling the future is only possible by taking command of both the present and the past via power over history and memory. To achieve this, nostalgia focuses on recent times instead of the more distant past, which is more studied by historians (Higson, 2014). The focus on recent times could also be explained insofar as nostalgia relies on memory, both personal and collective, as resources for affective longing.

Nostalgic experiences are impossible without having a memory anchored in the human faculty to remember and forget; however, not all memories are necessarily nostalgic: “Given that the object of nostalgic feeling is something no longer present, memory is inherent in the construct of nostalgia”, hence, “one can remember without being nostalgic, but one cannot be nostalgic without remembering” (Bachtó, 2007, pp. 361-62). This type of specificity is often neglected in both scholarly and public discussions. Moreover, memory is often lumped together with nostalgia in a stigmatised bin of feelings. Affect, which is paramount to nostalgic experience, is often pathologised and gendered as feminine, providing a basis for the stigmatisation of nostalgia. Being seen as less credible than the science of (seemingly) hard facts, i.e., history, nostalgia's culturally and historically empowering mode of engaging with the world is often overlooked and its role frequently downplayed.

Nostalgia is not just an individual emotion but a collective one as well; one that operates in both the public and private domains (Wilson, 2005, pp. 30-31). Personal (individual) nostalgia refers

to people's subjective experiences of the past, while collective (group) nostalgia refers to collective emotional experiences based on the collective memories of a group (Davis, 1979; Holbrook, 1993). Personal experiences are grounded in memories that are specific to the individual and differ significantly across society, while collective experiences originate in cultural phenomena that members of society share. These experiences can be both direct and indirect:

“Direct experience refers back to events in the individual's own life, while indirect experience results from stories told by friends or family members or from information in books, movies, or other media.”

(Holak, Matveev, & Havlena, 2008, p. 173)

Indirect nostalgic experiences are usually regarded as broad social and cultural phenomena and are often conceptualised as *historical nostalgia* (Marchegiani & Phau, 2013). Conceptualising nostalgia as a collective emotion provides a basis for talking about phenomena that are referred to as *nostalgia epidemics*, which cover not only individuals' proneness to nostalgia but also that of whole societies.

Theorists see a rebellion “against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (Boym, 2001, p. xv) in collective nostalgia for the past. Modernism is about breaking with the past and with tradition, while nostalgia is about longing for the past and a wistful remembering of tradition, both of which are hence “contradictory responses to modernity” (Higson, 2014, p. 125). Seemingly, we arrive at a point of contradiction by setting modernism and nostalgia against each other. Nevertheless, we know of examples of nostalgia being implemented as the basis of modernist projects, such as in Hitler's Germany or Putin's Russia, where modernist projects had a conservative foundation in and a stated return to tradition. Thus, *temporal* and *spatial nostalgia*, where the former refers to a longing for a time that has passed and the latter to a longing for a home that has been lost, converge and feed each other.

It is believed that the desire to return home usually takes one of two forms identified by Svetlana Boym (2001) in her distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia: (a) a return to an ideal childhood as a time of innocence, or (b) a patriotic reconstruction of the homeland as an ideal place, where the homeland is

synonymous with the nation. Both variants have a strong creative potential that can be realised in either vernacular forms of remembering or the construction of nationalist rhetoric and political nostalgia. At this point, some researchers have distinguished between two types of nostalgia: modernist (temporal and melancholic) and postmodernist (atemporal and celebratory) (Higson, 2014, p. 125), as well as a *nostalgia mood* (the emotional and affective patterns of nostalgia) and a *nostalgia mode* (a commodified and aesthetic style) (Grainge, 2002). Despite their deliberate schematisation, these two sides of nostalgia constantly intermingle, producing a hybrid phenomenon.

Postmodernist nostalgia feeds contemporary popular culture, which seems to offer an arena in which the past is no longer lost (Higson, 2014, p. 126). This type of nostalgia uses the past as a repository of different styles available for pastiche and bricolage, applying irony as a strategy for un-packing various historical epochs in order to mix and match them in artistic appropriations. However, this does not mean that postmodernist nostalgia has little to do with reflection or reduces history to mere visual style – “the spectacle of pastness”, as Jameson (1991, pp. 19-21) believed. In fact, it might just be the tip of an iceberg of a much more complex process of remembering that stays unseen when we, the researchers, study it. Nostalgia’s longing for a return to the past stimulates the transformation of spatial arrangements and therefore contributes greatly to the securing of a possible desired future. Through creative practices such as interior design, packaging and branding, collecting souvenirs, and collective remembering in online communities engaged in the sharing of various media of the past, nostalgia constructs the past and reshapes the physical and virtual world we inhabit in our everyday lives. Hence, temporal nostalgia has never been separate from spatial nostalgia; rather, they have always been interconnected and entangled.

I would like to point out the importance of these premises, as we are often faced with situations when, in both public and academic discourses, any type of remembering and use of the past is labelled nostalgic; and due to its misconception, nostalgia is subsequently stigmatised as a negative engagement with the past. Such an undifferentiated misuse of the term causes interpretational difficulties and leads to severe misjudgements of real-life situations and the stigmatisation of individuals and groups as

pathologically nostalgic. Therefore, I suggest looking at nostalgia’s conceptual history in order to lay the groundwork for a better understanding of the phenomenon, its emotional nexus, and its manifestations in contemporary information societies.

Negative view on nostalgia: A disease and pathological condition

Past theorists emphasised the negative aspects of nostalgic remembering. One of the main criticisms of nostalgia was directed towards its perceived escapism from present-day reality and the inability or unwillingness of those experiencing it to assume control over changed circumstances. According to this view, nostalgic engagement is perceived as choosing a passive way of dealing with loss by diverting attention towards the past rather than the present. This is one of the many reasons why nostalgia actually says more about the present than the past – it marks existing inconsistencies and ruptures, persistent traumas and deprivations. For instance, Nawas and Platt (1965) argued that nostalgia reveals anxiety over or fear of the future, while Peters (1985) characterised nostalgic yearning as ranging from fleeting sadness to a debilitating craving that can profoundly interfere with a person’s ability to manage present-day situations. As a longing *for* longing, nostalgia has also been seen as a “social disease”, defined by Susan Stewart as “the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition” (Stewart, 1984, p. 23). Such approaches have viewed nostalgia as a continuous escape from reality while simultaneously holding those who experience it accountable for the refusal to deal with the present.

This negative view of nostalgia as an escapist reaction to change has a long history dating back to its diagnosis as a pathological medical condition, and later as a psychological condition. As “a painful yearning to return home”, nostalgia was first discussed by Johannes Hofer (1934 [1688]), who described it as a severe sickness resulting in death. As a corporeal *disease*, nostalgia was associated with symptoms ranging from melancholia and weeping to anorexia and suicide. The only cure for this painful condition was believed to be returning home.

By the 19th century, significant changes had occurred in discourses about nostalgia – it was no longer understood as a curable corporeal disease,

but rather as an incurable psychological condition connected to the societal changes brought about by industrialisation, migration and urbanisation (Anderson, 2010). However, during the American Civil War, the medical discourse about nostalgia experienced a revival (Hutcheon, 2000, p. 194). Nostalgia became a common medical diagnosis based on strong physical symptoms. The methods for classifying and diagnosing nostalgia varied greatly, which led to numerous discrepancies in interpreting what the disease was and how to treat it. It was classified mainly as *extreme mental depression* and *mental illness* (Anderson, 2010, p. 256).

The negative perspective on nostalgia was embraced by a number of scholars who explored nostalgia in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the communist regimes. For them, nostalgia was a socio-cultural phenomenon caused by a certain chain of events: market changes and the persistent assault of the capitalist economy, accelerated globalisation, and the imposition of Western values (Todorova & Gille, 2010; Enns, 2007; Godenanu-Kenworthy, 2011; Novikova & Dulo, 2011). The post-Soviet transformation was seen as a traumatic event that resulted in widespread nostalgic longing for the socialist period of stability. Increasing uncertainty about the future and harsh social and economic conditions forced many people to change their lifestyles (not always for the best) and ultimately led to greater anxiety among post-communist societies.

Nostalgia was consequently medicalised and politicised, resulting in nostalgia-bashing and nostalgia-shaming of certain groups of people, predominantly those who had not succeeded in adapting to the new rules of the market. The *losers*, who mourned the collapse of the communist welfare state, the loss of universal values, and the erosion of feelings of security, were considered *psychologically sick* and excluded from *successful* communities by being labelled nostalgic, backward-looking and progress-alienated. That their nostalgic experiences were heterogeneous and did not necessarily constitute only passive escapism and a wish to restore communism was mostly overlooked (Kalinina, 2014).

Gradually, nostalgia-shaming was used to establish one's political stance and social status. I found that the liberal intelligentsia in Russia in the 2000s used nostalgia to foment opposition to the identity of President Putin's loyalists, who understood nostalgia as a restorative force for reinstalling an authoritarian regime and a

clear marker of one's political affiliations. By doing so, nostalgia has once again been coupled with a psychological condition. In the eyes of those who succeeded in adapting to the new circumstances, people who were believed to wish for the restoration of the authoritarian regime were deservedly labelled *sick* and *abnormal*. As the research has shown, some of those regarded by their peers as *nostalgically sick* actually shared similar opinions and feared the restoration of the authoritarian regime as well (Kalinina, 2014).

Similar strategies of denunciation occurred during the American Civil War, where some doctors argued that black soldiers were more often subject to nostalgia than white soldiers, "claiming exposure and ignorance as detrimental to the health and general vigour of black soldiers" (Anderson, 2010, p. 260). It was also believed that women were more prone than men to nostalgia and other so-called psychological disorders. Hence, a man experiencing nostalgia was considered to possess more feminine than masculine qualities. Such a *feminisation* of nostalgia forced men to hide or deny their *so-called mental illness*, fearing neglect and shaming, which in turn made it more difficult to diagnose (Anderson, 2010, pp. 270-271).

Apart from being used to distinguish between different groups or genders in a single society, nostalgia has also been used to emphasise the dissimilarities between various regions, ethnic groups and nations. For instance, nostalgia has been considered an exclusively *regional phenomenon* (Boyer, 2010, p. 17) occurring within the borders of Eastern Europe and former Eastern Germany. In this view, the East was defined as the *West's exotic other* (Cooke, 2005), while Eastern Europeans were understood as looking backwards to find safety and stability, a fair and equal society, true friendships, and mutual solidarity, all of which were lost after the collapse of the communist states (Velikonja, 2009; Todorova & Gille, 2010).

These examples show that prejudices lie at the core of nostalgia attributions, which are used to denigrate some while at the same time strengthening the privileged position of dominant groups. By building and re-building images of the past grounded deeply in personal and collective memories, nostalgia has been used as a tool for creating negative identities and identifying the *significant other*. By stressing that *others* are nostalgic, people form their own identities as positive. In such a usage, nostalgia can and usually does become a powerful tool for disempowering others.

The negative assessment of nostalgia rests also in the assumption that nostalgia should provide an objective portrayal of the past. As mentioned before, Svetlana Boym (2001, p. xviii) introduced two kinds of nostalgia, which she called *restorative* and *reflective*. In her reading, restorative nostalgia presents itself not as nostalgia but as truth and tradition, which protects a kind of absolute truth. Thus, restorative nostalgia claims to be the truthful representation of the past. Meanwhile, reflective nostalgia calls truths and traditions into doubt, leaving space for contradictions and reflections. Restorative nostalgia claims the return to origins, while reflective nostalgia makes it possible

“to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory.”

(Boym, 2001, p. xviii)

Hence, we are dealing with nostalgia attempting to question and even re-write history. While restorative nostalgia proclaims the return to origins after dominant historical narratives have been corrupted, reflective nostalgia calls for the questioning of normalised historical truths and attempts to either create an alternative story of the past or to enrich the past by filling it with banal details and vernacular memories about people's individual lifeworlds.

By doing so, some researchers believe, people cleanse their “memory of the oppressive aspects” and “remember gratefully the parochial privacy, slowness and predictability” of life (Stern, 2006, p. 479). Because of this cleansing, negative episodes of history are omitted, while new, banal details are incorporated into the emergent lacunas. Because of this tendency to question dominant historical narratives, nostalgia has often been understood as a revisionist project of rewriting history in a more user-friendly and entertaining way, which creates a “profound gap between the sanitised nostalgic reproductions and the actual traumatic history” (Oushakine, 2007, p. 452). Such emotional restorative nostalgia, based on a past that has never existed, connects selected myths that safeguard people in power while providing fruitful ground for the production of patriotic sentiments (Boym, 2001, p. 4). At the level of official discourse, certain past experiences are censored to maintain and legitimise the

dominant political system (Liu & Hilton, 2005). The analysis of contemporary nostalgic discourses in countries with limited discursivity in the public sphere, such as in Russia, provides evidence of such restorative nostalgia, promoted by the political elites and, quite frankly, graciously received and reproduced by the public (Morenkova, 2012). Nostalgia for the Soviet period is largely built upon myths about the past that indeed trivialise the traumatic history of the country. Moreover, it also has some real political consequences, where the history of political purges and communist crimes has been rewritten in favour of their perpetrators. Hence, the Russian state provides a monopolised reading of official history and national identity that is supposed to unite citizens under the emblem of the state. In doing so, nostalgia is incorporated into national identity as an affective resource to encourage or even manipulate citizens' perceptions of the past (Kalinina & Menke, 2016).

Such manipulations of memory and history via nostalgia are quite visible in popular culture and media. Television shows and films, restaurant design and cuisine, packaging and branding strategies echo the nostalgia for a bygone era. Such commercialisation and commodification of nostalgia hardly add to its positive reception. Being seen as a commercial phenomenon that promotes the capitalisation, simplification and repackaging of the past leads to a negative perception of nostalgia by many. Russian media scholars have even described the phenomenon as a “nostalgia-for-the-past-syndrome with its inclination for escapism and glamour” (Novikova & Dulo, 2011). Some scholars believe that nostalgia encourages consumerist attitudes and presents the past as merely entertaining (Ivanova, 2002; Novikova & Dulo, 2011; Abramov & Chistyakova, 2012). Elena Morenkova (2012) believed that such depictions of the past in nostalgic longing, where traumatic aspects of communist history, recycled and represented in an entertaining light, are consumed by young audiences who have neither a profound knowledge of history nor personal memories of that past, threaten to trivialise the tragic aspects of history. Furthermore, she argued that such depictions obstruct the process of coming to terms with the communist past; instead, they create the necessary conditions for the emergence of militant patriotism among younger generations of Russians.

Critics have blamed nostalgic popular culture

and media for the instrumental mistreatment of the past, viewing the phenomenon as part of the postmodern tradition, with its scepticism towards the celebration of progress and suspicion of ideological authority, universal theories and grand narratives (Kalinina, 2014). Another reason for such a negative stance towards nostalgia originates in general attitudes towards popular culture and emotions. Automatic dismissal and suspicion of popular culture and entertainment industries as frivolous, emotional and superficial has been transferred to both nostalgia and the media platforms used for nostalgia production and consumption (Volčič, 2007; Cooke, 2005). Such a negative perspective on nostalgia and popular culture also reveals that some still think of the media as all-powerful and media audiences as passive consumers incapable of negotiated or oppositional readings. For instance, some media researchers have pointed out the manipulative power of mass media, claiming that media producers are responsible for inducing a nostalgic mood in audiences (Ivanova, 2002, pp. 84-85). Yet, Keightley and Pickering claimed that

“where the negative sense of nostalgia prevails, there is a tendency to neglect the reciprocal relationship between audience and media in generating the conditions for making sense and meaning.”
(2006, p. 930)

Positive view on nostalgia: Psychological and sociological functions

Contemporary research on nostalgia has rehabilitated the phenomenon. Social psychology has contributed significantly to studies of nostalgia by stressing its positive effect on the human psyche. Cavanaugh (1989) suggested that nostalgic remembering helps individuals to comprehend personal changes over time, while Kaplan (1987) found that nostalgia helps young adults to cope with the loss of an idealised childhood and innocence. Similarly, Davis (1979) argued that nostalgia helps people to adapt to discontinuities in life and society. Nostalgia, therefore, can be regarded as an essential tool that individuals use to adapt to unavoidable changes in life. Nostalgia can restore a sense of personal identity by “reweaving the broken threads of life history” and can even enhance group identity

by enabling connections with others (Mills & Coleman, 1994). Batcho’s (2007) findings suggest that nostalgia may facilitate or be facilitated by the sense of connectedness to others and may also promote psychological well-being by countering alienation and strengthening one’s sense of community. Similarly, nostalgia is believed to help facilitate coping with traumatic experiences (Hertz, 1990) and has been regarded as an important vehicle for linking immigrants to their past as they settle in new environments (Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Volkan, 1999). Recent research by Sedikides and Wildschut (2016) has revealed that nostalgia can boost creativity, evoke inspiration and increase optimism. The researchers argued that nostalgia is a “dynamic, motivational force that enables the individual to look ahead and take proactive action” (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016, p. 319); this is because despite of nostalgia referring to the past, it in fact speaks more about the present and is “surprisingly forward looking” (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016, p. 319). Being both a result and a reaction to rupture and change, nostalgia’s aim is to create a continuous connection between the past, the present, and – more crucially – the future.

As I mentioned in the previous section, scholars have been quite critical about nostalgia’s ability to provide a diligent representation of the past. Nevertheless, the picture is more complicated than it might at first appear. According to Assmann, nostalgia exists at the intersection of individual and cultural memory and involves “a perpetual interaction between remembering and forgetting” that depends on context and agency to determine which side it is tilted towards (2008, p. 97). Based on this premise, Kalinina and Menke (2016) suggested that nostalgic longing plays an important role as an affective resource that stimulates active participation in the process of remembering. By making history a personal matter, nostalgia challenges official narratives, which are otherwise devoid of individual-based stories, and therefore creates a more democratic history. Longing for an irrevocably lost moment of personal significance, people become curious and start to enquire about historical events. They begin to actively recall cultural and historical discourses and collect objects that remind them of the past – what Assmann termed *active remembering* (2008, pp. 98-100). By doing so, people integrate historical discourses and cultural memories into their own biographies, establishing a sense of continuity and building individual and

collective identities. Meanwhile, this increased interest in history also brings people together and shapes communities of remembering (Kalinina & Menke, 2016). Hence, nostalgia can become an active force that motivates people towards active remembering.

On the other hand, an ironic outlook on history, criticised by many, is not necessarily accompanied by a total neglect of tragic events and the creation of sanitised pictures of the past. On the contrary, *ironic nostalgia* can often challenge totalising historical representations by mocking them. Thus, ironic nostalgia, usually spotted in commercial appropriations of the past, serves a similar function as Svetlana Boym's reflective nostalgia, calling truths and norms into doubt and provoking the re-negotiation of traditions.

We should always remember that nostalgia has a distinctive, bittersweet character, combining both sadness and joy, which makes this emotion so special (Havlena & Holak, 1991; Mills & Coleman, 1994). One can still have a positive memory of a moment that took place under tragic conditions without necessarily neglecting these conditions. Remembering a positive moment serves a rehabilitating function by keeping an individual both sane and optimistic. A nostalgic memory of a cheerful encounter during a tragic experience, for example, might be necessary for an individual or group to cope with the tragedy and survive. Condemning such positive memories as illusory and escapist devalues their experience and threatens their identities, which can in turn have a strong mobilising effect that can be instrumentalized as a powerful tool in the hands of activists and politicians – for better or for worse.

Nostalgia and media

One of the most recent perspectives on nostalgia suggests that it is not just something one feels, i.e. that it exists per se and happens only when the time is right and the subject is emotionally and cognitively ready for it, but that it is actually something one *does*. To *nostalgise* is a verb that describes “an act of speech that can potentially turn into a pragmatic creative process” (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 10). In order to do so, one needs platforms; and one of the most gratifying platforms for nostalgising is the media.

Media and communication networks are paramount for collective remembering because they mediate collective and individual experiences

across large groups of people, which in turn enables the process of identity formation. Nevertheless, scholars often see the media as an agent that disrupts, not enables, memory and history. Frederic Jameson held the media accountable for historical amnesia (1998, pp. 19-20), while others have blamed media-narrated events for the acceleration of history (Gitlin, 1980). One such example of media influencing people's perception of events is the proliferation of live broadcasts that have challenged our experience of time – events that have become historical while simultaneously occurring in real time (Dayan & Katz, 1992).

Media scholar Zala Volčič (2007) argued that, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, it was precisely in the field of popular culture that the Yugoslav “imagined community” was first challenged, whereas the media provided a platform within which a new sense of belonging was promoted and maintained. However, it is exactly because of these qualities of popular culture and media – to provide entertainment and to commodify historical eras via their simplification – that nostalgia has often been criticised. In fact, popular culture and media in particular function as arenas for nostalgia to realise its mobilising and creative potential and challenge dominant historical narratives through its democratisation. Katharina Niemeyer elegantly argued that

“media do not only produce nostalgic narratives, but that they can be, in themselves, the creative projection spaces for nostalgia, as well as acting as the symptoms or triggers of nostalgia. They can also act as tools to manipulate nostalgia or to render it impossible.”

(2014, p. 11)

Multimodal and changeable structures of creative industries, with their ability to use visual, aural and other types of sensory communication, allow for a re-creation of an authentic sense of the past and the repetition of the nostalgic experience. As Niemeyer pointed out, the media are no longer simple triggers of nostalgia; rather, the media constitute the space wherein nostalgia happens and provide the tools for nostalgic creativity. Photography, for instance, does not simply record the disappearing past but actually invents it (Sontag, 1979, p. 67). Similarly, social media networks not only spread images around imagined communities of users, but also impose a backwards-looking aesthetic while providing a visual sensation of the atmosphere. In such

environments, we actually deal with self-induced nostalgia – nostalgia that is created through the creation of the stimuli for a nostalgic atmosphere (Bartholeyns, 2014).

Niemeyer wrote that the *nostalgia boom* can indeed be regarded as a reaction to

“the latest developments of new communication technologies as well as the increasing uses of social media.”
(2014, p. 2)

The nostalgia boom signals the prevailing paradox of modern societies, oscillating between acceleration and deceleration. *Social acceleration* is therefore accompanied by the counter-phenomenon of *deceleration* (Rosa, 2013). Under such conditions, the relationship between the fear of the rapid development of the newest technologies and their increased usage is reciprocal. In the desire to return to a better world, a slower pace of development is believed to be achieved through increased nostalgising via the newest media tools.

The history of communication reveals that the fear of media revolutions is not a nascent phenomenon. Narratives of the loss of authenticity and the decline of social norms also accompanied the invention of the printing press, telephone, telegraph and television, and were common in other transitional historical contexts as well. In his essay on analogue nostalgia, Dominik Schrey pointed out that

“the common denominator of these nostalgic narratives of media change is the fact that they assess the value of the new by the standards of the old.”
(2014, p. 29)

This leads us to the necessity of looking closer at

media history for similar discourses on change in order to liberate contemporary discourses on nostalgia and media from claims of the unprecedented specificity of modern times and the nostalgia booms said to accompany it. Divorcing from the binary oppositions of new and old media could also be one of the possible ways to start this discussion. Another suggestion would be to stop regarding progress as linear and accept the argument that the media render different temporal experiences and have the capacity to provide different time layers or *timescapes* (Keightley, 2012).

Concluding remarks

Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (2006) argued that the manifestation of nostalgia accommodates both progressive and regressive stances and attitudes. Their seminal work on nostalgia signals that we should be more attentive to nostalgia as a hybrid emotion, which has both positive and negative effects of varying degrees. This means that despite the proliferation of new research on nostalgia that stresses its creative and positive potential for individuals and collectives, we, the researchers, should remember the evidence for the negative uses of nostalgic emotion for political purposes and its ability to fuel racist and nationalistic discourses and actions. When studying this complex emotion the researchers must be sensitive to the contexts in which nostalgic experiences flourish to early recognise the direction nostalgic sentiments could develop towards to. At the same time, we should also be more attentive to how the affective potential of nostalgia is employed by different societal actors. In order to do that, a more complex investigation of the uses and conceptualisations of nostalgia by different publics should be carried out.

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Impressum

MEDIENINHABER, HERAUSGEBER UND VERLEGER
Verein „Arbeitskreis für historische Kommunikationsforschung
(AHK)“, Währinger Straße 29, 1090 Wien,
ZVR-Zahl 963010743
<http://www.medienundzeit.at>

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LEKTORAT & LAYOUT

Diotima Bertel, Barbara Metzler, Daniela Schmid &
Diotima Bertel, Christina Krakovsky

PREPRESS

Grafikbüro Ebner, Wiengasse 6, 1140 Wien,

VERSAND

ÖHTB – Österreichisches Hilfswerk für Taubblinde und
hochgradig Hör- und Sehbehinderte
Werkstätte Humboldtplatz 7, 1100 Wien,

ERSCHEINUNGSWEISE & BEZUGSBEDINGUNGEN

medien & zeit erscheint vierteljährlich gedruckt und digital.

Heftbestellungen:

Einzelheft (exkl. Versand): 6,50 Euro

Doppelheft (exkl. Versand): 13,00 Euro

Jahresabonnement:

Österreich (inkl. Versand): 22,00 Euro

Ausland (inkl. Versand auf dem Landweg): 30,00 Euro

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