

CONTEMPORARY DIMENSIONS OF NOSTALGIA: TOWARDS A NEW THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In 2001 Svetlana Boym stated: “The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia”. She claimed that yearning for the past – which takes many different forms and involves a variety of practices – will be of increasing importance in contemporary culture. In the twenty years that have since passed, the interest in the study of nostalgia has flourished. Several dozen books, articles and essays devoted to this phenomenon have been published. It has also been pointed out that “nostalgia studies” is emerging as a new transdisciplinary field of research. Niklas Salmose wrote in this context in 2019 that “(...) nostalgia studies are occupied with very diverse topics where nostalgia is sometimes used as an instigator for human, social behaviour, or as a method for reading the times”. The first of the two ways of understanding nostalgia listed here is related to its performative dimension. The plethora of cultural, social, psychological, economic and political consequences of longing for the past are investigated. In the second understanding, nostalgia is perceived as one of the keys to interpret the contemporary condition. This is reflected in such concepts as: “retrotopia” (Z. Bauman), “retromania” (S. Reynolds), “the nostalgic turn” (B. Reynolds), etc.

Both the dynamic development of research on nostalgia, and the increasing role that longing for the past plays, make it necessary to re-theorise nostalgia in the current conjuncture. In this context, it is worth referring to the arguments presented by leading scholars in this field. For example, Michael H. Jacobsen wrote in 2020 that “(...) nostalgia (...) in desperate need of theoretical elaboration and empirical investigation”. In his last, posthumously published book “Retrotopia” Zygmunt Bauman claimed that reflection on nostalgia is indispensable in a world in which the impact of this phenomenon “(...) is visible and palpably felt *at every level* of social cohabitation (...)”. This project addresses the aforementioned needs. Its aim is to provide a comprehensive, transdisciplinary analysis of the contemporary manifestations of nostalgia and to offer a new theoretical framework for studies on nostalgia in the current condition.

Firstly, to achieve this aim, it is necessary to analyse and critically examine the existing theorisations of nostalgia in humanities and social sciences. Both the classical understanding of this concept as a “disease of the soul” and its subsequent evolution will be discussed. Second, I will reflect on the origins of “the nostalgic turn” in the current conjuncture. I will analyse both the contemporary manifestations of the traditional sources of yearning for the past, as well as new factors that have contributed its development. The next, third plane of the research will be an analysis of the various dimensions of today's nostalgia. In this context, I will study the influence that political ideologies, consumerism, popular culture and the media industry, among others, have had on longing for the past. Fourth, attention will be paid to the roles and functions that nostalgia performs in the contemporary condition. I will analyse its impact on both activities aimed at restoring the old order, and on cultural practices that ‘cherishes shattered fragments of memory’ (S. Boym). The last, fifth subject of the analysis will be a reflection of the assumptions on which a new theoretical framework for studies on nostalgia should be founded. This will lead to the formation of a new proposal for the theorisation of the contemporary dimensions of nostalgia, within which future research could be conducted.