

“Anthropocene Nostalgia in the 21st-Century American (Audio)Visual Culture” investigates a new type of nostalgia—expressed primarily in visual and audiovisual texts—that has emerged as a result of the ongoing climate change.

The profound impact of the climate catastrophe on American culture requires a thorough examination. Human-caused harms to the biosphere have been most perceptible in recent years, which has eventually raised public concern over the environment and induced new types of anxiety (such as eco-anxiety). Thus, numerous American cultural texts engage with the cultural implications of the climate crisis—a dynamic my project aims to interrogate in depth. Although the Anthropocene is not an official new time unit, the term—while problematic—has been an important research topic. The awareness of the Anthropocene led to a shift in common perception, so that the distinction between nature and culture has been eventually deemed obsolete. This substantial cultural impact of the geological event has demanded a revision of existing cultural categories, such as nostalgia, which is the focus of my research.

The goal of the project is a thorough analysis of how (and to what extent) the awareness of the Anthropocene—as a sign of accelerating, human-made climate change—has changed nostalgia, which is manifested in American visual and audiovisual cultural texts of the 21st century. My study builds on the hypothesis that in the 21st century, a new nostalgia has emerged—one that stems from the acknowledgment of the Anthropocene and its irrevocability. This sentiment (which I call “Anthropocene nostalgia”) differs from the wistful longing for the past, as nostalgia is commonly defined. **Unlike its previous and other forms, it employs the aesthetics of past decades to offer a more critical approach toward bygone years. Through my analysis, I demonstrate that the analyzed nostalgia functions as a significant contemporary structure of feeling (cf. Williams 1961).**

The intended outcome of “Anthropocene Nostalgia in the 21st-Century American (Audio)Visual Culture” is material for a book manuscript, a book proposal submitted to an international publisher, and an article submitted to an international journal and/or edited collection. To ensure a comprehensive study of Anthropocene nostalgia, which is a pervasive cultural category spanning across diverse registers, I will examine how it manifests in four media—photography, TV series, film, and painting. In each chapter, I will perform a discourse analysis, integrating visual and textual elements of the primary sources and contextualizing them within the cultural theories of Anthropocene and nostalgia, which will allow me to design a framework for a detailed study of Anthropocene nostalgia in American culture. The choice of primary texts is directly linked to the forms of expression of the discussed sentiment—e.g., the use of visual tropes of the past, synthetic colors, or aestheticization. In the analysis of each medium, **I will discuss distinct discursive forms of this sentiment, such as a representation of American oil culture, a pessimistic portrayal of America’s transforming landscapes, or a depiction of complex nature/culture relations of past decades.**

By using nostalgia as a lens through which social and psychological consequences of climate change are effectively explored, my project offers a new approach to both nostalgia and the Anthropocene. The way climate change awareness has influenced this well-known cultural category has not yet been properly analyzed, which constitutes a glaring omission. Apart from filling this research gap, the project will supplement cultural theories of both nostalgia and the Anthropocene, contributing to further conceptualization of these notions and expanding the current expertise on the depiction of climate change and eco-anxiety in cultural texts. Moreover, the project creates new perspectives on both American and cultural studies. Due to the popularity of American culture and the accessibility of the texts I choose (as most visual and audiovisual texts can be easily found on the internet), the analyzed films and images are highly intelligible outside the U.S. as well. Hence, given the universal character of the problems arising from the ongoing climate crisis, as well as the prevalence of nostalgia in contemporary Western cultures, the outcomes of my research will be useful for scholars examining nostalgia and/or cultural responses to the Anthropocene, also beyond the American perspective.