

"Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be." Poetologies of and Theory as Nostalgia.

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Host: Friedrich Schlegel Graduate School of Literary Studies

Organizers: Mikolaj Golubiewski, Johannes Kleine, Roman Kuhn, Dennis Schep

While Kant philosophized about perpetual peace and universal hospitality, Novalis wrote: *Die Philosophie ist eigentlich Heimweh, ein Trieb überall zu Hause zu sein.*

This characterization of philosophy indicates its long-standing entanglement with nostalgia. The philosopher looks with wonder at the world in which he's no longer at home—a universal exile who turns to philosophy for shelter. What is this home that philosophy longs for? Potentially überall, it is clearly no physical space to which one might one day return, whether this be Homer's Ithaca or the psalmist's Zion. Philosophy's Heimweh does not long for a return home—it wants to be at home everywhere.

Etymologically, the word 'nostalgia' comes from the Greek *nóstos*, 'a return home,' and *álgos*, 'pain.' Introduced as a medical term for homesickness in the 17th century, nostalgia first acquired a broader spectrum of signification in 19th century France, when authors like Balzac and Baudelaire used it to designate a diffuse type of longing that could not simply be resolved by going home. Dislodged from its medical origins, nostalgia came to refer to a longing aimed not only at physical places, but also bygone eras, deceased loved ones, and more ill-defined objects considered to be lost. In this transition from medical notion to psychological condition, it acquired a measure of cultural prestige. Where homesickness was a disease that could be fatal, nostalgia was a psychological state in which one could revel: "Odysseus longs for home; Proust is in search of lost time" (Phillips 1985).

Gradual extension from a physical condition to a psychological state of mind charged with symbolic value allowed nostalgia to become virulent in a variety of both literary and theoretical discourses. Svetlana Boym (2001) argues that the nostalgic desire for origins is at "the very core of the modern condition." The modern view of a linear, yet undetermined history, together with a sense that the present is in some way deficient, offers fertile ground for all kinds of nostalgic longings.

Urbanization and globalization rendered problematic the notion of home on which Heimweh rests, and the same can be said for the idealized objects of nostalgic longing. But this lack of conceptual legitimacy has hardly prevented the proliferation of discourses of nostalgia. Dennis Walder (2011) argues that we are currently witnessing a revival of nostalgic longing, related to the displacements of war and the end of empire. Postmodern architects blend nostalgia with an ironic appropriation of the past, visual artists use pastiche to relate their works nostalgically to art history, and everyone wears vintage clothing.

Within academia, the last fifty years have witnessed an unprecedented suspicion of origins and an attack on such simple notions as 'the authentic.' When anti-essentialism is the norm, nostalgia becomes suspicious, leading many to supplement it with irony so as

to establish a manner of critical distance (Hutcheon 1998). If nostalgic feelings constitute the image of their cherished object, it is all too easy to denounce these objects as idealizations; but still one could ask whether not only nostalgic longing but also ironic appropriation and hybridisation are driven by comparable desires to reconcile with the lost. While, generally, nostalgia may be seen as normatively conservative, perhaps it is analytically inevitable.

Rather than simply exposing the objects of nostalgia as idealizations and constructions, we aim to ask how nostalgia operates in our contemporary discursive economy. In literary as well as theoretical constellations, nostalgia negotiates the space separating past from present, home from elsewhere. In order to grasp the longings that traverse this space and the anxieties to which these answer, we invite scholars in the fields of literary studies, cultural studies, anthropology and philosophy for contributions.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

THEORY:

- Nostalgia as genesis and (popular) drive of theory;
- Nostalgia and the transparency of signs;
- Nostalgia and the idealizing/refiguring/erasing of the past;
- Nostalgia and materiality/fluidity of media;
- Nostalgia and memory;
- Conservative nostalgia and reflective nostalgia;
- Nostalgia as criticism;
- Nostalgia and utopianism.

LITERATURE:

- Nostalgia and melancholy;
- Nostalgia and Modernism/modernity;
- Nostalgia and authenticity;
- Nostalgia and exile;
- Nostalgia and ethics;
- Performing nostalgia in writing.

Keynote Speaker: We are happy to welcome as our keynote speaker Nicholas Dames, Theodore Kahan Professor of Humanities, Department of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University.

Submissions: Please submit a short description of your intended paper and a short CV to Johannes Kleine (johannes.kleine@gmail.com). Submission deadline: December 1, 2014.