

# *medien* & *zeit*

Kommunikation in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart

**Topic:  
Media, Communication  
and Nostalgia**

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

**Not Every Vinyl Retromaniac  
is a Nostalgic**

**Hills, Old People, and Sheep**

**“Why? Because It’s Classic!”**

***Nowstalgia***

**Experienced Mood and  
Commodified Mode**

**Activating Nostalgia**

**Postcolonial Posts  
on Colonial Pasts**

**Nostalgia Commodified**

**Editors:  
Manuel Menke &  
Christian Schwarzenegger**

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# medien & zeit

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## Editorial

# Media, Communication and Nostalgia Finding a better tomorrow in the yesterday?

Manuel Menke & Christian Schwarzenegger

*Today is grey skies, tomorrow is tears  
you'll have to wait till yesterday is here*  
Tom Waits

In 2016, it appears, the promise of a good future was increasingly sought for in the past and by invoking the spirit of a faded prior exceptionality. In the Brexit campaign or the US elections, to name but a few of the most prominent examples for similar developments around the globe, nostalgia fuelled populism and nationalist identity politics. “Take back control” and “Make America great again” were as much the essence of a nostalgic narrative of a better past as they were a false promise for a better future. The glorious times such politics refer to in their campaigns are hard to trace and likely never existed in the imagined form. But they are offered as a projection surface for people’s hopes, dreams, and fears, harvesting the sentiments and affections of disgruntled parts of the population to capitalise them for political success. In the now so anxiously termed “post-truth” era – in itself a reference to a favourable yet allegedly bygone version of reality – nostalgia is used for orchestrating affects at the cost of facts and rational discourse. The success of such political strategies in Western democracies stunned liberals across the globe and the debate about its appeal will have to continue due to the persistent distrust in democracy, media, and politics we are contemporarily witnessing in Europe and elsewhere.

When we decided to do a special issue on nostalgia from a media and communication perspective, little did we know, that nostalgia would be prominently entering the stage of global politics and reveal itself once again in its most criticised form – as equally reactionary and restorative. Hence, many still consider nostalgia solely as dangerous even though there is a broad variety of nostalgic engagements that comes into play – many of which overshadowed by this dominant

negative reading. Against this backdrop, the papers comprised in this issue are sensitising our understanding of what nostalgia actually means for people and what they do with it in vibrant media environments. They offer conceptualisations that help broaden our understanding of nostalgia in the context of media and communication instead of limiting it to its problematic features, yet, without neglecting them.

## Research on Nostalgia

Besides its current prominence in political and public debate nostalgia was already a trending research topic in many academic fields investigating its various facets. Academics from sociology, political sciences, memory studies, social psychology, and advertising research – to name but a few – are interested in explaining the omnipresence of nostalgia and its appeal to so many people. But the recent hype about nostalgia is more than just a mere fascination for the past in a variety of cultural spheres and contexts.

And indeed, approaches aim at exploring the numerous other qualities that signify nostalgia as a creative and progressive resource, a tool for commodification, or an agent for identity and community building to articulate cultural or generational belonging. People recollect and embrace media formats and communication technologies of their childhood. We witness a revival of vinyl records and how media design adopts new products to the vintage appeal of old media technologies. TV dramas, music styles, advertisements and product design alike are flirting with the charms and lifestyles of the past. We decorate our apartments with vintage furniture and rediscover retro-drinks and retro-

fashion. People share memories about past media practices, commodity brands and other everyday experiences from romanticized pasts to communicate and identify who they are today, and where and how they belong. Nostalgic memories are however not neutral but entangled with political orientations, social norms, and cultural values; they bear an inherently social dimension. This hints to more profound social and cultural developments that this special issue aims to shed light on.

This collection of articles presents insights from multiple fields to paint a holistic picture of nostalgia as a catalyst for understanding the complex entanglements of romanticised pasts, present needs and envisioned futures. Only then, we would argue, we are prepared for both the positive and negative impact nostalgia may have on our lifeworlds and societies today and in the future.

## Media, Communication and Nostalgia

In the call for papers we tried to address this complexity by outlining the research perspectives that emerge when media, communication and nostalgia are genuinely considered in their interrelation in practices, products, and politics that qualify as constituent features of media saturated societies: What role does nostalgia play for the production, commodification, distribution, and exchange of narratives and mnemonic objects in domains of public and social communication, from mass communication to popular culture? How do media technologies serve as portals to a personal or historical past? Which features of nostalgia do we find in a digital memory culture? How does nostalgia for media or communication technologies contribute to community formation and establishing a sense of belonging in communities? How is nostalgia instrumentalized in political communication, for political goals or social activism? The reader will find what is lightly touched by these questions embraced and ambitiously advanced by the authors that contributed their work to this special issue.

## About this Special Issue

Nostalgia is a booming and tenacious topic around the globe. The response to our CfP clearly supports this statement. We received a total of 27 abstract proposals from 19 countries in South America, Asia, Europe and the USA. The 9 papers

that were finally accepted after a thorough two-step review process still reflect this diversity: The contributions included in the issue represent the work of authors currently affiliated in Hong Kong, Brazil, Poland, Germany, Austria, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and the USA, nationalities of authors still add some further countries to this list. This does not only allow for a variety of case studies from different cultural contexts but also adds to a fruitful de-westernization of theoretical and empirical approaches.

This special issue is special in another respect as well: To include all the convincing papers, the first time in its history *medien&zeit* presents a combined print and online edition. All 9 papers are as from now on available open access online at [www.medienundzeit.at](http://www.medienundzeit.at) (Issue 31/2016 No. 4). Five papers and the abstracts of all articles are additionally published in the traditional familiar printed journal format of *medien&zeit*. QR-codes link the abstracts of the online-only papers with the digital version of the issue, allowing to immediately go online and benefit from the integrative nature of this transmedia venture in academic publishing. We would like to invite all readers to make use of the opportunity to do a transmedia reading and get the most out of this *medien&zeit* issue. Probably, in dealing with nostalgia, the format of this issue can help to find a valuable format for the future of *medien&zeit*.

## What to Expect

The opener of the issue is an essay by Ekaterina Kalinina on the history of nostalgia research in which she unravels the confusion about what nostalgia actually is by dissecting the various conceptualizations we find in different fields. She thoroughly traces back the dominant connotations that underlie our debates on nostalgia and additionally argues for a stronger consideration of media as an essential platform for nostalgic productions in modern societies. Hence, this essay does not only provide an insightful and critical overview of the literature on nostalgia but also calls on researchers to be aware of nostalgia's versatility in media and communication contexts. The second paper moves from the conceptual to experimental grounds. The unexpected revival of listening to vinyl records is one of the typical examples that come to mind when speaking of media related nostalgia. Nostalgia for vintage, and retro-style media technologies are however only one part of the story, as Steffen Lepa and Vlas

Tritakis show in their contribution. Based on an experimental study they illustrate that not every use of and appreciation for old technologies can be considered a nostalgic practice. There are motives beyond nostalgia. They propose the notion of symbolic aura attribution an important resource for how and why people are willingly embracing older and thus rarer and uncommon technologies. The call for more research on the meaning of nostalgia in people's lifeworlds is perfectly captured in the paper authored by Lynne Hibberd and Zoë Tew-Thompson. They take us to an English village named Holmfirth that was the actual setting of the famous UK sitcom "Last of the Summer Wine" for over 30 years. The authors sharply analyse in their non-media-centric approach how the village and the sitcom are entangled in several nostalgic ways and people relate to the fictional that became part of their lifeworld reality adding to the cultural heritage of the village. The dimensions of this sitcom's influence are manifold and range from memories about the sitcom shared by the citizens to changes in the architecture of the village.

In "Because it's classic" Jakob Hörtnagl addresses nostalgia in a very different setting. In his study he discusses the case of the retro-gaming community Project 1999 and their efforts to reconstruct the lost world of an online role-playing game as accurate and as authentic as possible. The classic experience becomes a template, justification and benchmark for decisions in the now. Thus, aiming for the perfect reconstruction of a past experience the gamers and builders of the gaming environment and surrounding communication structures provide an important case for understanding the interrelations of past media memories, old and new media technologies and current media practices for shaping communities and identities today.

An innovative and at first sight maybe counter-intuitive conceptualization of nostalgia as "nowstalgia" is introduced by Ezequiel Korin. In his essay he defines "nowstalgia" as the practice of recording experiences with a GoPro camcorder or taking selfies in anticipation of a possible nostalgic use in the future. He not only describes these increasingly popular practices as "past-in-the-making" but also delicately analyses the cultural and historical framework in which they are embedded. Korin examines the temporality of mnemonic content in an exceptional and thought-provoking approach. Hence, one is challenged to give up the idea of nostalgia being

fettered to the past and instead be open for the possibility of "nowstalgia" for future pasts.

Evoking nostalgia is a common goal and strategy in advertising and marketing concepts, especially when it comes to sweets and how they are related to memories of a cosy and sheltered childhood. Mario Keller's study looks at the uses of nostalgia in the advertising campaigns of Austrian sweets manufacturer "Manner". Keller is interested in how motives from the imperial past, of Austrian national and of Viennese local identity are triggered alongside hints to viewers' personal memories regarding their past with the fabled hazelnut wafers. Using the concepts of an experienced mode and a commodified mode of nostalgia, he highlights shifts in how audiences were addressed in a variety of ads throughout the last decades and how motives addressing Austrian audience members' collective memories were subtly replaced by more translocally and globally open versions.

Similar to Hörtnagl's case, but with a very different media setting, the struggle of users to preserve appreciated media experiences from the past is also the case provided in the article by Talitha Ferraz. Ferraz builds her argument on what she calls "activating nostalgia" on the case of two Brazilian efforts to protect historical cinemas in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. She analyses how the activism of audiences across online social media and public events have proven to be pivotal for the maintenance respectively reopening of the cinemas and became a crucial axis for the formation of belonging and identity ties among cinephiles in Brazil.

The next contribution takes us from cinephile nostalgia in cities to nostalgic memories about the city itself. How people build communities in social media is what Francesca Olivotti and Gabriele de Seta are explaining with the example of Hong Kong nostalgia. They investigate the everyday online activities of users evolving around a common interest in the post-colonial past of the city. In their ethnographic approach, they examine photographs, narratives and objects of the past material culture as part of media practices that allow the members of the community to collectively share and discuss their "local memories". Thereby, they give the reader an inner view of the possibilities digital communication offers for nostalgic negotiations of the past; in this case of a city's heritage.

Marek Jeziński and Łukasz Wojtkowski conclude the issue with their article about the commodification

of post-communist nostalgia in Poland, especially for the PLR, the People's Republic of Poland. They build their argument on their analysis of three different online platforms and how they market products reflecting the historical past and lifestyles in different ways. The commodification of nostalgia for the past, their findings highlight, works perfectly in new media environments as the online distribution of goods smoothly latches on sharing practices on social media platforms. The past as a cultural resource for folklore and a vintage hipster appeal is, we can learn from their article, depoliticized but probably through this also highly political.

Media can serve as vessels, addressees and also

lenses through which individuals and societies look at fond memories; they can amplify as well as deafen nostalgia and memory. The articles in this issue allow for a glimpse on the multifaceted ways in which media, communication and nostalgia are related as they highlight cases of nostalgia, through, by and towards media. In various communicative contexts they ask for the potential of nostalgia as a seismograph for cultural and political sentiment. The debates addressed in this issue will continue afterwards and elsewhere, we hope that the articles will help to inform them.

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# 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; Bachto, 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” (Bachto, 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, audial 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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# Not Every Vinyl Retromaniac is a Nostalgic

A social experiment on the pleasures of record listening  
in the digital age

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## Abstract

Approaching current vinyl enthusiasm in late modernity, we postulate four mechanisms as possible explanations and test them by conducting a social experiment with 31 music listeners. Half of them were to play the vinyl version of a current music album; the rest were given the CD. Without participants' knowledge, the headphone sound was manipulated, effectively resulting in a between-subjects design with 'sound' and 'sensory appeal' as independent variables and 'emotional arousal' and 'nostalgia' as dependents. Additionally, participants' birth year was implemented as a covariate. Obtained results confirm the distinctive sound of the Vinyl as well as its sensory appeal to be both aesthetically more exciting for nowadays' listeners compared to a CD. Furthermore, we demonstrate feelings of technostalgia to be 'embodied' since they only appear with 'valid' material media of one's own past. In contrast, generational aura attributions emerge when handling 'obsolete' audio media one has not been socialized with.

## Explaining Vinyl Retromania

The past 10 years have witnessed the resurgence of an audio medium already deemed obsolete: The vinyl record (henceforth: the Vinyl) has experienced an astonishing revival, with dramatic sales increases in the US and all around Europe lasting up until today (Nokelainen & Dedehayir, 2015). Doubtless, a part of this phenomenon may be explained through the rise of the DJ culture in electronic dance music (EDM) scenes. Within these music cultures, the Vinyl has played an important role since the early 1980s as a tactile interface that substantially extends the degree of artistic control in a live music mixing performance (Farrugia & Swiss, 2005).

But obviously, given the enormous increases in sales figures, this cannot be the whole story. Hence, several authors from cultural studies have interpreted the comeback of the Vinyl as part of a larger movement of "retromania" (Reynolds, 2012) or "analogue nostalgia" (Marks, 2002) within late modernity that is said to be the expression of a common uneasiness of music listeners when being confronted with the unlimited possibilities of use

and alleged "coldness" of new digital media. In the larger picture, the current increase in vinyl sales may therefore appear as one of the several symptoms of a society "obsessed with the cultural artifacts of its immediate past" (Reynolds, 2012, p. XXI) that also finds its expression with other seemingly obsolete analogue media technologies like film, polaroids and cassettes (Schrey, 2014).

In this line of thinking, musicologist Mark Katz (2015, p. 278f) has lately postulated three psycho-socially founded aesthetic mechanisms that might explain the resurgence of the Vinyl in the media repertoires of nowadays' music listeners by the special forms of aesthetic pleasure it affords: (1) Its *distinctive sound* compared to digital media, (2) the *special sensorial experience* of listening to a record compared to listening to digital media and (3) the phenomenon of *technostalgia*, referring to bittersweet feelings that are evoked when being confronted with nowadays obsolete technologies of one's own past. Within the present article, we try to verify and extend from these claims by first reviewing the state of literature regarding each postulated mechanism and then conducting a social experiment to empirically demonstrate

the existence and interplay of all three. Finally, we also demonstrate the existence of a fourth aesthetic mechanism that might explain a further portion of the pleasures of record listening in the digital age. This mechanism might be termed (4) *generational aura attribution* and we close our contribution to this special issue on media, communication and nostalgia by arguing that this type of ‘paranostalgia’ is actually something that should not to be confused theoretically and empirically with embodied technostalgia related to media.

### The Distinctive Sound of the Vinyl

With regards to technical sound quality, every educated audio engineer would argue that the vinyl is clearly “inferior” compared to Compact Disc (CD) audio or modern consumer audio codecs at high bitrates: In terms of its reproduction capabilities, it clearly has a worse signal-to-noise ratio and a lower dynamic range (Sterne, 2006). Therefore, a vinyl record will never reproduce the sound of an original music performance or studio production as “adequate” as a CD or a digital file. But, as Jonathan Sterne (2006) forcefully argues, in spite of a long tradition of searching for *immediacy* in media technology advancement in terms of “transparent” media (Bolter, 2000) and respective claims in historic and nowadays audio technology marketing (Thompson, 1995), as well as results from audio quality preference tests (Olive, 2012), this type of technological positivist argument misses the whole point of a lot of contemporary listener’s demands: Since the diffusion of the CD, a majority of music lovers appears not to seek a high-definition reproduction of some original any more that nobody apart from the recording engineers could ever listen to (Rothenbuhler, 2012). Instead, nowadays listeners seem to strive for a lively experience fitting to the overall listening context that is able to arouse their aesthetical interest (Sterne, 2006). In this way, the typical background noise of a vinyl that is due to the contact between needle and groove, might enrich the listening experience compared to e.g. a CD in terms of *hypermediacy* (Bolter, 2000): The medium adds an additional symbolic quality to the music, which may on the one hand be interpreted as a *symbolic reference* to past times. But on the other hand, it is also in a literal sense expressive of the *fidelity* of the medium, in that the noise will change slightly every time the record is played again.

Even without drawing on such symbolic

arguments which might appear rather “esoteric” to some readers not being audiophiles, it can be argued from the standpoint of empirical aesthetic research in cognitive psychology that the additional “noise floor” contained in the sound of the Vinyl clearly renders it a physically more complex and also more unfamiliar sound stimulus compared to nowadays encountered music sounds which are mostly based on digital audio media. This should, according to Berlyne’s (1971) theory of art appreciation, result in heightened emotional *arousal* during the aesthetical experience of listening to music. For a general finding that has been replicated successfully in numerous experiments across the art forms, including music (Marin & Leder, 2013) is that *stimulus complexity* and *unfamiliarity in terms of personal norms* tend to increase the felt emotional *arousal* in aesthetic situations. Taken together, the symbolic liveliness and fidelity as well as the physical complexity and unfamiliarity of the medium’s sound should result in an emotionally more arousing music experience when employing the Vinyl compared to a digital medium, which leads to hypothesis 1.

#### Hypothesis 1:

*For nowadays music listeners, listening to the sound of a vinyl record should result in increased emotional arousal compared to listening to the sound of a digital audio medium.*

### The Special Sensorial Experience of Listening to a Record

With regards to its sensorial appeal, haptic qualities and practical use, one could argue in the first place that the vinyl is “inferior” to nowadays digital media: It is rather large and unwieldy which makes it impossible to be used mobile, it has to be treated with special care, and one has to learn and employ very special actions to put it into work. Furthermore, a record only plays on its own for a certain time, it enforces a certain order of playing the titles, and title or the whole disc cannot be automatically repeated (Osborne, 2012).

But what appears to be a list of disadvantages from a very functional point of view can also be perceived as an advantage from an aesthetic point of view: It renders the use of the Vinyl something seldom and special which requires certain special competencies, equipment, space and patience that not everyone can afford at every time (Katz, 2015). Hence, it requires a subject that is eager to make the listening session a very involved and

focused act. Or, to put it in other terms: It not only requires, but also produces a very involved subject, that invests a lot of time and economic and cognitive resources in the listening (see also Hoklas & Lepa, 2015). Another aspect that is mentioned by Katz (2015) is the larger and therefore more enjoyable sleeve and cover artwork, something that was often bemoaned from contemporaries during and after the “forced introduction” of the CD to the music market.

A further point is worth noting: Compared to digital media like the CD or digital files, the vinyl is also far more *tangible* in a literal sense, since the groove that produces the sound is directly “visible” and “touchable” (Osborne, 2012, p. 2) on the surface of the disc. This non-arbitrary relation to the reproduced sounds themselves results in the *tangibility* of the medium (Katz, 2004; Nokelainen & Dedehayir, 2012) and an increased level of direct control of what is happening, which has made it so attractive for EDM culture. In this way, the Vinyl may not only serve as a means of symbolic distinction for nowadays music users, it also “allow[s] people to be *active* and *influential* agents in using their equipment and playing back music” (Nokelainen & Dedehayir, 2012, p. 109). Taken together, using the Vinyl requires complex knowledge and behavior on the side of users not regularly accustomed to it. It also makes the experience of listening to music something comparatively harder to achieve which requires and at the same time enables more intellectual and practical involvement. Altogether, this may lend the practical use of vinyl an increased amount of excitement from the perspective of nowadays audio media users not accustomed to it which should lead to an increase in emotional arousal during music listening. Similar to hypothesis 1, we do not postulate any other specific changes in type of the emotional experience of music, since media related emotional effects (e.g. from loudness or spatiality) typically relate to the arousal dimension of experienced emotions only (Kellaris & Rice, 1993; Lepa & Hoklas, 2015), which represents the *intensity* but not the specific *type* of evoked aesthetic feelings (Zenter, Grandjean & Scherer, 2008).

#### Hypothesis 2:

*For nowadays music listeners, practically interacting with the sensory appeal of the Vinyl and a record player should result in increased emotional arousal compared to interacting with any digital audio medium.*

## The Phenomenon of Technostalgia

The notion of *technostalgia* was first put forward by Pinch and Reinecke (2009) referring to some musicians’ preference for old, often analogue sound technologies, i.e. vintage amplifiers and instruments. Bolin (2015) extended the term to refer to any feelings of nostalgia not related to media content but to the medium employed itself, in other words: the “material context” of media reception. In his view, technostalgia denotes the bitter-sweet feelings that are evoked when using material media that have formed an important part of one’s media socialization but are increasingly deemed obsolete in society. It is often experienced as a feeling of “coming home”, reminiscent of the etymology of the term “nostalgia” which historically described a kind of “home-sickness” (see also other texts in this journal issue).

In Bolin’s view, technostalgia is “highly collective” (2015, p. 12) and foremost a generational phenomenon. This claim is justified by media generation theory (Gumpert & Cathcart, 1985), which posits the following: Resulting from their everyday handling of certain media as part of affect-laden family and peer-group settings in their formative years of youth, people develop intimate “embodied” relationships to certain material media technologies they grow up with. Later in life, they habitually “stick” to the acquired “media grammar”, typically even if the associated objects are “forcefully” substituted by newer technologies (Lepa, Hoklas, & Weinzierl, 2014). Such forms of *conjunctive experiential spaces* connect people of the same generational unit (Mannheim, 1952), who accordingly tend to share the same nostalgia around certain media. As it was put by Dewey (1916, p.5-6, quoted after Carey, 1989): “Men live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common”. In result, members of the same media generation units yearn for similar time periods and miss similar media technologies. Moreover, a sudden encounter with the increasingly obsolete media in everyday life may often serve as “communicative anchor” for a nostalgic sharing of emotional memories, also characteristically forming the basis of common generational identity and semantics (Aroldi, 2011).

A central argument of this paper is to stress that this habitual relationship to certain material media of the past does not at all ground in a form of symbolic attribution, such as the other three postulated mechanisms. Instead, it grounds in a



personal practical “labour” investment with the medium as a material tool for world disclosure, in a continuous practical activity with materiality through the same repetitive movements, actions and gestures (see Bolin, 2015, p. 8). With growing practice, this results in an *embodied relationship* with the respective medium, a form of implicit procedural knowledge that cannot be put in words, but is automatically retrieved when being confronted with the old apparatus.

As an analogy to understand this type of situated and action-directed knowledge inscribed into the body (see Meier, Schnall, Schwarz & Bargh, 2012, for an introduction into the research on *embodied cognition*), one might think of the feelings of familiarity and of “coming home” that a person experiences who learned playing the guitar during his youth, then stopped playing for some years and is suddenly given a guitar and asked to play a song. The encounter will not only lead to an automatic retrieval of the way certain chords have to be played from sensorimotor long-term memory, but also evoke pleasant biographical memories of past musicianship related to this implicit knowledge. This will be similar for all former guitar players, regardless which song is played. In this way, phenomena of technostalgia may explain a certain portion of nowadays vinyl resurgence, but certainly only for those people that have been using it extensively in their formative years and therefore exhibit an “embodied familiarity” with the medium.

### Hypothesis 3:

*For nowadays music listeners, practically interacting with the familiar sound and sensory appeal of an obsolete medium of one's own past such as the vinyl on a record player should lead to increased feelings of nostalgia compared to interacting with non-obsolete media forms.*

### Generational Aura Attribution

Finally, the paradox that vinyl sales have been driven largely by young consumers (Palermينو, 2015; Ringen, 2015; Lepa & Hoklas, 2015), who partly do not even own turntables (Hogan, 2016; Savage, 2016), leads us to suppose that there must be other factors responsible for the vinyl comeback, apart from its distinctive stimulus qualities and the phenomenon technostalgia. After all, as it was put by Bolin (2015, p. 8) “Can one long for a home where one has never lived?”. We therefore postulate that a further major source of nowadays’ vinyl enthusiasm stems from

a process of *aura attribution* which is different to the mechanism of technostalgia as theorized above: The notion of “aura” was originally put forward by Walter Benjamin (2006 [1936]) during the advent of analogue reproduction media. In his view, a large portion of aesthetic enjoyment of original artworks results from their *uniqueness* and *rarity* that he deemed necessary for attributions of authenticity and aura on the side of the audience. He therefore famously reasoned that artworks would totally lose their auratic qualities when getting mass-reproduced. Following Bartmansk and Woodwarth (2013), we claim that this notion has to be interpreted as product of the historical time frame Benjamin was working in – a time where mass-reproduction of artworks just began – and should insofar not be treated as an essentialist a-historic argument about all reproduction media. After all, economically speaking, it is the relative rarity of an object or service in comparison to societal demands within a culture that explains its symbolic value (Lepa, 2015). In this line of thinking, one may argue that from the perspective of members of digital media culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, analogue records and record players may regain the status of “original artworks” if they are rather seldom in the everyday repertoire and thereby fulfilling symbolic demands that other audio media do not afford. Hence, we reason that the aura of a medium is something being collectively attributed and symbolically constructed from the perspective of collective user demands rather than an intrinsic quality of certain media. The fact that such demands should be reciprocally dependent on the rest of the available media environment at a certain historic time makes this phenomenon also a generational issue, which might explain why aura attributions are often theoretically mixed up with technostalgia. But, as Bolin (2015) forcefully argues, in opposition to nostalgia they have to be understood more as a generational “phantom pain”, a collective longing for something that never existed, a kind of “paranostalgia”.

Altogether, these arguments imply that the sound as well as the sensory appeal should lend the Vinyl an increased amount of aura especially from the perspective of nowadays “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001). Therefore, they should experience heightened emotional arousal during listening to music with a record player compared to using a digital medium. Conversely, true former everyday users of Vinyl from prior media generations, while probably exhibiting a certain degree of

technostalgia during use, are not expected to exhibit this type of auratic feeling. For when given the choice between a record and a CD, they would probably rather react as quoted by Katz (2015, p. 278): “What a pain in the ass they were. I’d rather listen to a CD”. Therefore, we expect a certain portion of additional emotional arousal when using the Vinyl to emerge, dependent on the birth cohorts of listeners. Conversely, since we deem generational aura attribution to be a “paranostalgic” phenomenon only, we do not expect this mechanism to also result in the specific embodied feeling of nostalgia (see part 3).

Hypothesis 4:

*For nowadays music listeners, the degree of emotional arousal when being confronted with the sound of a vinyl or the sensory appeal of using a record player should be dependent on the birth year of the agent.*

### A Social Experiment to Analyse and Differentiate the Mechanisms at Work

In order to demonstrate that the four depicted mechanisms may be likewise responsible for vinyl enthusiasm, it was decided to conduct an empirical study that would be able to analyse a music listening scenario. We initially reasoned that such a study had to measure both nostalgia and emotional effects (in terms of arousal, since none of the hypotheses implied changes in emotional valence) and that it should compare the effects of vinyl with a digital but still tangible audio medium of a different “generational appeal”, such as the Compact Disc. In order to be able to experimentally separate aura attribution from technostalgia effects (due to this being a central theoretical argument of this paper), it appeared further necessary to somehow operationalize “embodied familiarity vs. non-familiarity” with the media, as theorized above in section three. This notion led the authors to the idea of conducting a *social experiment* that confronted music listeners of heterogeneous birth cohorts with either *existing or non-existing combinations of the sound and sensorial appeal* of the Vinyl and the CD.

Social experiments (Greenberg & Shroder, 2004) differ from the classic approach of experimental psychology in that they do not intend to recreate social reality by trying to represent the most defining proximal factors for an outcome in

the lab and varying them in ecologically valid ways while controlling for all others. Instead a social experiment is a kind of “practical thought experiment” often conducted in the field or a field-like situation that aims at working out the interplay of hypothesized socio-psychological mechanisms on the outcome under study by intentionally disrupting the circumstances of the field in ways that could never happen in “real life”. This is done in order to understand the defining causal mechanisms of a real-life situation by researching subjects’ reactions to this *de-familiarization* (see Danermark, Ekström & Jakobsen, 2001).

The rationale to do so in the present case was that the technostalgia mechanism was hypothesized (see hypothesis 3) to base on socialized embodied familiarity with “feel and sound” of a specific tangible medium (such as the Vinyl playing from a record player), while aura attribution was by theory deemed to draw on the symbolic value of single medium aspects regardless of personal familiarity with the specific setup encountered. Hence, symbolic aura attributions could also be expected in situations, when users were confronted with an unfamiliar, “weird-sounding” or “weird-feeling” medium combination (e.g. a CD sounding like a vinyl record, or putting on a vinyl record and receiving CD sound, while technostalgia was expected to emerge only in situations marked by a congruence of sensory appeal and sound in terms of confronting a long-familiar medium.

### Method

#### Sample Recruitment and Group Homogenization

To recruit a most heterogeneous listener population for the planned social experiment, an online survey on “music listening in digital everyday life” was initially advertised by snowball emails and on social network sites addressing music listeners from the larger area of Berlin, Germany. The questionnaire included socio-demographics (*gender, birth year*) and 43 Likert items on personal music *listening strategies* slightly adapted from Schramm (2005). Participants could rate on a 7-point-scale (“not applicable” to “very much applicable”) to what degree they felt that the given statements (e.g. “I like to do something else while listening music” / “I tend to focus on melody, rhythm and harmonics”) were coherent



to their personal behaviour. After obtaining the data of  $n=250$  participants, a principal axis factoring (employing oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization) was conducted across all listening strategy items. The Kaiser-criterion delivered a solution that produced eight listening strategy factors with the first four explaining most of the item variance. After calculating factor scores for each respondent, the  $n=76$  participants that had given their email address and stated that they were ready to take part in a later laboratory experiment were then gradually invited to do so, the option to win a free music voucher was used as an incentive to take part. The stepwise subject selection strategy employed aimed at gaining participants with high scores on a single factor ( $z$ -score larger than 0.5) and low scores (smaller than 0.5) on the other and likewise at trying to balance the number of “adherents” of at least the first four factors that had explained most variance in questionnaire items. By adopting this strategy, it turned out possible to gain 31 subjects aged from 16 to 70 years with well-mixed music listening strategies and practices to take part in the experiment. Already before arriving at the lab, they had been assigned to one of the later four experimental treatments groups in such a way that the number of “adherents” of each of first four factors was approximately the same in each group. The rationale for this pre-test procedure was the authors experience with prior experiments, that randomization of treatment groups in terms of creating groups of similar heterogeneity in music listening practices often fails when working with smaller sample sizes such as in the present case. Since music listening practices seemed strongly related to the variables under study, we decided to perform these extra means in order to prevent artefacts resulting from possibly insufficient randomization.

### Experimental Setup

The experiment took place in a living room scenario with a sofa, dim lighting and a hi-fi stereo constructed in a research laboratory. The hi-fi stereo contained a CD player (MARANTZ CD-53 MK II) and a turntable (SONY PS-LX231) and its amplifier's (PIONEER A-221) output was connected via a long stereo cable to a pair of hi-fi stereo headphones (AKG K141 Monitor 600 ohms) that was placed at the sofa some approximately two meters away from the table on which the hi-fi stereo was located.

During the later listening phase of the experiment,

the investigator was staying in an adjacent observation room from where he could observe the participants' actions at the hi-fi stereo. In this room, another hi-fi stereo had been placed, which also contained a CD player and a turntable (TECHNICS SL-1210 MK2). Its amplifiers' (PIONEER A-221) output was connected via passive DI boxes and a pair of long shielded cables to the amplifier input of the hi-fi stereo in the lab, thereby leading to the participants effectively listening via their headphones to the music played on the hi-fi stereo in the observation room and not to the audio sources they were thinking to operate (see figure 1). In order to conceal this fact, the laboratory hi-fi stereo had been discretely manipulated with black duct tape in such a way, that neither the chosen input channel, nor the cable connections on its backside were clearly visible for participants, also the cables connecting both rooms were well-hidden. Furthermore, since participants had to move between the table with the hi-fi stereo and the sofa in order to put on the headphones after turning on a record, they were at no time able to aurally perceive the moment when the needle touched the record and a characteristic peak signal would occur in the playback. Finally, in order to prevent possible between-subjects effects due to larger loudness differences, a level equalization between both sound sources (CD vs. Vinyl) was realized by additionally using a pre-amp (BEHRINGER MINIAMP AMP800) for the turntable in the observation room.

### Experimental Procedure and Treatment

When entering the laboratory, subjects were welcomed by the investigator and then filled out a computer questionnaire concerning their *birth year*, *gender* and *musical expertise*. The latter was operationalized with six binary items (having had specialized music education in and apart from school, having an audio engineering background, having studied an instrument at university or conservatorium, having played an instrument regularly). Furthermore, they were questioned on the intensity of their habitual *CD use* and *Vinyl use* in the last twelve months, employing an ordinal 5-point scale (never, yearly, monthly, weekly, daily). Afterwards, they were told the cover story for the experiment: The study was allegedly occupied with testing the importance of album covers for aesthetic and emotional impressions of music in the digital age. Depending on their treatment group, they were either given the Vinyl

or CD version of the album “Days of Abaddon” (2014, Fierce Panda Records/Yebo Music) produced by the US indie rock band “The Pains of Being Pure at Heart” and told to play the first two titles “Smock” (2:16) and “Simple and Sure” (3:28). They were also told to study the album cover, to enjoy the music on the sofa and to afterwards give their rating on their felt emotions during listening to the second track and their aesthetic impressions of the album cover into another questionnaire on a computer situated at the sofa. After this instruction, the experimenter left the room.

Without participants’ knowledge, the investigator manipulated the sound emanating from the headphones for half of the subjects towards a medium not actually operated by the participant. This was done by watching participants turning on the respective medium through the half-open door and at the same time initiating their true *sound* treatment by help of the hi-fi stereo in the observation room. This effectively resulted in a balanced 2x2 between-subjects design with *sensorial appeal* (Vinyl/CD) and *sound* (Vinyl/CD) as the independent variables.

After listening to the second track, participants started to fill out a questionnaire with items on their personally felt emotions and also commented on their impressions of the album cover, while the investigator entered the room and quickly dimmed the music. Apart from several

items related to the cover story, the questionnaire contained an 11-point scale for rating the degree of felt *arousal* (“calming” to “arousing”), as well as three 5-point (“not at all” to “very much”) Likert items (“nostalgic”, “sentimental” and “romantic”) taken from a German translation (Lykartsis, Pysiewicz, von Coler & Lepa, 2013) of the Geneva Emotional Music Scale (Zentner, Grandjean & Scherer, 2008) that together operationalized the degree of felt *nostalgia*.

After finishing the questionnaire, participants were debriefed. As part of that, they were asked whether they had known the album before and if they were somehow suspicions regarding the further aims of the experiments they had not been told about. After collecting their answers, they were fully informed about the experimental manipulation, bid farewell and then left the laboratory. The whole experimental procedure lasted about 30 minutes for each participant.

Statistical Analyses

Initially, the scale variables for *expertise* (sum-index) and *nostalgia* (mean-index) were calculated. Then descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations were calculated for all control variables and the dependents. Afterwards, it was checked whether the non-random grouping strategy had been successful by testing with a MANOVA for differences in group means of listener strategy factors as well as

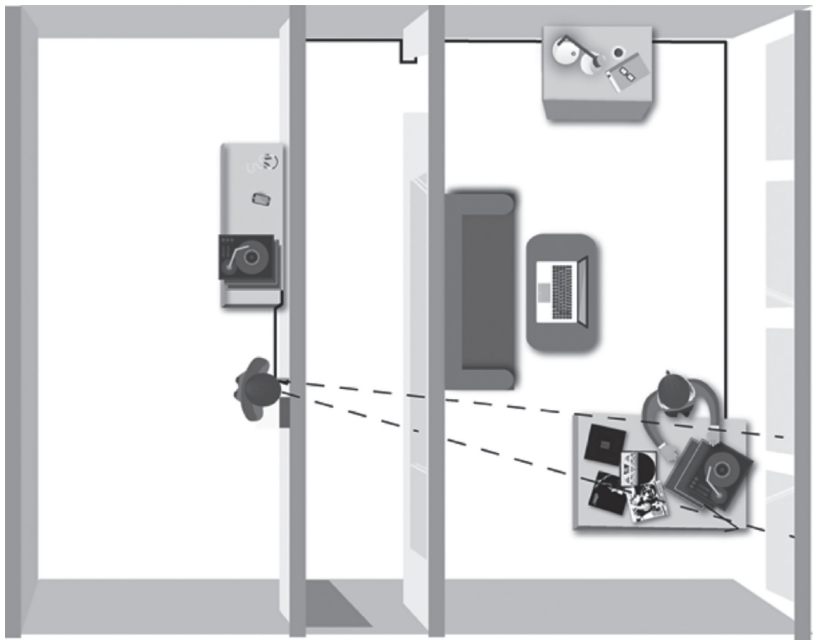


Fig. 1: Experimental setup

*birth year, expertise, CD use and Vinyl use* across experimental treatments.

In order to test for the actual hypotheses, descriptive results for arithmetic means of the dependent variables in all treatment groups were inspected first. Then a General Linear Model (GLM) with the treatment factors *sensorial appeal* and *sound* and the covariates *birth year, gender* and *expertise* was estimated for the dependents *arousal* and *nostalgia*. Apart from the main effects, also all 2-way-interactions for the three variables included in the hypotheses (*sensorial appeal, sound, birth year*) were tested, while *gender* and *expertise* served as controls in the model to accommodate for a possible remaining degree of unobserved heterogeneity within the constructed treatment groups. The *birth year* variable had been mean-centered (M=1976) before estimating the model in order to prevent possible bias due to multicollinearity when testing interactions. Finally, to accommodate for the relatively small sample size, standard errors for the model estimates were calculated employing a bootstrapping algorithm with 1000 random draws.

## Results

### Sample Structure

The experimental sample consisted of 31 subjects aged from 16 to 70 years (M=39.16, SD=14.8) at the time of the experiment. So, people were born between 1945 and 1999 with approximately same shares stemming from the baby-boomer generation (1945-1962; n=9), the generation X (1969-1981; n=10) and the Digital Natives (1982-1999; n=13). 48% of the participants were female and most of the subjects had a medium to low *musical expertise* (M=3.19, SD=3.7, MIN=0, MAX=16). Treatment groups were approximately equal-sized (see table 1). The sample members exhibited a clearly more intensive CD use (never=19%, yearly=19%, monthly=26%, weekly=19%, daily=16%) than Vinyl use (never=51%, yearly=16%, monthly=23%, weekly=7%, daily=3%). Nevertheless, there were no significant correlations between these intensities and *birth year* (Spearman's  $\rho > 0.05$ ). Finally, there were no significant bivariate correlations between the control variables *gender, birth year* and *expertise*.

	SENSORY APPEAL	SOUND	MEAN	SD	N
Arousal	CD	CD	6.25	2.605	8
		Vinyl	7.71	1.890	7
		Total	6.93	2.344	15
	Vinyl	CD	8.29	2.138	7
		Vinyl	9.22	1.563	9
		Total	8.81	1.834	16
	Total	CD	7.20	2.541	15
		Vinyl	8.56	1.825	16
		Total	7.90	2.271	31
Nostalgia	CD	CD	2.75	0.886	8
		Vinyl	1.67	0.471	7
		Total	2.24	0.895	15
	Vinyl	CD	1.67	0.638	7
		Vinyl	2.04	0.824	9
		Total	1.88	0.749	16
	Total	CD	2.24	0.938	15
		Vinyl	1.88	0.698	16
		Total	2.05	0.830	31

Tab. 1: Sample structure and group means of dependents

Grouping Results and Treatment Check

In order to check whether the non-random grouping strategy in terms of balancing music listener types across treatments had been successful, a multivariate MANOVA was conducted taking the treatment variables as predictor and the eight PCA factor variables for listening strategies as dependents. While the preconditions for this procedure in terms of variance homogeneity across groups were fulfilled according to performed Levene tests (all  $p > 0.1$ ), the estimates for multivariate effects from both treatment variables as well as their interaction turned out to be all non-significant (all Pillai Traces  $p > 0.05$ ). The same procedure was realized for the variables *birth year*, *expertise*, *CD use* and *Vinyl use*, also resulting in only non-significant results. Finally, in terms of the treatment check performed during debriefing after the experiment, it turned out that neither of the 31 participants had known the album before. Also, neither had noticed the actual experimental treatment in terms of the realized decoupling of *sensory appeal* and *sound*, thereby demonstrating that the cover story and

the experimental manipulation had worked well. Nevertheless, some subjects told the experimenter that they had experienced something “weird” in the experience as a whole, without being able to give specifics.

Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

In the overall sample, the manifest dependent *arousal* ( $M=7.90$ ,  $SD=2.3$ ,  $MIN=3$ ,  $MAX=11$ ) turned out to adhere to a normal distribution (KS Test result  $p > 0.1$ ). The same result was obtained for the mean-index constructed *nostalgia* scale variable ( $M=2.05$ ,  $SD=0.8$ ,  $MIN=1$ ,  $MAX=4.33$ ) with KS Test result of  $p>0.1$  and Cronbach’s  $\alpha=0.75$ . There were no significant bivariate correlations between the dependents. Table 1 shows descriptive results regarding the three dependents for the four treatment groups.

Results of Multivariate Hypothesis Tests

The necessary prerequisites for a MANOVA analysis were fulfilled with Box’s  $M=10.28$ ,  $F=0.0986$ ,  $df1=9$ ,  $df2=6863.933$ ,  $p=0.45$ , and Levene Tests for both dependents resulting in  $p>0.1$ .

PREDICTOR	DEPENDENT	F	p	$\eta^2$
Intercept	Arousal	89.843	<.0001	0.803
	Nostalgia	38.546	<0.001	0.637
SENSORY APPEAL	Arousal	4.653	<b>0.042</b>	0.175
	Nostalgia	3.020	0.096	0.121
SOUND	Arousal	4.430	<b>0.047</b>	0.168
	Nostalgia	2.044	0.167	0.085
birth year	Arousal	1.365	0.255	0.058
	Nostalgia	0.295	0.593	0.013
gender	Arousal	1.603	0.219	0.068
	Nostalgia	0.162	0.691	0.007
expertise	Arousal	0.354	0.558	0.016
	Nostalgia	1.264	0.273	0.054
SENSORY APPEAL x SOUND	Arousal	0.002	0.961	0.000
	Nostalgia	9.240	<b>0.006</b>	0.296
SENSORY APPEAL x birth year	Arousal	5.662	<b>0.026</b>	0.205
	Nostalgia	1.647	0.213	0.070
SOUND x birth year	Arousal	0.864	0.363	0.038
	Nostalgia	1.881	0.184	0.079

Tab. 2: Results of GLM univariate hypothesis tests ( $p<0.05$  significant effects in bold)

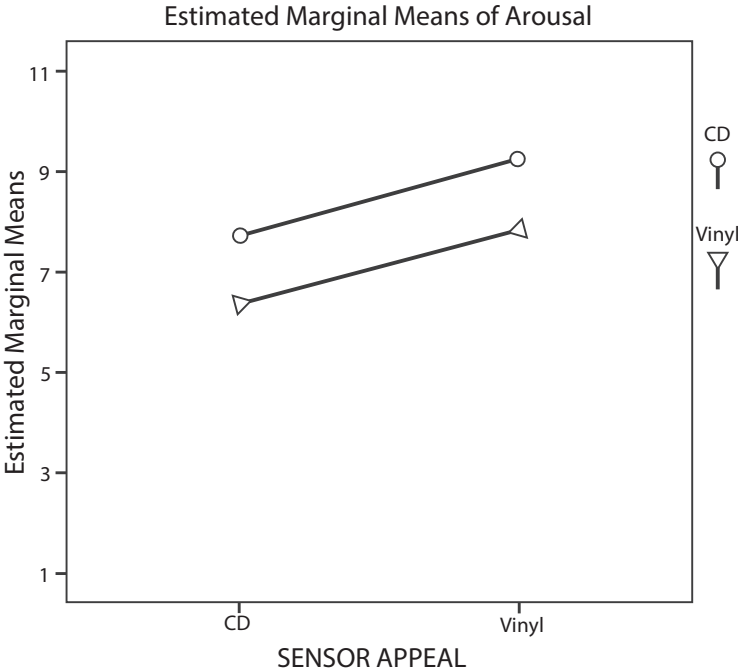
Even if multivariate testing had turned out to be unnecessary due to the dependents not being correlated, it was still performed to check for overarching effects: There was a multivariate main effect of *sensory appeal* with Pillai's Trace=0.25,  $F=3.54$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.047$ ,  $\eta^2=0.25$ , while the multivariate main effect of *sound* was estimated as Pillai's Trace=0.22,  $F=2.99$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.072$ ,  $\eta^2=0.22$ . No multivariate main effect was found for *birth year* (Pillai's Trace=0.07,  $F=0.77$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.475$ ,  $\eta^2=0.07$ ), *gender* (Pillai's Trace=0.08,  $F=0.86$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.437$ ,  $\eta^2=0.08$ ), or *expertise* (Pillai's Trace=0.07,  $F=0.80$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.46$ ,  $\eta^2=0.07$ ). Significant multivariate 2-way-interaction effects were only found for *sensory appeal* x *sound* (Pillai's Trace=0.30,  $F=4.42$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.025$ ,  $\eta^2=0.30$ ), while the interactions of *sensory appeal* x *birth year* (Pillai's Trace=0.24,  $F=3.39$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.053$ ,  $\eta^2=0.24$ ) and *sound* x *birth year* interaction turned out to be non-significant (Pillai's Trace=0.11,  $F=1.36$ ,  $df_1=2$ ,  $df_2=21$ ,  $p=0.279$ ,  $\eta^2=0.11$ ).

Inspection of univariate between-subject-effects (see table 2) delivered significant main effects only for *sensory appeal* on *arousal* ( $F=4.653$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.042$ ,  $\eta^2=0.18$ ) and *sound* on *arousal* ( $F=4.430$ ,

$df=1$ ,  $p=0.047$ ,  $\eta^2=0.17$ ). For both variables, the experimental treatment "Vinyl" produced substantially higher *arousal* values (see figure 2). Finally, none of the control variables exhibited significant main effects on the dependents.

Significant univariate interaction effects were obtained for *sensory appeal* x *sound* on *nostalgia* ( $F=9.240$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.006$ ,  $\eta^2=0.30$ , as well as for *sensory appeal* x *birth year* on *arousal* ( $F=5.662$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.026$ ,  $\eta^2=0.21$ ). Inspection of estimated parameters and group means shows (see figure 3), that the *sensory appeal* x *sound* interaction may be explained by significantly increased *nostalgia* when *sensory appeal* and *sound* treatment both were "CD". The same tendency was observed for "Vinyl" (see figure 3) but was lower in effect size. The observed *sensory appeal* x *birth year* interaction, on the other hand, is explainable by increased *arousal* when the *sensory appeal* treatment was "CD" and participants were stemming from later *birth years* ( $b=0.122$ ,  $p=0.026$ ).

Altogether, the GLM was able to explain  $R^2=54\%$  in *arousal* variance and  $R^2=46\%$  in *nostalgia* variance.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: birth year (mean-centered)= -.001290, gender=, 48, expertise=3,193548

Fig. 2: Estimated marginal group means for arousal

Discussion

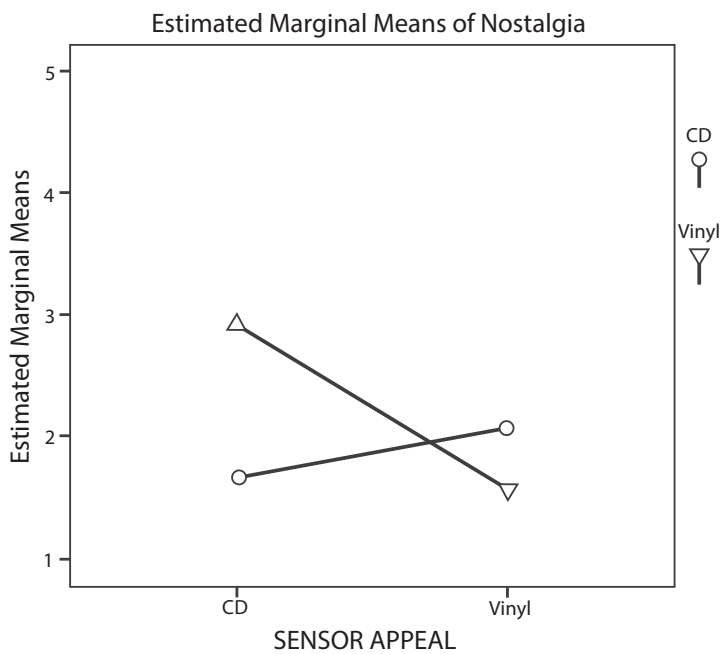
Basic Results

The present study performed empirical inquiry on four psycho-social mechanisms deemed likewise responsible for the observable new Vinyl enthusiasm in Western late-modern countries. This was done by conducting a social experiment that confronted a heterogeneous group of music listeners from differing birth cohorts with the task to employ one of four different audio media setups for music listening: Two of them were the CD and the Vinyl and their respective playback apparatuses, while the other two represented artificial combinations of sound and *sensory appeal* from either of the original prototypical media forms. This kind of setting allowed us to test specific hypothesis related to influences of materiality, media socialization and symbolic attribution processes on aesthetic experiences in everyday music listening. The methodological innovative pathway was taken because we aimed at *independently* demonstrating the working of implicit embodied familiarity and symbolic attribution effects, which would not have been possible in a survey study or traditional experimental approach.

Methodologically, the sampling and grouping strategy employed to produce maximal homogenous subsamples for each treatment condition, as well as the cover story for the social experiment appear to have been successful. Additionally, the gained sample seems representative for typical music listeners in Germany at the present time (Lepa et al., 2014; Lepa & Hoklas, 2015): While the CD forms part of the habitual audio repertoire of most participants, the Vinyl is rather seldom used, nevertheless use intensity of both is not directly dependent on *birth year*. Furthermore, the treatment manipulation turned out to be successful as well, in that it produced significant effects on both measured dependents, *nostalgia* and *emotional arousal*.

Results on Sound and Sensory Appeal

The present results of the GLM clearly confirm Hypothesis 1 and 2. The found independent main effects for sound and *sensory appeal* on emotional *arousal* demonstrate that either part of the Vinyl listening arrangement appears to have aesthetic advantages compared to the CD for nowadays' listeners: Emotional *arousal* was



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: birth year (mean-centered)= -.001290, gender=, 48, expertise=3,193548

Fig. 3: Estimated marginal group means for nostalgia



always increased when either manually using the Vinyl and or listening to it. Taken the present findings, the viewpoint of sound studies and empirical aesthetics that the vinyl stimulus is unusually “rich” in terms of physical complexity as well as symbolic referentiality and therefore able to evoke strong emotional excitement in nowadays music listeners appears to be more valid than “technological positivist” views from technical acoustics that would have predicted aesthetic benefits for the CD due to its superior audio quality.

## Results on Technostalgia

Hypothesis 3 on the mechanism of *technostalgia* could also be successfully confirmed by the present GLM results: Only ecologically valid media settings appear to be able to evoke a feeling of embodied familiarity that had theoretically deemed necessary as a precursor of nostalgic feelings when using an obsolete but formerly familiar medium. This is demonstrated by fact that in the present social experiment, nostalgic effects were found for the interaction effect of *sensory appeal* and *sound* only. Furthermore, effects were also only found when “really existing” media were encountered by the participants. Additionally, this effect was larger for the CD medium than for the Vinyl. This might result from the fact that, according to the descriptive results concerning the age structure of the sample, only a minority of the participants might have grown up with the vinyl, while a larger portion might in fact also feel *technostalgia* for the CD.

## Results on Generational Aura Attribution

The present results of the GLM finally also partly confirm Hypothesis 4. The found interaction of *sensory appeal* and *birth year* demonstrates that aura attribution takes increasingly place when people are using a medium that is not part of their everyday audio repertoire which is visible in the comparatively increased *arousal* when a CD was manually used by younger participants of the sample, a medium that is as obsolete for them as the Vinyl, as the descriptive results of the questionnaire had shown. However, and unexpectedly, the interaction effect pertained to *sensory appeal* only, implying that “vinyl sound on a CD” is maybe something so common in nowadays music productions that it isn’t able to produce special generation-related aura attributions any more.

## Overall discussion

Taken together, the conclusion of the theoretical and empirical works in this paper is that the currently observable revival of the Vinyl is probably due to very different psycho-social mechanisms working at the same time, with part of them being grounded in *symbolic* and part of them being grounded in *material* aspects of the medium: First of all, for nowadays music listeners, the distinctive *sound* as well as the *sensory appeal* of the Vinyl appear to be both aesthetically more exciting compared to digital media. This is seemingly due to the increased intrinsic complexity and richness of the medium, related symbolic associations and, last-but-not-least, the relative unfamiliarity of most listeners with record players in their everyday audio repertoires. When listening to music, this makes the sound as well as the handling of the Vinyl emotionally more exciting than e. g. using a CD and obviously also lends to it certain special auratic qualities, especially for people not using the medium as part of their everyday audio repertoire. Conversely, for people who grew up the Vinyl (regardless if they employ it in their nowadays repertoire or not), the mechanism of *technostalgia*, rooted in long-term embodied familiarity with a material medium, may explain another portion of nowadays “vinyl retromania”, but this mechanism obviously does not intensify musical emotions per se. Instead it adds a bitter-sweet feeling of longing for a “lost home”, in other words: a feeling of nostalgia to the listening act.

In this sense, since the present text is part of a special issue on media, communication and nostalgia, we feel it important to stress that the obtained empirical results confirm our theoretical claim put forward in the theoretical part of this paper that *technostalgia* and *generational aura attribution* are two very different socio-psychological phenomena that should not be mixed up like it is sometimes done by authors from cultural studies like Marks (2002), Schrey (2014) and Reynolds (2016). In short (and in line with the arguments of Bolin, 2015): While *technostalgia* is a bitter-sweet feeling of embodied resonance when using a *familiar*, but increasingly “obsolete” material medium, *symbolic aura attribution* conversely increases listener’s emotional arousal when being exposed to media stimuli that are rather *rare* and *uncommon* in their everyday media environments, especially for agents that have



never been originally socialized with them. Insofar, when it comes to understand “vinyl retromania”, we are dealing with two nearly antagonistic phenomena with only one of them being an instance of “true nostalgia” in the sense of the term.

Finally, and in a broader sense, the present results give also general insights on the current debate on sociomateriality in media and communication research far beyond music listening: They speak to the fact that subjectivation during media experiences may be determined *independently* by both, collective symbolic attributions as well as embodied effects of materiality, which in our view delivers an important argument for the epistemological position of critical realism (Leonardi, 2013).

## Limitations and Outlook

Limitations of these interpretations and their generalizability pertain foremost to the chosen music stimulus, as well as to the sample size and structure: Without replication with different music titles and a larger sample, the present findings should be regarded as preliminary, since regardless of the group homogenization procedure and the employment of control variables and bootstrapping, they could still have been influenced by the chosen piece of music and the very specific sample structure obtained in terms of unobserved background variables. Furthermore, all identified effects rely on the experimentally induced contrasts between Vinyl and CD medium, which implies to integrate also other audio media in the design of future studies when trying to replicate and extend from current findings.

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# Hills, Old People, and Sheep

Reflections of Holmfirth as the *Summer Wine* town

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## Abstract

Holmfirth, West Yorkshire, UK is globally renowned as the setting for the world's longest running sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine* (UK, BBC, 1973-2010). This article explores how the TV series has become embedded in the practical existence of the town and draws on empirical research with residents of Holmfirth which shows how people situate themselves in relation to their factual and fictionalized cultural heritage. In this paper we consider the interrelationship between media and memories and the role that nostalgia plays for the production, commodification, distribution and exchange of narratives.

Holmfirth is a rural market town in the Holme Valley, West Yorkshire, UK; the center point between three major cities in the north of England, Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield. Historically built on farming, agriculture and the textile industries, the town exists in the 21st century in much the same way as many former mill towns across the Pennines do, a composite of 19th century factories and newer developments left somewhat scarred by the millennial recession. Holmfirth differs from many similar small towns by having two significant relationships to global media. The first is that it is the birthplace of *Bamforth & Co. Ltd*, a silent film production house which set up business in 1870 and became known for its moving pictures and “saucy” seaside postcards. Over the late 19th century Bamforth's success surpassed that of the US film industry and the town was colloquially dubbed the “Hollywood of the North”. Bamforth relocated the production of moving pictures to London in 1915 and an archive of the original Bamforth postcards is placed in the Holmfirth *Picturedrome*, a local music venue which itself is a former cinema. When the company was eventually sold off in the 1980s the factory stood derelict in the center of town for over thirty years. In 2016 it was purchased by the owners of the *Picturedrome* and is currently being re-developed.

The other prominent link to global media, which is explored further in this article, is that Holmfirth is the main filming location for *Last of the Summer Wine* (UK, BBC, 1973-2010), a series which lays

claim to being the longest running sitcom in the world. Over the course of its production, *Last of the Summer Wine* consistently garnered high viewing figures for the BBC and is particularly profitable overseas (Vine, 2011). In 2016, six years after the final episode was originally broadcasted, it remains a regular feature on British television albeit relegated far from its peak prime time family slot on BBC1. Today, its syndication on free-to-air digital channels such as *Yesterday* and BBC Gold ensures that it shows a near permanent presence throughout the day.

## Imagining Holmfirth

The extraordinary length of *Last of the Summer Wine's* production, its presence on television for over forty years, and its existence as television “wallpaper” (Bourdon, 2003, p. 6) have all played a part to ensure that Holmfirth's synonymy with the series is firmly established. As we have argued elsewhere, Holmfirth as place and *Last of the Summer Wine* as text both help to define each other as a composite memory of “timeless rural Yorkshire” (Hibberd & Tew-Thompson, in press). These bucolic images draw on a known trope in which series such as *Last of the Summer Wine* and similar shows such as *Heartbeat* (UK, YTV, 1992-date), *Where the Heart Is* (UK, ITV, 1997-2006) and *All Creatures Great and Small* (UK, BBC, 1978-1990) offer versions of “ordinariness” and “simple pleasures” which are inherently nostalgic

and help to establish a quintessential rural northern identity as a conceptually shared memory (Davidson, 2005; Armitage, 2009; Russell, 2004). *Last of the Summer Wine* specifically has nostalgia at its core. This is indicated both through its title which implies the pleasures resulting from imbibing the final drop of a season's bounty; and through its content which follows the antics of three elderly friends, Compo, Foggy and Clegg, as they wander around their locale, reminiscing about former times, commenting on and often bemoaning the changing times, and reveling in their twilight years. The visual imagery of the series lends itself to the formation of shared episodic memories: "three elderly men sliding down a hill on a tea tray" comes immediately to mind. In addition, the visual tropes of the "rural north" draw on landscape photography which promises televisual pleasure as a series of spectacular attractions (Wheatley, 2016), and on a documentary/realist tradition which works to encapsulate, enable and solidify present-day practices of remembering (Keightley & Schlesinger, 2014, p. 746). The dramatization of the "ordinary" lives of the fictional characters on screen, particularly over such a prolonged time, has helped the town to exist as both an imagined and known entity, creating a virtual visual memory of the region regardless of whether Holmfirth (or West Yorkshire) has been visited or even whether the television series has been encountered. The title of our paper reflects this and derives from an offhand remark made by one of our students who had neither visited Holmfirth nor watched *Last of the Summer Wine*, but who concluded from her knowledge of the series as wallpaper that the area must be constituted of "hills, old people and sheep".

We now turn to considering how *Last of the Summer Wine* as a TV text manages to move beyond the diegetic world of the series, into the spaces of the town in which it was filmed, and become embedded into the lived experiences of Holmfirth residents. In this paper, we are particularly concerned with examining the role of nostalgia and recollections. We begin by outlining the scholarly basis for this study and then move on to describe some of the ways in which the series is woven into the fabric of the town. Finally, we examine the role of nostalgia as a structuring trope to explain how *Last of the Summer Wine* is embedded in the ways that people talk about and experience the area.

## Television and Nostalgia

Television and nostalgia are inextricable. Amy Holdsworth (2011) argues that memories of past television and past television viewing experiences, which are often tied to the space of the home and exist within familial structures, can be seen as indicative of a desire to anchor ourselves in the world, a practice which draws implicitly on nostalgic recourse to the known, comfortable, and familiar. Holdsworth is predominantly concerned with examining how memory and nostalgia are represented, constructed and produced by television in order to produce "televisual memory": the representation of, and nature of, memory on television. Other scholarly work on nostalgia television (Kompere, 2005; O'Sullivan, 1998; Spigel, 2001) is similarly characterized by a concern with the television "text" and the ways in which television constructs and cements moments in history in a way which necessitates an affective response (Doane, 1990; Kuhn, 1995). We seek here to broaden out the debate to include embodied and affective responses not just to the text itself but its afterlife and effect on the constitution of place in Holmfirth. In doing so we draw on what Shaun Moores (2012) has referred to as a non-media-centric approach to media studies, which moves beyond considering the representational "text" (Pink, 2012; Moores, 2012; Krajina, Moores & Morley, 2014).

## Methodology

The empirical research that underpins this article is still underway and comprises interviews, focus groups and longer-term auto-ethnographic work. The interviews that we draw on here predominantly took place between October 2014 and 2015, and consist of twelve face-to-face interviews conducted in residential homes and cafes in Holmfirth. Three of the interviewees referred to in this article invited friends and/or partners to take part in the discussion. The voices that we draw on make up a selection of people that responded to leaflet and flyer drops around the town. As we sought to investigate not the television series *per se*, but rather the way in which television is encountered, embedded and referred to on a banal, daily basis, these advertisements asked people to discuss their experiences of living in Holmfirth. While we anticipated that this might result in data which do not include any referents to the series, in fact this



was not the case. In all of the interviews to date, references to the television series have surfaced either by name or by associative comments (e.g. comments about “the tour bus”, businesses named after fictional characters, and places renown with particular incidents). Our immediate problem was in trying to examine how *Last of the Summer Wine* might inform understandings and experiences of Holmfirth without directly pointing to the TV series and so tipping the conversation towards it. Decisions over who to interview were based entirely on the willingness of people to participate, judgments about “typicality” or “representativeness” (see Cook & Crang, 1995; Geiger, 1990; McCracken, 1988) were not considered. Coincidentally, all of the respondents quoted here have lived in Holmfirth for more than ten years, and while all of them identified the area as “home”, not all of them considered themselves to be “local”. Our interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed and although names have been changed in accordance with our institutional ethical guidelines, some of our participants were keen to retain their own names and be quoted as such. We consider that the lack of acknowledgement of ownership over personal voice is an issue that needs further consideration if we are to truly engage with research practices which aim to break down barriers between the academy and the public.

A final methodological note acknowledges that one of the authors of this article lives in Holmfirth. Consequently, she draws on her personal observations from the experience of being resident in the town (direct lived experiences which prompted this research in the first instance), and acknowledges that responses to the interviews may have been influenced by respondents’ sense that they were talking with someone “local” who knew the town first hand. Ien Ang (1996) notes the importance of considering ethnography not as a quest for realist knowledge but rather as a “form of storytelling” in which descriptions of everyday life retain their veracity while the “deeply partial position” of researchers as storytellers is nonetheless acknowledged. This refocus sees the researcher as

*“a producer of descriptions, which, as soon as they enter the uneven, power-laden field of social discourse, play their political roles as particular ways of seeing and organizing an ever-illusive reality.”*

(Ang, 1996, p. 75-76)

The broader considerations that arise from this methodology are the focus of study elsewhere (Tew-Thompson & Hibberd, in progress).

### “The Summer Wine Town”

We now turn to the interrelationship between nostalgic memories and *Last of the Summer Wine* by considering Holmfirth as a location.

After 37 years of filming, *Last of the Summer Wine* is embedded into the fabric of the town in such a way that simply to be in Holmfirth represents a blurring of the line between fictional setting and actual location. As broadcaster Stuart Maconie (2012, p. 145-147) notes in his book *A People’s History of Modern Britain*, simply to be in Holmfirth is akin to walking into a television history which has been unwittingly absorbed and sometimes actively resisted. For example, *Sid’s Café* in the center of the town is a small café named after one of the characters in the series. Formerly a back room of an ironmonger, it was mocked up as a café by the BBC and used as an exterior location shoot. In 1979 the owners realized the potential for the tourist market by realizing it as an actual café – the real “Sid’s” is the fictional “Ivy’s” café in the series (in which Sid is Ivy’s husband). A life-sized statue of Compo, the most enduring character in the series, stands outside where it is a permanent fixture for tourist photos. The “real” Compo – actor Bill Owens – is buried in a church less than a mile away from the statue. While built environments such as Sid’s and “Compo’s Chip Shop” are named after key characters, others imply a knowledge of the series through indirect allusions. “The Wrinkled Stocking” tea room above “Nora Batty’s steps” is named after the fetishized legwear that is a defining feature of Sid’s love interest. Nora Batty’s steps are named so because they are the real steps used as an external location shoot for this character, and are in turn next to the *Summer Wine* experience. This small commemorative museum and gift shop beckons visitors with a signpost phrased in old Yorkshire dialect: “Ee, tha’d best come and see Last of t’Summer exhibition, tha knows”. Inside, nostalgia is similarly evident in the commodification of *Last of the Summer Wine*. Souvenirs and merchandise draw on times past and mundane domestic activities, with characters displayed on tea towels, aprons, jars of boiled sweets, packets of biscuits, jigsaws and mugs. Picture postcards featuring stills from the series have crinkled edges and companion books (for

example Bell, 2012; Kitson, 1990) promise happy memories and authentic inside tales. Alongside the merchandise box sets of the DVDs, themselves now reminiscent of a somewhat outmoded 20th century medium, are for sale. Outside the museum the “Summer Wine Magic” tour bus is a regular daily feature of the local landscape. This ostensibly directs the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990) toward the TV series through its journey through the older southern side of the valley, past cobbled ginnels, steep winding steps and weavers’ cottages. At the same time, it punctures the representation of Holmfirth as an area of bucolic pleasures by situating the pleasurable nostalgia of the fictional TV series alongside other disturbing, disruptive reminiscences, including several fatal floods and the infamous Moors murders of the 1960s (see Hibberd & Tew-Thompson, in press).

Many of these “experiences” of Holmfirth were clearly established to attract tourism in the first instance, and remain *in situ* to ensure its persistence in the valley. (For example, a public bus timetable published in 2016 in order to detail a new route advertises that it goes “through *Last of the Summer Wine* country”, suggesting that the series is still present in the public imagination as well as a reason for visiting the town in the first instance.) Alongside this official discourse there is also evidence of more personal engagement and ownership of the series. Signed photographs of stars of the show, living and deceased, feature on the walls of most local businesses where they are displayed as though they are family snapshots, and many of our respondents spoke warmly of the “close encounters” (Bourdon, 2003, p. 6) that they had with *Summer Wine* over the course of its production. These recollections of quotidian experiences with non-textual television are indicative of personal and collective memories established and shared through popular culture (Tinkler, 2013, p. xvii), which are in this case embedded into daily lives through the presence of multiple para-texts (Gray, 2010). Many of these close encounters are recalled as banal or trite by our respondents, dismissals which perhaps reflect the “lowly” status of much popular television. If TV’s immediacy as a medium relegates it to an overlooked position, *Last of the Summer Wine* as the very epitome of TV that “has been around for years, and is doing now what it has always done” (Mills, 2010, p. 6) is further denigrated. As Brett Mills identifies, the over-familiarity and omnipresence of popular TV texts often means that they are rendered invisible by academic work

with its tendency to “downplay the significance of the old, the ongoing, the repetitive, the always-there” (Mills, 2010, p. 7). In addition, the older members of its cast and target demographic remain on the periphery of media and cultural studies (Tulloch, 1989), and television studies marginalizes critical engagement with this type of ordinary, everyday TV (Bonner, 2003) which is critically constructed as “easy [...] simplistic, and watched by lazy audiences” (Gorton, 2006, p. 72). This critical neglect is indicative of the way in which cultural studies perpetuates and reinforces hierarchies at the same time that it claims to critique them (Murdock, 1997; Walkerdine, 1997). However, as Penny Tinkler (2013) has noted, these nostalgic encounters have a radical potential, offering an articulation and interpretation of personal memories which differs from public histories “from above” by governments and officiated discourses. We now turn to explore the nature of these memories which indicate how *Last of the Summer Wine* as a TV text produced and distributed through a public service discourse is made personal and individual.

## Memories

The interview extracts that we turn to now make up part of our ongoing empirical research into life in the Holme Valley, and we draw on them to show how the adoption of the *Summer Wine* sobriquet forms part of a broader system of signification and representation through which experiences are negotiated, interpreted and understood (Edensor, 1998). The voices of residents in Holmfirth give some indication of how nostalgic memories are used to mobilize groups and form identities. By linking individual memories to collective forms of remembrance facilitated through *Last of the Summer Wine* we are able to offer a tacit appreciation of a shared cultural history which brings together people and places. We draw on our participants’ responses here to illustrate how the reality of living in Holmfirth is a composite of community and cultural memories which catalyze each other to become visible, pertinent, and real. As noted above, most often *Last of the Summer Wine* is mentioned in a banal, fully integrated manner, wholly disassociated from the TV series and used instead as a naturalized history and way of referring to people, places, memories and events. For example, Margaret notes;



Margaret: “[...] but my son lives up the other way, past Compo’s, you know the first left before the Greenfield? He’s been up there [...]”

This offhand comment indicates the embedded nature of the show’s presence in the town: its presence, like a road named after a deceased person or practice, is used simply as an indicator of place with no association to its original referent. It is also indicative of the intimacy between interviewer and respondent highlighted in the methodology. Here, there is a clear sense in which the respondent is able to rely on the interviewer’s first-hand knowledge of the town to “correctly” interpret where *Compo’s* is and what it refers to. (Someone unfamiliar with the area could rightly conclude that there are at least three places in Holmfirth which could be – and frequently are – referred to as *Compo’s*.)

Regardless of whether or not they had ever seen the series, all of our respondents identified that *Last of the Summer Wine* would be a defining feature of how they described Holmfirth to someone not familiar with the area;

Joan: “[...] and everybody knows Holmfirth because you had the ‘Last of the Summer Wine town’ especially if you’re talking to the older generation, they know where it is straightaway.”

Residents used the series as a marker of belonging in which they positioned themselves as casually disinterested in the series whilst suggesting tourists would be drawn in by it. The vast majority of our respondents had a *Last of the Summer Wine* story which they would use as a way of disavowing connection to Holmfirth as a setting and instead establishing it as a real place in which everyday things happen. This sense of an authentic Holmfirth was reinforced by statements which drew attention to the artifice of the TV text as a construction;

Vivian: “I think [we used to watch it], yeah, because we’d spot where it was. And you can work out like they used to get on the bus in one place and get off somewhere else. It wasn’t quite right but you only know that if you know the area.”

The ways in which Holmfirth residents situate themselves as having “authentic” knowledge of the area is reminiscent of Tom Mordue’s (2001) analysis of Goathland, North Yorkshire

as the setting for YTV’s rural drama *Heartbeat*. Mordue’s research notes that residents enact and encode performances of belonging in their home territory, as compared to tourists consuming the same space. By engaging in discursive strategies that attempt to regulate local space, Mordue argues that residents determine the type of performances that should take place within it. Here, we see that residents position their accounts of a “real” Holmfirth with reference to the TV series at the same time that they distance themselves from it. A similar distancing tendency can be seen in the way that residents refer to the series with a degree of humility. In his cultural geography of New Jersey as “Sopranoland”, Lance Strate (2002, p. 180) identifies a sense of personal pride in seeing his home turf feature as a backdrop to the flagship HBO series *The Sopranos* (USA, HBO, 1999–2007), while also noting a sense of gratification from “viewing the finished product, knowing that millions of other people are watching it along with you.” That this sense of pride is not evident in our respondents perhaps reflects the lowly positioning of *Last of the Summer Wine* as ordinary television against the reified status of HBO’s quality output. Rather, the quotidian nature of *Last of the Summer Wine* suggests embarrassment in either the text and/or the nostalgia associated with it;

Rob: “Anyway, but I can’t watch it. [Laughs] I just, you know it’s interesting to see but I can’t watch it. I don’t find it very interesting.”

The sense of global community that Strate (2002) identifies is however evident, and can be seen both in accounts of people watching it (in the early days) to see their home on TV, as well as an awareness that this made them globally visible;

Joan: “We’ve a family friend who lives in Canada, moved [from here] over thirty years ago. And he would be about 80 now but he loves it. And so do his friends, still watch it.”

The quote above gives a sense in which Joan imagines a mediated community brought together by a shared understanding of *Last of the Summer Wine* as a text which is made all the more pleasurable because of its resonance to place and the past. The wistful allure of *Last of the Summer Wine* is similarly evident in the ways in which it is used by residents as a temporal grammar (Lull, 1980; Morley, 2006) which connects media and nostalgic memories. Molly recalls;

*Molly: "I know exactly when the first one was shown on television because it was the day that I came out of hospital with our youngest son. He'd just been born. So I can always date it."*

Many of our respondents also invested in a cultural framing of the countryside that evokes the "rural idyll" which is inherently nostalgic (Newby, 1979). Some of the recollections of daily life appropriate the rural mythologies of *Last of the Summer Wine* in an understanding of how life used to be;

*Margaret: "[It] was great when the children were growing up because, well, it was an old-fashioned childhood because we had the woods and we had the stream and they could go walking the dogs and messing about and playing in the woods and it felt safe... That sort of childhood was idyllic really for them."*

One of our respondents set her experience of living in a rural area in direct opposition to the bucolic idylls of televisual representations;

*Barbara: "I think I usually say we live on the moors. To me moorland means walking up the road and then walking into a beautiful area of incredible countryside. But it's a specific sort of countryside that is very different. If you say you live in the countryside in Yorkshire, people tend to think, 'Oh Herriott, the countryside.' The Last of the Summer Wine didn't particularly emphasize the wildness with the moors, I mean not that we watched it after the first couple of series. If you start moving over towards [here], it's really wild countryside and not particularly attractive."*

For Barbara, the idyllic nature of televisual representations is persistent and romanticized yet exists alongside another persistent and contradictory visual trope, "it's grim up north". In referring to *Last of the Summer Wine* and alluding to James Herriott's *All Creatures Great and Small* (it is not clear from this comment whether she has the TV series or books at the forefront of her imagination), Barbara draws on a romantic, nostalgic visual framing which she acknowledges is at odds with her daily lived experience.

Many of our respondents' accounts of daily life, habits, and routines use *Last of the Summer Wine* as a marker of Holmfirth "then and now". While the longevity of the show makes it difficult to attribute societal change either directly or

solely to the series, most respondents refer to a television grammar whereby Holmfirth as a town is punctuated as existing before and after *Last of the Summer Wine*. For example, one couple perceived a structural change in the organization of commerce in the town which they attributed to the series;

*Barbara: "Yes, we were here when they started filming. It's made a big difference to - it did make a big difference to Holmfirth and when we first came, the shops in Holmfirth would close on Saturday afternoon, and everything closed on Saturday afternoon."*

*David: "And then following the Last of the Summer Wine and people starting to come, it meant that the shops were open in the afternoon and that people wanted somewhere to go, so it made an enormous difference."*

*Barbara: "It certainly was a big growth from a small, not really a, almost didn't feel like a town, did it? [David nods agreement]. We liked it. It was good because it meant that the town became alive. And yes, and the shops became more interesting. Before then, things were strange."*

What is particularly interesting in this account is the sense of "strangeness" attributed to Holmfirth in the late 1960s which indicates how the past as reproduced through memories exists in the context of current social organization (Halbwachs, 1992). Earlier in this interview both Barbara and David had attributed their motivation for moving to Holmfirth to its isolation and rurality, but in recalling the way that filming and consequently tourism became part of the town the earlier sense of isolation is remembered as alien.

## Concluding remarks

Although the series' longevity makes it difficult to determine a precise chronology of dates which can be used as yardstick for measuring change in the town, *Summer Wine*'s presence has indubitably impacted on local residents' experience of living there and is key to the establishing of Holmfirth as a tourist destination. Holmfirth's economic geography begins to change with the shifting cultural experience of the place, setting in place an oscillation that continues to this day even as the TV text shrinks from cultural memory and lives on in the repeats and re-runs of its syndication afterlife. Somewhere along the line there has been a subtle but important change in emphasis in

which the knowledge that “*Last of the Summer Wine* was filmed in Holmfirth” has become an account of “Holmfirth, location of *Last of the Summer Wine*”. This discrete but discernible shift is indicative of the way in which media memories, often formed without recourse to an actual text, are used as a prop for understanding place in which the factual and fictional are so closely aligned as to be barely distinguishable. A more recent metamorphosis in terminology further illustrates the way that the rich nostalgia of the TV series has become thoroughly embedded. After a period of being dubbed “Holmfirth, *Last of the Summer Wine* town” through personal recollections and officiated promotional discourses, the current nomenclature for Holmfirth is simply as “the *Summer Wine* town”. This sobriquet which conflates real and imagined place signifiers so as to make them inseparable (Mordue, 2001) is utilized as a way of referring to the area and events happening in and around it. “Summer Wine Trail runs” and the ‘Summer Shine car wash’ bear no relationship to the program, reach groups of people that were not the target audience of the series and are unlikely to have encountered it as a television series at all. This is partly a deliberate strategy by destination marketers to capture

tourists’ attention through known tropes (see Morgan & Pritchard, 1998) but also indicate how the *Summer Wine* sobriquet has been stabilized with meaning which is invoked through a shared conceptual memory. If *Last of the Summer Wine* is the central point in a tourist understanding of Holmfirth, the Summer Wine aura extends to the region as a whole.

Our interviews give an indication of the roles that nostalgia plays in the production, commodification, distribution, and exchange of narratives. *Last of the Summer Wine* manipulates cultural memory by spatially informing Holmfirth through signifiers of the factual and fictional past and offering re-memories of television as a text, institution and practice. Although the series broadcasted its final episode in 2010, its presence has been inscribed, embedded, and appropriated into the town and its people. In the voices of our respondents we detect both a pride in visibility and a sense that the remnants of *Last of the Summer Wine* are something of an embarrassment. These personal responses to texts and their afterlives remind us that *Last of the Summer Wine* is not just a cultural artifact but forms part of a wider cultural, industrial and personal interpretation of place.

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# “Why? Because It’s Classic!”

Negotiated knowledge and group identity in the retrogaming-community “Project 1999”

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## Abstract

This paper explores the *preservation of the social architecture* as a constitutive element of the retrogaming-community Project 1999, a group of players who are enthusiastic about a specific classic phase of the old MMORPG Everquest. In an attempt to recreate an *authentic* gaming experience, certain technical and cultural characteristics of this era are invoked as a symbolic resource in a retrospective discourse. The players negotiate nostalgic sentiments in the contradictory conditions of the contemporary converging media environment to recreate what they consider the “essence” of Everquest. The paper follows this issue by investigating the ways in which knowledge is collected and applied. Using a dedicated wiki, information about the original game is collected and made visible within the community in a collaborative effort. This provides opportunities to reflect and discuss shared memories and recreate authenticity not only on the technical, but also on the cultural level. The stated ideal, although impossible to achieve, serves as an important point of reference in ongoing negotiations on the condition of the game. A collective memory grounded in nostalgic longing directed at the past thus becomes a source for shared identity and communitization in the present.

Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORPG) are unique in the regard that simulated game worlds not only allow different forms of communication between players, they also embed the social interaction in a shared virtual space that represents a large part of the social situation of reception. This text explores the *preservation of the social architecture* as a constitutive element of the retrogaming-community *Project 1999*, a group of players who are enthusiastic about a specific classic phase of the old MMORPG *Everquest*. In an attempt to recreate an *authentic* gaming experience, certain technical and cultural characteristics of this era are invoked as a symbolic resource in a nostalgic discourse. The players negotiate nostalgic sentiments in the contradictory conditions of the contemporary converging media environment. The text follows this issue by investigating the ways in which knowledge is collected and applied. Using a dedicated wiki, information about the original game is collected and made visible within the community in a

collaborative effort. This provides opportunities to reflect and discuss shared memories and recreate authenticity not only on the technical, but also on the cultural level. In this context, the phrase “it’s classic” is often heard as an ultimate justification to adhere to what is perceived the essence of classic *Everquest*. The stated ideal, although impossible to achieve, serves as an important point of reference to negotiate group identity.

*Everquest*, an early MMORPG that was released in 1999 and still exists today, was one of the first online computer games that offered the players a vast virtual world, called “Norrath”, to explore. It has been a recurrent subject of study, with research targeting issues such as the economics of virtual game worlds (Castronova, 2005), gaming culture and sociability (Taylor, 2006), or player motivation (Yee, 2001). *Everquest* has frequently been used as an example to delimit the MMORPG genre in the broader field of game studies (Juul, 2002; Juul, 2003). In 2009 a special issue of *Game Studies* was released (Hayot & Wesp, 2009) on the



occasion of its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to reflect upon its significance in the field of virtual world studies. It is often referred to as a milestone of computer game history by fans as well as developers and is prominently featured as one of the “classic” great works in gaming history (Mäyrä, 2008, p. 127). As Taylor (2006) describes in her ethnographic work, *Everquest*’s virtual world of “Norrath” contains not only a virtual landscape and computer-controlled creatures that a player can navigate with the help of an avatar, it is also a space of sociability that many consider home. Players form alliances and collaborations to master the challenges designed into the game world, sparking organizations like “guilds” which people join to build relationships and for mutual support. The social interaction that happens within the game world lays the groundwork for a game culture (Dovey & Kennedy, 2006) that stretches beyond the immediate playing experience into fan sites, forums, knowledge databases, and even real life contexts like player meetings and conventions. Like most games of this genre, *Everquest* is under constant development as new content gets added to the world on a regular basis to keep it interesting and exciting for the players while also subjecting it to a constant stream of, often profound, changes that challenge existing social structures, or as Taylor puts it:

*„As the game undergoes serious revision in the face of strong competition, some early fundamental design choices that informed and reflected a kind of ‘essence’ or ‘spirit of the game’ are being reworked and often radically altered.”*  
(Taylor, 2006, p. 41)

The term *retro*, when applied to the field of gaming, usually describes different dimensions pertaining to practices surrounding old videogames. Newman (2004) describes retrogaming as one of the emerging trends in digital gaming, along with online, mobile, party, and casual gaming. For one, it is referring to playing old games which often requires special devices like outdated consoles for which the game was originally developed. This problem of transferability of old software to new devices can be solved with *emulators*, programs that allow the execution of old code on new machines (Heinemann, 2014; Murphy, 2013). Notable emulators are the *Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator*<sup>1</sup> (MAME) for PC, an open source project

that started off as an emulator for arcade games, but since then has evolved into an emulator for multiple types of computers and consoles, or the *Nintendo Virtual Console*, a commercial product for the *Nintendo Wii* that provides access to numerous *Nintendo* classics. While emulation can be considered an important preservation strategy, it is also controversially positioned at the fringes of legality due to copyright issues often threatening its existence. Beyond the technical reconstruction of a specific game state, retrogaming points to wider social and cultural implications of practices surrounding old games. This includes the technical reconstruction of old games on new machines but also partial adaptations when characteristic elements, like 8-bit music, familiar characters or distinct aesthetics and styles, are resurfacing in popular culture, often as commodities with commercial interests involved (Suominen, 2008). Old videogames can be, fully or partially, re-appropriated in different contexts, with new interest groups and modes of participation emerging. Beyond the immediate gaming experience, retrogaming is part of a broader gaming culture that offers new ways of communitization.

A big part of the appeal of retrogames can be linked to nostalgia. In early research, nostalgia is often portrayed as a symptom of an over-complex and ever changing modernity (Shaw & Chase, 1989; Lowenthal, 1985), a feeling of loss and longing that seduces the nostalgic into obsessing about an idealized past to cope with the complexities of the present. Newer research ties into the notion that nostalgia and change are closely related, but not in the form of a one-way retreat into the past. Instead, nostalgia, as a mode of remembering, carries the potential of agency to come to terms with the past in the present (Whalen & Taylor, 2008) to negotiate change in a modern world. Svetlana Boym (2007) recognizes two distinct forms coming to terms with the present: *restorative* nostalgia attempts the reconstruction of a desired condition that is considered true. Its outcome is tradition that perceives itself as universal to create meaning. This perspective, she writes, is currently found in religious or national revivals, which use symbols and rituals to tie to an idealized past (Boym 2007, p. 13). While restorative nostalgia declines change in an attempt to hold onto a fixed state, *reflective* nostalgia accepts the futility of such an endeavor. It is anchored in individual

<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.mame.net>

memories and personal narratives which are used to reflect upon the past. As such, the reference stays fragmented and inconclusive. The object of desire is lost and nostalgic remembering is both cherished and challenged to come to terms with the present (Boym, 2007, p. 15).

While nostalgia appears as a personal mode of remembering, it ties to a collective understanding of the past in the form of public memory:

*“[...] nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory.”*

(Boym, 2007, p. 9)

Shared nostalgia, in the form of a collective memory, is then not only a mode of remembering, it can also be a driving force for a sense of belonging and communitization. Heinemann regards this negotiation of public memory as a discursive process in which perspectives on the past are rhetorically constructed to serve as a source for group identity in the present (Heinemann, 2014, p. 3). Especially in smaller communities this often happens parallel to “official” versions of history when members create distinctions and emphasize peculiarities in what he calls “vernacular” discourses.

*Project 1999* is itself part of a larger project on [www.eqemulator.org](http://www.eqemulator.org) pertaining to the emulation of *Everquest*, where a group of tech-savvy developers and enthusiasts is maintaining a platform to host different custom versions of *Everquest*-emulators. Among these, *Project 1999* is by far the most ambitious and popular one. Its declared goal is to reproduce the original game experience by recreating the game world “Norraath” the way it was in the time period between 1999 and late 2001. A small group of developers and community managers does this by reverse-engineering a younger version of the game world into its original state. This emulator, along with a forum and a wiki-database dedicated to the game, are hosted on servers provided by the developers and available to a number of enthusiastic players. During the time of research, more than 1000 players were present in the shared game world during peak hours to experience this virtual space the way it was 15 years ago. Taken from observations and participation in the community, the vast majority of them played in the original era, with informants often referring to it as “the golden age” and reporting feelings of nostalgia associated with places and people encountered during that time.

What distinguishes gaming with an MMORPG-emulator from other forms of retrogaming is that the recreation of the technical features of *Everquest* involves the recreation of the space in which social interaction happens. While projects like MAME might be able to bring old games back to life on more modern devices, they can’t emulate the full experience of a shrill arcade hall of the 70s or the intense play-sessions in a friend’s living room; social experiences which are often an integral part of the gaming experience (Butler, 2007, p. 129). Felzmann (2010, p. 201) explains this impossibility of the return with the double space structure of computer games: While the virtual space in which the players act with their avatars can be reconstructed, the situation of reception is ultimately lost in time, and with it the social experiences often associated with nostalgic longing. With one of the main feature of MMORPGs being persistency, the gameworld of *Project 1999* is maintained and managed by a volunteer team of community managers. Concepts and expressions of nostalgia confront us with a sense of loss regarding the object of desire which is a thing of the past to which we can’t return. Relocating the social situation of reception into virtual space then begs the question of how much is actually lost and how authentic can an emulated gaming experience be?

The *social architecture* of the original *Everquest* has been described by Nick Yee (2009) as an attribute of the game itself which, through its unique design, provokes interdependence between players and altruism. In-game collaboration and the resulting ties between players are considered to be triggered by choices that were made by the original developers of the game. In this line of thought, the main source of *authenticity* is grounded in the software code. Here I will argue for an expanded view in which the emulation and maintenance of the game, which is carried by a small group of developers and community managers, is embedded in a broader *retrospective discourse* about how the game is supposed to be played in a “right” way. Authenticity is therefore also situated in the everyday acts of the members of the community. This paper aims at highlighting this ongoing process by looking at the collaborative use of the wiki technology which is used to collect, and thereby make visible and discuss, information about classic *Everquest*. To do so, I will highlight some of the challenges that the emulator faces in the current, converging media environment. I will argue that many features of original *Everquest* that are invoked in the *retrospective discourse* are not only

the result of choices made by designers, but also of a media environment which, from a present-day perspective, is characterized by its limitations in terms of communication and functionality.

## Methodology

The findings in this paper are part of a larger ethnographic study which has been conducted over a period of six months of participant observation, followed by eleven semi-structured interviews. It is based on the *Situational Analysis* approach (Clarke, 2005) which expands on the *Grounded Theory* methodology by Anselm Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1996; Strübing, 2007). The goal of this approach is to inductively generate categories based on empirical data much like with Grounded Theory but with different techniques that consider not only human, but also non-human actors and discourses. Similar to ethnography, it tries to link action and discourse to arrive at a *thick description* (Geertz, 2003). This expansion is particularly helpful in a virtual environment where the social architecture of the game world and the discourses associated with its maintenance provide an important framework for human interaction. This follows Anselm Strauss' *negotiated order approach* (Strübing, 2007, p. 51) which describes the structure of any social aggregate as the result and the starting point of ongoing processes of negotiation. This happens within social interaction and is not necessarily confined to the act of playing itself. In fact, much of the communication about the game happens outside the game in dedicated forums or the community-driven *Project 1999* wiki, a knowledge database that uses the wiki-technology. Knowledge plays a prominent role in the construction of reality. According to social constructivism (Berger & Luckmann, 1980) there is no knowledge outside sociality. Knowledge is what is perceived to be real, and in sum provides a stock of knowledge which is often passed down by social groups and which can be used by the individual within the given contexts.

As an analytical tool, Anselm Strauss' concept of *social worlds* (Strauss, 1978) is used to identify different groups in the *Project 1999* community. It is derived from Tomatsu Shibutani (1955) who describes *reference groups* that are confined by their effective communication surrounding a shared interest or goal. A participant observation has been conducted for several reasons: for one, it made it possible to undergo a typical gaming career starting with the inception of the avatar.

By playing solo and in groups together with other people, one could experience much of what was considered characteristic for the classic gaming experience, including the very time consuming level-up process and the many acts of mutual support from other players. It was also revealing to see, how the game experience changes depending on what groups you decide to be part of, like whether you play alone or in groups, or when you join a guild to participate in more organized events. This way, different social worlds were identified, along with the purpose they served for its members and the discourses involved.

The study has been conducted from the perspective of what Henry Jenkins calls an "Aca/Fan", which he describes as "a hybrid creature that is part fan and part academic" (Jenkins, 2016). This means that I have made my own experiences with *Everquest* including some time spend in the "classic" era. While this proximity to the subject of study poses risks, those are, in my opinion outweighed by the understanding with which I can approach both the game and its players. It proved useful to be able to anticipate some of the expectations that are, for example, associated with certain classes of avatars. Also, some of the excitements and insights helped to overcome the many time-consuming, even boring, aspects of a game which, like other retro-games, is often characterized by its steep learning curve and high difficulty. Personal memory also provided an opportunity to reflect on the emulator now and relate to the stories of the informants. During the participant observation, a diary has been used to document even the most trivial encounters. This allowed me to critically reflect upon my own adventures in "Norrath" at different points in the research process.

The experiences made and the social worlds discovered were the basis for a theoretical sampling. Following the logic of qualitative research, the aim was to identify informants with different backgrounds and allegiances. The people interviewed included very active gamers and more casual ones, raiders and non-raiders, members in guilds and solo-players, newcomers and veterans, some that were involved in the development of the game, very active members in the forums, and one of the very few women of the community. The selection was deliberately broad to get an overview over different aspects of the game and how different players apply new media platforms into their gameplay experience. Most of the informants were recruited via a forum dedicated to *Project 1999*, but some were the result of in-game encounters.

## Towards a restoration of knowledge

With the virtual space being the basis of the situation of reception, the game itself structures the ways of acting and interacting within the game world quite significantly: in the original era, communication was only possible within the build-in chat features of the game which didn't allow communication on an extensive or even global scale. Instead, one had to rely on interest groups and groups that were spatially close to the player. As a result, guilds and spatial proximity were important sources of support when confronted with one of the many challenges that the game poses. Vinzent, a very active player who is also in a leading position in a larger guild, describes the willingness to be kind and helpful to other players as a main factor when building a positive reputation and transfers this belief to the emulator:

*"I do try to be diplomatic and I do try to be nice and I like having friends and knowing several people, it's important to me that these people have a good opinion of me. So yeah, I do work for it [...] on purpose [...]. I do it because I know there is a return. I know that if I am nice to them they will be nice to me and we will form relationships. Because I have experienced it in Everquest one all those years ago and I know how it works."*  
(Vinzent)

In the classic environment, individual action is also the result of the means of communication that are offered by the game world: limitations of communication create opportunities for players to display socially desirable behavior. Such limitations, the game's difficulty and the resulting interdependency are often mentioned as important attributes of the *social architecture*. Additionally, in the classic era it was not possible to run other applications on the computer while playing the game because the technical limitations didn't allow it. Actions that are taken for granted today, like swapping to a browser to look something up or using third party software to communicate with other players, weren't available at that time. In the classic era, the social situation of reception was strongly limited to the experience provided by the game's interface.

Today, the players can use a dedicated *Project 1999* wiki database providing information on almost every aspect of the game and a forum for ongoing discussions. The wiki includes detailed descriptions

about the many different areas of the game world, its inhabitants and its challenges. Furthermore, it offers a large variety of player-written guides that players can read up on which help them to organize their playtime and reach their goals as efficiently as possible. The wiki can be understood as a tool of mass-communication that allows the players to collect and display information about *Project 1999*. It is the technological basis that enables players to share collected information with a larger audience and provide the visibility necessary for further discussion. The creation and modification of pages is, much like on comparable platforms, generally accessible and can be conducted by anyone. Only in the case of some pages is the possibility to edit restricted to a few moderators who are also recruited from the player base. It is also important to note that the wiki is carried by the community and that the developers consciously avoid adding their own knowledge about the emulator to the database.

Another media platform for communication in the community is the *Project 1999* forum. Players can create or follow discussions about different issues in threads. A broad range of topics is discussed in different segments of the forum, including announcements from the developers, bugs and features of the emulator, in-game occurrences that are of interest to the general public, item pricing on the local marketplace or tips and tricks in regard to different challenges of the game. The most popular segment, the "Server Chat", offers the reader a large variety of threads on many issues, most of which are short lived as newer threads tend to push older ones out of the spotlight of attention rather quickly. The forums are a vital platform for players who want to stay up to date about current events in *Project 1999* and especially vocal members of the community use them to participate in the ongoing discussions on a variety of issues.

Enhancing the virtual space of the game by integrating different media platforms is not a new phenomenon, yet the purpose behind it has changed with regard to the emulator. Following *Everquest's* release in 1999, the community saw the creation of a multitude of platforms that allowed players to communicate about game related issues outside of the actual game world. As Taylor (2006, p. 83) describes, these often became lively community hubs that served an important function by collecting and highlighting information. Due to the difficulty of the game and the subsequent inaccessibility of a large part of the game world for casual gamers, more committed players could show

off their accomplishments by adding them to these emerging databases. Others could then read up on this information to inspire and enhance their own adventures. Many *Project 1999* members remember this *emergence* of knowledge fondly, when large parts of the game world remained mysterious. Or as Anita, a casual player who regularly comes back to *Project 1999* in an attempt to re-live past gaming experiences, puts it:

*“Everything you knew you knew from propaganda in the game. We had certain pages where we could look things up, but everything you wanted to see was because someone told you about it. The developers didn’t provide information, there were no beaten paths. You had to explore and test everything yourself. And what’s missing in today’s games is that you couldn’t do much on your own, you wouldn’t get far if you go solo.”*

(Anita)

Or as John, a casual player, contrasts the emulator with the classic experience:

*“We know so much more about the game now than we did then. Everyone was learning together then and now everyone knows everything and you have the wiki that has every answer for everything you could want. So you don’t really need to ask hey does anyone know how this quest works where do I need to go? Ah, you just get the answer hey it’s on the wiki check it out. So there is sort of a different orientation to the community.”*

(John)

Chris, a very active member in the *Project 1999* community and a leading member of a larger guild, also reports on how knowledge has been withheld deliberately in the classic era to gain an advantage in the competitive game. In this environment, knowledge becomes a scarce resource that can be exploited to build reputation, improve one’s gameplay or raise one’s profile in game related discussions. These examples also point to the interdependency between knowledge and sociality and highlight the challenges the new media environment poses for the social architecture. As the game developed and changed over the years, emerging information piled up on older information like the layers of an archaeological excavation.

In contrast to the emergence of knowledge in the original classic *Everquest*, *Project 1999* is characterized by the *restorative effort* of collecting

knowledge from a concluded era. In almost 17 years since its release, *Everquest* as a game, but also as a franchise with its many offshoots, has grown so much that details from the classic era can be difficult to find. In order to retrieve valid information, players often try to draw from original sources, i.e. the same websites described above as so crucial for discussions related to the game and as always changing as the game world got discovered. The fate of these websites is diverse: many of them have vanished, others reinvented themselves into multi-game platforms, evolving and changing as new web-technologies emerged. In all cases, researching “valid” information today became an intricate endeavor that requires extensive research and a considerable time investment. Compared to classic *Everquest*, this effort of restoration entails a very different approach to how knowledge is circulating within the community and is therefore at odds with the original intent of the emulator: to provide a gameplay experience which is as authentic as possible.

## Collaborative efforts and challenges to authenticity

The wiki’s role as a collaborative endeavor to collect information becomes clearer when we look at the effort people put in. One way of gathering information from the original era is by using archived websites via tools like the *wayback machine*, an online site that serves as an archive for webpages. By saving websites in different time-intervals it allows users to access older versions of these sites. For *Everquest*, there are multiple versions available for the timeframe between 1999 and late 2001, the end of the so-called classic era. Accessing a website from a certain point in time allows the user to read not only the content from that time but also the comments and discussions from the players when that content was new and exciting. These conversations often went into great detail about different peculiarities of the game world. These pages are important sources for enhancing individual gameplay as well as for research investigating the development of the emulator.

Players act as researchers and feed it into the wiki in an attempt to document the game world of the emulator. In that regard, the *Project 1999* wiki is not a testimonial of how the original *Everquest* was but about how the emulator is. As mentioned above, the developers of *Project 1999* consciously abstain from contributing to this database in order



to maintain a sense of mystery. Information that is transferred from archived websites into the wiki unreflectedly is therefore often deviating from the emulator because what was true then isn't automatically true now. However, by sharing the information on such a platform, it gains visibility which in turn allows discussion and deliberation on whether certain information reflect the status quo. Markus, a relatively new player in Project 1999, often uses original sources to verify information that he finds on wiki to make sure that he plays it the right way:

*"I compare it also with the other Everquest sites because the wiki is a wiki and it doesn't have all the information so I look at other websites that have information from the original Everquest to just sort of see if maybe some of the [...] information is missing from the Project 1999 wiki and then I think ok maybe I can go and find some of that missing information from another website."*

(Markus)

Elias, a long term member of the community who is very involved in different aspects of development, reports that he wrote his own parsing program to raise statistical data about the occurrence of certain events in the emulator to check if the information on the wiki is accurate, or if there are issues that should be brought to the attention of the developers.

*"There are websites where you can look at loot tables and they are from various non classic things so they don't really apply to Project 1999. The loot changed a lot in later eras and so you can scrape that stuff to make the wiki pages but all that time it will be inaccurate. So yeah what I did was I actually went in and experimented and gathered all this data and replaced that stuff on the wiki with that data when I had enough samples."*

(Elias)

Vinzent is using the wiki to document his own experiences, often changing details on already existing pages as he goes when he finds irregularities. Most informants report that they either contribute to the wiki or they at least modify information if they feel that's necessary. The collection of knowledge can thus be understood as a form of translation from old information drawn from the original sources into this new environment. This is a process of adaptation in which all informants participate one way or another. Participation here

does not necessarily mean direct contribution to the wiki, as shown in the next segment it is often just by reading and by deciding to follow one path of action over another. For example, when players consciously abstain from retrieving certain information or go out of their way to display supportive behavior.

As the examples above show, the players are not only very aware of these changes, they also consciously reflect upon them and on the impact they have on the social architecture. By drawing from their experiences in the emulator and comparing them with their personal memories from the classic era, they develop awareness of similarities and differences between now and then. The implication of this abundance of knowledge for the social interaction that happens within the game world becomes clear when we look at individual players actions. Today's ambivalence of the games authenticity and integrity on the one side and the ambiguity of today's means of communicating and sharing knowledge on the other side provokes a constant reflection on how the game is supposed to be played. This issue will be highlighted here using the example of *strategic planning*.

The wiki of *Project 1999* opens up opportunities to play more efficient in terms of goal orientation and is used by all informants on a regular basis. The usage often starts outside the game, even during work or free time to do research with the intent to strategically plan in-game adventures beforehand. One informant, Markus, who was a very new player in Project 1999, describes a series of specific tasks that he wants to do in order to gain better equipment. His plan is to improve his avatar so he can be a more desirable ally for other players, thus being invited to groups more often. He researches the quests he wants to do on the wiki, analyses the different steps necessary for each quest, evaluates each step's difficulty and develops a plan on how to do several quests at once in the most efficient way by checking the accessibility of the involved areas, optimizing travel routes between them, calculating costs involved with different routes, setting up a timetable and finding out for which part he needs other players' help for. In a similar fashion, Anita reports how using the wiki to explore the game world is an important part of her gaming experience. Often guided by mere curiosity, she finds interesting bits and pieces in the exhaustive databases and develops plans on how to get to certain points of the game world or how to best harvest certain



rewards. The online research becomes a starting point for adventures she wants to play out, often in areas that were inaccessible to her in the classic phase. Sometimes this research is followed up with a search for other players who are interested in joining her on her mission.

In the case of both informants, the application of the research comes with self-imposed restrictions on how to best apply it in the actual game. Ironically, while Markus' plan might be the ideal way to do certain quests, it is not automatically the ideal way to improve one's avatar, even though that's ultimately the stated goal. Likewise, the adventures of Anita are, as orchestrated as they might seem, not really feasible from a strictly goal-oriented point of view. Markus could get better equipment with much less effort if he would just buy another player's goods at the local market. But for him it is important to go through the quest steps to achieve a specific type of equipment that is special to him, even if it means that he has to invest more time to get it. Anita mentions how important it is to her to "earn" the equipment herself, considering bought items as selling out the original idea of the game. Also grouping up with other players to do something together is important to both of them, even when a certain reward doesn't require that extra effort. One of the key attributes that is ascribed to *Everquest* in this regard is that it is a difficult game that rewards players based on the time investment and the risk taken, making support from other players a necessity. The wiki offers readers a large variety of beaten paths in the form of guides and valid information which they can follow to circumvent difficulties. Like in the cases of Anita and Markus, wandering off those beaten paths requires a conscious effort and an additional time investment with little reward except the sense of achievement for having done so. In this spirit, players on the emulator often try to achieve their goals with a certain pride in mind that can better be explained with nostalgia than with ambition: delving into old memories by reliving certain limitations of the game – as artificial as they might be in this new setting – is often more important than quick progress. The wiki can be used by the players as an initiator to rediscover the game world in a particular way. This dilemma expresses the ambivalence that the recreation of the social architecture is facing on the level of everyday individual practices: players have to make their own decision about whether they aspire to authenticity or to efficiency. Normally

players decide for both, choosing one or the other depending on the context.

## Discussion

When we look at the technical reconstruction of the virtual game world, the game can be seen as a memory space that people feel a strong personal attachment to that is largely grounded in nostalgia. The game itself, with its underlying algorithms and the subsequent redundancy, evokes events that are perceived as triggers for meaningful experiences and social interaction. The attempt to preserve the social architecture relies strongly on this shared notion that the emulator serves as a memory machine that provides certain events with the unfailing reliability of clockwork. Yet, for the realization of the aspired *social architecture* this only provides the backbone.

When it comes to nostalgia there is always a tension between preservation of the old and the intrusion of the new, or, as Boym (2007) puts it, between restorative and reflective nostalgia. These are not binary concepts. In *Project 1999* we find strong forces of restoration on the technical level, like the developers and enthusiasts who spend thousands of working hours into recreating the game world. But also the ordinary players hold onto past experiences by emulating play styles and expectations that correspond with the perceived social architecture of classic *Everquest*. On this level, the term "it's classic" can be seen as a mantra that is heard often in forums or in chats to legitimize preservative measure of the old above the new, of staying as true to the original as possible. Every pixel matters in the reconstruction of "Norrath".

The virtuality of the game world is new and due to this virtuality, space is taken out of the equation when it comes to nostalgic longing. Or to pull from Svetlana Boym again:

*"Nostalgia appears to be a longing for a place, but it is actually a yearning for a different time."*  
(Boym, 2007, p. 8)

As such, the attempt to recreate a specific gaming experience by emulating the virtual space is ultimately futile, no matter how close to the original the emulator gets. But while the social architecture is lost, the space enables the members of the community to reflect upon it; like a self-referential system in which the different fragments of nostalgic longing are represented again, made visible and discussed. In this line of thought, "it's

classic” is not so much a mantra of preservation, but an expression of perseverance with which certain ideals and a certain vision of the “golden age” of MMORPGs are kept alive to serve as a point of reference that players can refer to when negotiating a shared identity. “It’s classic” is therefore a highly contested term that challenges different notions of authenticity while lying at the core of the attempted preservation.

New media platforms like the wiki play an important role in this negotiation process. On the one hand they represent media change by allowing the very same features that players decline as threatening to the social architecture. But at the same time they provide the means for the collaborative construction of something new. The *Everquest* community always was a „mediatization community“ (Hepp, Berg & Roitsch, 2014) in the sense that media usage was a constitutive element for this community that formed in and around a virtual space of mediatized communication from the beginning. Subsequently, the *Project 1999* community is re-mediatized by integrating newer media platforms and uses them to reinvent itself. This creative use of new media shows that nostalgia in this case is not just about a stubborn orientation

towards an old piece of game code. Instead, it’s an attempt to capture what is perceived the essence of the object of desire and recreate it in the context of a new media environment.

By looking inwards in their attempt to preserve the social architecture of the emulator, the players in *Project 1999* reflect very closely on the developments within the MMORPG genre. Informants’ references to the social architecture and the construction of knowledge point to the many aspects of change with regard to the computer game *Everquest* and its competitors. Instead of looking at computer game history in terms of genres and titles, it might be worth exploring these changing frameworks of social practices in more detail, looking at how design choices and convenience features have shaped sociability in virtual worlds, how players are socialized by different social architectures and how they incorporate them into their own play styles. Much like MAME has been considered a “counter archive” by David Murphy (2013), the “vernacular” (Heinemann, 2014) discourse in *Project 1999* opens up opportunities to explore alternative gaming history outside the mainstream games industry, and how this resonates in different related contexts.

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# Nowstalgia

Articulating future pasts through selfies and GoPro-ing

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## Abstract

This article discusses the emergence and prevalence of a prospective nostalgic narrative of present events articulated through the practices of selfies and *GoPro-ing* as instances of anticipatory future yearning, colloquially identified as *nowstalgia*. The compound term collapses past, present, and future into a deeply complex temporal construct, as the object of such a yearning is but a possibility that is waiting to happen or, at best, one that is taking place in the present.

Using a critical cultural approach, the article proposes *nowstalgia* as an analytical tool for the exploration of selfies and *GoPro-ing* as moments of active construction of a presumably valorized past-in-the-making. The conditions of production of *nowstalgic* narratives hinge, the author argues, on the abstraction or removal of the subject from the present actions and situations in which they are immersed, in favor of documenting them, which becomes justified by their possible yearning in the future.

*“Technological progress has merely provided us with more efficient means for going backwards.”*

Aldous Huxley

As the young man leaves the zipline platform 30 feet off the ground, we spectators sitting in front of a YouTube feed see the trees below, the excitement in the man’s face, the tense line traversing the otherwise pristine tropical sky, and the roaring waterfalls misting in the distance. Though it is all part of his journey, we are invited to accompany him via a selfie stick donned with a GoPro camera. Time and again, he looks at the camera to check his framing, then proceeds to show us his point of view, only to return seconds later to rechecking the framing. Time and again, instead of experiencing the Costa Rican zip line excursion, he records it. Another place, another story. A young woman in her early twenties stands with her back turned toward the stage while Beyoncé performs. At the end of her outstretched hand, the screen of her smartphone blinks rapidly, capturing her face filled with excitement and a

barely recognizable silhouette of the performer in the background. One click, one blink, one selfie after another, and then the woman submerges into her phone to select which one better captures the moment. A couple more clicks, and an emotional text is added to the image. By the time the selfie finds its way onto Facebook, Beyoncé has already moved on to another song and the stage is illuminated in a different manner. Once again, the young woman turns away from the stage, and the cycle is renewed.

Although the situations and settings might differ, the preoccupation with recording rather than experiencing is a staple in videos and photographs that plague social media sites and streams in the contemporary world. Whether surfing inside the hollow curl of a wave in the South Pacific to witnessing a homely birthday celebration, from a sorrowful funeral of a loved one<sup>1</sup> to zip lining

<sup>1</sup> Although the “funeral selfies” trend hit its high – and, arguably, low – point in 2013 when Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt captured an image of herself along

with U.S. President Barak Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron during Nelson Mandela’s funeral (Glover, 2013), the practice has come to be considered by some

over the Costa Rican tropical forest or attending Beyoncé's concert, participants are increasingly invested in producing user-centered self-executed visual narratives, frequently sacrificing an engaged participation in the situation that they work so hard to preserve. The obvious question that follows, then, is why would anyone – other than a professional photographer or video producer who is performing a job – invest so much effort to visually capture such a situation instead of fully experiencing it? More broadly speaking, one is left to consider how such a seemingly contradictory practice has gained preponderance and become a dominant cultural practice.

This paper engages in a theoretical investigation of this phenomenon, the value of which has been noted by Niemeyer, who suggests that “[s]ome people might even anticipate their nostalgia of the future by thinking of new devices that would be able to store and produce the nostalgic memories that have not yet occurred” (2015, p. 96). The anticipation of future nostalgia toward a situation currently documented/experienced is identified by the colloquialism *nowstalgia* (urbandictionary.com, 2009). Far from being solely an individualized cognition or behavior, this paper emphasizes the socio-economic conditions that produce nostalgic narratives as a prevalent cultural form in order to examine power relations that become reified through selfies and GoPro-ing (named for the GoPro-brand cameras commonly used to do this) as practices of *nowstalgia*.

The goal of this paper is to introduce an analytical tool that can guide grounded, empirical research into user-centered self-executed visual narratives, their nostalgic form and operation, and the necessary conditions that produce them.

## From nostalgia to *nowstalgia*

The yearning for the past identified as nostalgia since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century has undergone radical changes beginning in (Boym, 2001; Sedikides & Baden, 2004). From a malady equated to homesickness, to a psychiatric disorder, and most recently as a mobilizing force of yearning for past elements or events distinct from homesickness, nostalgia articulates past, present, and future

into a prospective possibility rather than merely a retrospective certainty (Boym, 2001). Similarly, Niemeyer (2014) identifies nostalgia as an articulation of more profound temporal and spatial relations that redefine and re-signify past, present, and future situations in relation, even to the point of constituting the basis for the entire vintage category (see also Niemeyer, 2015). While individual memory constitutes the basis of nostalgia (Boym, 2001), in contemporary western societies the primacy of images over other types of representations of the past seems to have relegated individual memory to its role identified by Berger (1980) as a precursor to the development of photography in the 19th century.

Although visual texts depicting specific situations, places, and times with the goal of preserving a memory of them and spurring the reminiscence of the associated pleasant feelings arguably date back well into pictorial representations of our prehistoric past, photography's high fidelity and capability to fix a moment in time (Berger, 1980), memorializing it for future consumption as a quotidian souvenir (Sontag, 1977), configure it as a privileged form of memory representation. Following up on Berger (1980), the photograph contains meaning so much as to preserve appearances through which memories can signify the images. An isolated image, then, decontextualized and disarticulated from the entire surrounding mediascape is relegated to Berger's (1980) characterization of it as a relic of the past. However, the contemporary mediascape is highly interconnected, establishing entire constellations of meaning where visual texts that reference a distant past coexist with and can be re-signified and re-dimensioned by those of a recent one in an ever-actualizing exercise of nostalgic articulation.

Given the ubiquity of mobile video, one might wonder about any differences between video and photography in this phenomenon. Although we could, for example, retrace Metz's (1985) discussion on the formal differences between both forms in their relation to the human psyche and, therefore, to the “meanings” each one produces, doing so locates meaning within the object, thus essentializing and universalizing it (Peters, 1989). Similarly, we

researchers as an entire form of mourning vernacular on social media platforms (Mesele, Gibbs, Carter, Arnold, Nansen & Kohn, 2015). Furthermore, despite it not enjoying widespread acceptance, a recent survey has found that the practice itself is deemed as appropriate by as much as a 20% of the millennials

composing the sample (Buchanan, 2015), which can be evidenced in the present by posts of selfies at funerals from users of social media such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook (for an example, see McAteer, 2016).



could engage in the distinction promoted by Sontag (1977) between still and moving images, from the perspective that the former is a more memorable visual representation than the latter, as it is a sliver frozen in time and, thereafter, not a flow. However, such a claim neglects the interconnectedness of the current mediascape in which individual images constitute a photo-stream and coexist side-by-side with videos within a single multimedia *tableau vivant*. A more productive route is to center our attention on the cultural practices by which they are actively and dynamically produced-consumed. In a highly interconnected mediascape, in which still and moving images are interchangeably used to articulate user-centered self-executed visual narratives, the symbolic differences between these mediated forms are confounded and – ultimately – discarded by intermediate products.

Niemeyer (2014) identifies a recent boom of nostalgia in the contemporary mediascape through the (re)collection and (re)consumption of past mediated aural and visual texts, which become readily available. This *nostalgic's playlist* (Lizardi, 2015) compounds several texts produced at different moments into an ever-expanding present container. Among scholars of nostalgia, Boym (2001), Lizardi (2015), and Niemeyer (2014) focus on the capacity to store and reproduce both aural and visual texts, referencing past events as exemplars of nostalgia. The advent of digitalization has afforded users a greater capacity to generate and distribute their own nostalgic aural or visual narratives. As content for social media, these narratives increase the amount of digital cultural products available beyond those provided by services such as *Netflix*, *Hulu*, *Pandora*, or *Amazon Video*.

Yet, given its current prevalence, user-centered self-executed visual documentations present as much a quantitative as a conceptual challenge. Although graphical representations of the self are nothing new, dating back to Antiquity and forming a coherent tradition since the Middle Ages (Hall, 2014), the requirements in terms of the ability of their producers limited their use only to skilled artists. It is with the development of photography as a mechanical form of production of the self-portrait in the early 19th century, that self-portraiture is accessible to individuals independently of their pictorial abilities. Further development of the apparatuses used for image-capture and their new

affordances, along with an augmented emphasis on the cultural and social value of the individual in American society, have transformed the “home mode of visual communication” (Chalfen, 1981) through a shift that privileges the production of self-portraits in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, under the “selfie” label. The pervasiveness of digital cameras first and smartphone cameras later, as well as the ubiquitous networking capabilities in the late 20th century made this recent increase possible on a massive scale. As a result of these conditions, the photographer/videographer no longer seeks to show her spectators what she is seeing, but instead shows herself showing the spectators what she sees (Frosh, 2015). This seemingly slight, yet significant, shift is ingrained in the reconceptualization of visual documentation, which departs from the memorialization of the captured events for posterity (Sontag, 1977) to means of (instantaneous) communication (Van Dijck, 2008; Wendt, 2014).

The visual vestige enters the digital space via social media sites and content-sharing platforms, which alters the shaping of subjectivities and thins out the divide between public and private spheres (Lasén & Gómez-Cruz, 2009). While the digital image preserves memories, the practice of sharing allows for a *de facto* collection of digital mementos, which instantaneously become a

*“part of the infrastructure of the digital superpublic, outliving the time and place in which it was original[ly] produced, viewed, or circulated.”*

(Senft & Baym, 2015, p. 1589)

Social media platforms further memorializing the past through medium-specific characteristics, such as Facebook’s notification of posts made by the user in prior years on the same date.

User-centered self-generated images and videos which are deemed to have potential nostalgic value in the future and which become produced under the precondition that they will be shared and stored through social media sites constitute a prospective anticipation of nostalgia. Additionally, the interference and rupture of a situation implied by its visual capture (Sontag, 1977) is resolved by the collapse of the roles of participant and documenter into a single unity which documents-while-participating and participates-while-documenting. These two elements constitute the cornerstone of *nowstalgia*, which we can now define as the production and distribution of



visual documents with potential future nostalgic value by an individual who becomes increasingly engaged in its documentation and sacrifices her participation in the activity or situation deemed likely memorable in a time to come.

Inevitably, this leads us to consider the mechanisms through which individuals are capable to foresee the nostalgic value of their visual documentation in the future. By definition, nostalgia is inherently articulated in a retrospective manner and to suppose some form of determination by which it is derived from a specific set of conditions seems completely speculative. As such, we understand that the individual can only base future expectations on elements which are readily accessible to her at the time of modifying her present behavior and which must necessarily precede the action/situation to be documented. A feasible response to this set of conditions can result from the articulation of the situation's affective valence for the individual and the recognition of culturally-accorded values (Chalfen, 1987) implied by it.

Participating in a situation provides its subject/documenter with an unmediated relation to her pre-cognitive realm of emotions, even before she is able to structure them in a logical/linguistic arrangement (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). As such, the heightened affective value attributed to a specific situation might trigger in the individual the compulsion to capture it by the means of documentation available at the time. Likewise, the culturally-accorded values implied by a specific situation (Chalfen, 1987) could well justify the intent to preserve its documentation. In this sense, the identified cultural values could serve for the individual to gauge the significance of the situation and its corresponding documentation.

Although we have proposed this theoretically feasible explanation for the presumed mechanisms through which *nowstalgia* operates prospectively, its examination through an empirical study would be utterly necessary. However, the major difficulty in conducting such a study lies in the temporal distance from the moment in which the situation is captured under the *nowstalgic* pretense to the eventual emergence of a nostalgic condition.

In the following segment, we will explore self-portraiture and self-recording of videos as empirical evidences of practices associated with *nowstalgia*. However, it is necessary to advance a few notions of these cultural forms in order to foreground this aspect of our analysis of *nowstalgia* as an articulation.

## Selfies and GoPro-ing as practices of *Nowstalgia*

The conceptual and theoretical exploration of *nowstalgia* we are undertaking in this paper must be grounded in concrete practices that will further its applicability as an analytical category. Given their widespread use in contemporary western societies and their corresponding degree of naturalization, we have selected selfies and GoPro-ing as exemplars of *nowstalgic* production. While these user-centered self-executed practices share the participant's investment as subject/documenter, each one promotes a different type of rupture of the individual's participation. Self-portraits created by the use of a digital camera, known as "selfies", register a point of view that is impossible for the participant to have by natural means without the aid of a reflective surface, technological contraption, or disembodied experience. On the other hand, self-recording of videos while performing highly-immersive endeavors (user-centered self-executed -ing) allows for the generation of two different point of views: either a subjective perspective created by affixing the camera to a wearable support on the participant or a disembodied perspective created by affixing the camera to a selfie-stick or other non-wearable object operated by the participant. Both options, however, commoditize the memory of the experience by obliterating its uniqueness, either by establishing an inherently unnatural third-person perspective with respects to the participant or by the exact replication of her point-of-view.

These user-centered self-executed visual documentations require the disengagement of the subject/documenter from the activity or situation in which she is participating, despite the obvious differences between the situations subjected to each one of these practices. In this sense, we must examine the usage of these two types of visual documentation, rather than their original conditions of production. Widespread practices such as #TBT ("Throw Back Thursdays") on social media networks such as *Facebook*, *Instagram* or *Twitter*, in which visual documents from a prior period in time are posted (or re-posted), provide a glimpse at the nostalgic value of sharing these documents. As such, the potential of a visual document for constituting a nostalgic discourse rests on the personal valence attributed to the depicted situation, rather than on its exclusiveness (or lack thereof).

Action cameras, such as the GoPro, are used to record unique actions or locations, to be exposed to extreme dangers without the accompaniment of a human subject or to record either a first or third-person perspective of the user's participation in an activity considered to be extreme (Chalfen, 2014). These cameras' capacity to bear witness in high definition and with a low degree of intrusion to incredible feats allow consumers sitting safely on the other side of the screen to experience the vivid emotions felt by the participant herself (Ortiz & Moya, 2015), thus expanding the ways of seeing (Chalfen, 2014). For the subject/documenter, the video provides as much the possibility of sharing her experience with others as with herself at a later time, thus allowing her to relive it by the vicarious means that a video recording supposes. Such possibilities could very well justify the diversion of immersion in the performed action for the subject/documenter. The interplay between not being fully engaged in an extreme situation and documenting the action could be explained by the value given to the promise of re-experiencing the action through the resulting recording. This dynamic, which derives from the subject/participant's anticipation of the desire to relive the situation, anticipates her future longing for experiencing what she felt during the situation and thus constituting a notable exemplar of *nowstalgia*.

A similar situation is articulated through the practice of selfies, in which users engaged in a particular activity or situation that is deemed as memorable pose either in isolation or against a background considered indexical of it. If personal photographs indicate the culturally structured values of their producers (Chalfen, 1987), selfies function as a combinatory assemblage where self-presentation and cultural values are negotiated and resolved by a single individual. Beyond the assertion of the photograph as evidence of the user's participation or presence in a particular situation or action (Sontag, 1977), this self-reflexive practice implies the configuration of subject/documenter's culturally significant narrative from a first-person perspective (Chalfen, 1987).

However significant selfies might be for the subject/documenter, they are commonly shared via social networks, which ratifies their role as a mode of interactive exchange and production, articulating the photographer's identity as a social being (van Dijck, 2008). In so doing, the selfie reproduces the point of view of those on

the other side of the screen, the other members of the subject/participant's social circle, rather than reproducing her own point of view. As such, it compounds the user/photographer and the situation/action into a single experiential proposition ("look at me being a part of this") rather than preserving the subjective experience of the situation/action through the eyes of the user/photographer ("look at what I'm looking at"). Capturing a selfie while immersed in a particular situation or while performing a specific action allows the user/photographer to experience once again how she was seen by those who observed the selfie in the first place, to view herself as an integral participant of that situation/action.

The re-inscription of the user/photographer into the action/situation is made possible through the memorable experiential vestige in the form of a selfie, which can be revisited at a later time. Capturing a selfie compounds the exterior gaze toward the user/photographer and the valued situation/action as its setting, in an anticipation of the longing for being once again immersed in said situation/action, constituting an exemplar of *nowstalgia*.

## **Nowstalgia as a cultural-historical process of articulation**

Several theoretical perspectives categorize self-referential visual representations as acts of narcissism (Senft & Baym, 2015), so it is necessary for us to briefly explore this concept. First developed by Freud in 1914 as an integral part of the individual's process of ego formation, the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism "has been repeatedly asserted within social and cultural criticism for the past 40 years" (Tyler, 2007, p. 344). Freud's conception of narcissism, whereby the individual negotiates the recognition of others' existence as independent subjects by assigning characteristics of the self onto them and constructing affective attachment to said characteristics, was further developed by Lacan as a form of maintaining the unity of the self (Gaitanidis & Curk, 2007). Bridging from psychoanalysis to media studies, McLuhan (1964) developed the conception of narcissism in a different direction, positing that the affective connection with the narcissistic object derived from the sensory stimulation caused by the reflection of the self and not from a libidinal drive toward the self. McLuhan's reconceptualization

of narcissism situates the phenomenon within a purely deterministic framework where the individual is subjected to the mediated stimulus. In doing so, however, it allows for an expansion that drives away from individual psychology, not without underlying its meta-pathological nature and an uncritical acceptance of the mechanism *per se*.

The lack of a critical interrogation of narcissism as a category allows these assertions to abscond the underlying politics of the phenomena they presumably describe (Tyler, 2007). In turn, this characterization problematically equates all self-referential representations as signs of meta-pathological behaviors. As a result, the underlying societal, political, and economic relations through which such self-imagery is conceptualized, produced, and distributed is oversimplified. Furthermore, this characterization of self-referential images as purely narcissistic manifestations fails to critically explore the individual's willingness to privilege the act of documenting the moment above the experience of the situation being captured.

The importance of the phenomenon of *nowstalgia* lies in its role as a meaningful practice that “translates mere *behaviour* into a cultural – *signifying* – practice” (du Gay, Hall, Janes, MacKay & Negus, 1997, p. 18), transforming otherwise irrelevant snapshots or recordings of activities in which the subject/documenter is involved into texts and structures of signification. This transformation results from the articulation of a privileged process of visual documentation of the action, which purposefully alters the individual's participation in it, and the consequent practice of sharing or posting the produced visual document via social media sites or streams. These instances represent moments of production and circulation (Hall, 1986), which are constituted into a *nowstalgic* discourse. The translation of these moments back into social practices takes place through the consumption of the visual text via social media and the interactions it elicits (likes, shares, comments, etc.) as well as through the influence it exerts as a model for productions which attempt to reproduce its mechanisms and techniques of documentation. Similarly, revisiting, reposting, or reproducing the visual text by the participant/documenter herself at a later moment in time, equally represents a form of translation and transformation of this discourse into cultural practices.

To understand *nowstalgic* production as a cultural

practice and as a discursive form while avoiding the traps of reductionism and essentialism (Slack, 1996), it is necessary to adopt theory as a temporal arbitrary closure which allows the retheorization (Hall, 1986; Grossberg, 1993; Slack, 1996) of user-centered self-executed visual content as means of prospective nostalgic production and not as mere evidences of a pathology of meta-psychology (Tyler, 2007). This discussion requires a common ground between the deterministic view of technology mandating individual behavior and the logocentric characterization of technology as byproducts of the *homo technicus* (Galván, 2003). However widespread or accepted either of these two variants might be, both derive from a problematic ontological conceptualization of the subject as the compendium of antagonistic dichotomies (Smith, 1988). As a solution to this, our analysis becomes centered on the subject's unity through her dialectical articulation (Slack, 1996).

As a cultural practice, *nowstalgia* articulates the technological apparatuses involved in its production and the specific ways in which these technologies are employed in the constitution of prospective nostalgic products. However, given that cultural practices are complex conflictual spaces which can only be understood within the context in which they are articulated (Grossberg, 1993), on the following pages we will attempt to investigate some of the principal relations that intersect the practice of *nowstalgic* production.

To further our exploration of *nowstalgia* as a cultural practice, we initiate our investigation with the deconstruction of the term into its two elemental components: the indication of a present temporality (now) in substitution of the Greek vocable for a heroic return home (nostos), while preserving the sense of longing proper of the termination *-algia*. The substitution of “the return home” (*nostos*) for “the present moment” (*now*) is not merely a linguistic mischief, but carries with it the profound transfiguration of nostalgia into *nowstalgia*, departing from Hofer's classical idea of homesickness (Boym, 2001) onto the embodiment of presentism as the dominant cultural logic of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rushkoff, 2013).

A radical shift in the focus of our temporal horizon occurred at the turn from the 20<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Rushkoff, 2013), changing from the futuristic look forward signed by A. Toffler's seminal proposition to a new mentality in which

*“(p)eople stopped thinking about where things were going and started to consider where things were..”*

(Rushkoff, 2013, p. 11)

The increase of live television feeds, the emergence of the 24-hour news cycle, real-time data collecting and mining, and the perpetual autonomy of time in the digital world apart from human interactions presaged the preeminence of the present over both past and future (Rushkoff, 2013). However, such a shift also brought about a certain collapse of the linear narrative and, with it, a crisis of temporality between present and past (Rushkoff, 2013). Nevertheless, this over-dominance of the present seems to abscond and bypass the specific and conflictual set of societal, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the crisis of temporality in favor of an essentialist dictum that proclaims a technocratic determinant over human time (Rushkoff, 2013).

The emergence of *nowstalgia* as a cultural practice is deeply informed by the temporal discontinuity implied in presentism, but even more so by the underlying conditions and relations that are reified by this concept. If we identify the present not merely as an “immersion in the here and now” (Jameson, 1991, p. 283) but rather as a dynamic construction of history, as a past-in-the-making, the notion of the present becomes an interplay of conditions that shape that “here and now” into tomorrow’s past and yesterday’s future. To open different paths than those drawn out by the seeming naïveté in exclaiming the present as the only temporality of modern society, it is necessary to historicize, to delve into the historicity of human actions.

Yet, the somewhat direct correlation between historical temporalities and their graphical representations have found in recent technological affordances the mechanisms to subvert such a correlation. An example of this lies in the possibility of applying “artistic” filters to digitally produced images, in order to simulate and reproduce the character of cultural artifacts from earlier periods (Bartholeyns, 2014). Imprinting present narratives with a self-inflicted nostalgic feeling through the simulation of former technologies (Bartholeyns, 2014) is as much a sign of the value attributed to nostalgia as it is a redefinition of the concept of nostalgia *per se*.

The question, however, is not in terms of the possibility of articulation of a nostalgic narrative around events which are occurring in the present,

but rather around the investigation of the conditions that foster the nostalgic narrative of present events and elements as a prevalent cultural form, re-signifying it as the only temporality in existence. Let us begin by investigating the technological apparatuses involved in the practice of *nowstalgia*.

If *now* is our only temporal possibility, the disengagement from the activity being carried out in favor of its visual documentation seems the only logical solution to the fleeting nature of such a brief span of time. Furthermore, the affordances of the means of documentation – whether cameras attached to cellphones or stand-alone cameras – that allow for an immediate capture and, in most cases, an upload to a social network, become no longer a luxury of a few but a solution to the ontological need for online representation or presence. Yet, these technological affordances and modes of user-centered self-executed representations solely to be shared are relatively novel: the World Wide Web was invented in the last decade of the 20th century and it was not until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> when online channels became interactive and thus opened the door for the development of social media (Dijck, 2013). Selfies came about in 2002 (OED Online), cell phones did not have cameras before the year 2000 (Hill, 2013), and front-facing phone cameras were not even an option until three years later (Sony Ericsson Z1010 – World’s First Phone with a Front-Facing Camera). However, under the argument of the present as the only temporal possibility of modern times (Rushkoff, 2013), all these developments seem to be autonomous from the trend of privileging the current over the past or the future, thus becoming characterized as mere technological responses to presentism.

A second area surrounding *nowstalgic* production that requires our attention is the individual’s incorporation as a generator of content. As such, it is common for the individual not to be monetarily rewarded (at least not in most cases), but instead to provide free content for the social networks through which her products are distributed (Dijck, 2013). If making a case for the unpaid work of audience through their investment in media consumption (Smythe, 1981) was not a challenge, constructing an argument in favor of content providers who post their visual texts on social media truly does not require much effort at all. However, individuals who create their own *nowstalgic* visual texts do

not find retribution for their labor in monetary terms (and must sometimes even pay for their publication), but rather in the implicit value of its distribution. From an economic perspective, if the generation and accumulation of surplus value through inexpensive labor and commodity production was the maxim of capitalism (Marx, Engels, Mandel, Fowkes & Fernbach, 1990), the exploitation of complimentary labor – in this case through securing free content – seems a dream come true for late 20th century neoliberalism (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005).

The relations between the content-producing individuals and the content-distributing corporations finds a strong anchor in the dominant logic of America-centric individualism. Fostered by the opposition to Communism's collectivist thinking (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005), the emphasis on individualism led to a heightened social valorization of liberal principles, such as private enterprise and individualist rationality in a post-war United States<sup>2</sup>. Technological advances of the latter part of the 20th century that played onto this individualist logic, such as the Sony Walkman and, later, the cellphone camera, reified the underlying neoliberal privilege of the individual in detriment of the collective, brilliantly summarized by Margaret Thatcher in her dictum,

*"(t)here is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."*

(Keay, 1987)

Fostered by the logic of late 20<sup>th</sup> century individualist neoliberalism, presentism (Rushkoff, 2013) rests on the shoulders of the continual appropriation of the forces of production by capital (Reynolds, 2012), through which the great technological innovations of the period were ultimately produced. The emergence of a radically new form of labor (such as harvesting free user-developed visual content) seems quite a logical outcome from this ferment. Yet, the visual texts developed by the users remain hidden under

the guise of individual empowerment through their distribution on social media, even if their production required disengagement from the activity they were seeking to capture.

Under these conditions, privileging the production of the visual text over the experiential situation seems to be resolved by the construction of a fabricated memory, which might be as vivid for the individual as if no visual documentation had been produced (Garry & Gerrie, 2005). The individual's experience of performing an action that is being documented is not that of the situation *per se*, but of documenting said situation. As a result, both the final visual product and the individual's experience from which this fabrication derives become commoditized, forcing her to relive this situation in a vicarious way, identical to that of any spectator who consumes the resulting photographic or video capture on the other side of the screen.

Let us return to the case with which we initiated this paper as an example: the man who flies over the luscious Costa Rican jungle while devoting attention to its visual documentation has a different experience than if he had not been invested in its production. Furthermore, if he is to access the visual document in the future with the intent to relive the experience, the only experience accessible to him will be that of having captured his flight over the luscious jungle. Our adventurer's eyes will not have seen *in situ* many of the things his camera was able to capture and will then be forced to experience them for the first time, just as any of the spectators that consume the video of his journey.

## Concluding Thoughts

The present paper established a conceptual framework for defining the cultural practice of *nowstalgia* as a distinct – albeit closely related – concept to that of nostalgia. Although the temporal horizon of each of these concepts serves as their main identifying element, the implications in the discourses each one makes viable and

<sup>2</sup> Although the nuclear and suburban bourgeois family of the 1950s in the United States is seen as a nurturing site for creative leisure activities (Zimmermann, 1995) which would seem to counter the claims of a growing tendency toward individualism, said notion is incomplete, as it fails to explore the internal relations and situations by which such a construction became consolidated. While maintaining an exterior appearance of harmonious unity, the nuclear family of

the American 1950s suburbia seems little more than a facade in whose interior individual dissatisfactions were subdued – either violently or peacefully – resulting in the reproduction of the social norms of the period (Coontz, 1992). The fear of losing the newly acquired affluence, which served as a means of social control (Gitlin, 1993), functioned as the ferment from which the social conflicts of the late 1950s and 1960s.



the relations that become reified through their associated practices differ in great and significant degrees.

Furthermore, through the investigation of the conditions under which the cultural practice of *nowstalgia* becomes articulated, we have provided a critical-historical exploration of the emergence of the practice and the conditions, apparatuses, and means of representation through, by, and against which it emerged in the liminal period between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In doing so, we offered an alternative theorization of the contemporary dominant cultural practices of user-center self-executed visual documentations beyond that of individual pathology, as anticipated responses to

an eventual sensation of longing for the captured moment.

Finally, through the concrete investigation of the practices of GoPro-ing and selfies, we proposed a reading of the articulation of these prevalent practices from the perspective of *nowstalgic* production. This opens the door for future extensions of this line of inquiry either via specific case studies that allow for its further development or through the conceptual investigation of novel ways in which *nowstalgia* becomes articulated through emerging or yet unknown means of communication.

For now, we will simply have to wait until tomorrow comes... and it will.

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# Experienced Mood and Commodified Mode

Forms of nostalgia in the television commercials of Manner

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## Abstract

The article raises the question how nostalgia is utilized as an advertising strategy in the television commercials of the Austrian sweets producer Manner. The first section of the paper elaborates how different variations of this emotion developed and how the meaning of it changed throughout history. Among others nostalgia became an important aspect of consumer culture and was therefore increasingly popular as a tool for advertising and marketing. In the second part of the paper, by analysing and comparing a Manner commercial from 1998 to two from 2015, it is shown in what different ways nostalgia can be visualized and communicated in television advertising. Whereas the 1998 campaign tried to evoke a “real” nostalgic mood in viewers by referring to national collective as well as to individual consumers’ nostalgia, the 2015 commercials playfully engaged with various superficial nostalgic references and omitted negative facets of nostalgia.

Nostalgia has become one of many strategies in marketing and advertising. It is used to imbue brands with additional emotional and cultural meaning, in order to reach the declared goals of every advertising campaign: to raise awareness, to embed a brand or product in the minds of consumers, and to make people buy the advertised product. A brand which appears to be ideal for the application of such a nostalgic marketing strategy is the Viennese sweets-producer Manner. The *Josef Manner & Comp AG*, founded in 1890, managed to become one of the best known brands in Austria throughout the 20th century (*Horizont online*, 13.5.2016, Kühschelm, 2005, p. 99).<sup>1</sup> Its most famous product, the Neapolitan-hazelnut-wafers, known for their unique pink square packaging, is without a doubt one of the best distributed sweets in Austria. Since the 1960s the wafers can be encountered almost everywhere in the country: in gas stations as well as in theatres and operas, in pubs and restaurants as well as in snack bars or skiing huts (Kühschelm, 2005, p. 100). The company represents itself as a traditional family-enterprise, owned (among others) by Carl Manner, the heir of the founder

Josef Manner. Two characteristic features of the brand are the pink colour and the outline of St. Stephen’s Cathedral. By choosing the cathedral as the official trademark, the brand was linked to the most famous monument of Vienna, therefore to Austria itself, since the late 19th century. As historian Oliver Kühschelm has shown the brand Manner and their main product the Manner-wafers, have become national icons and markers of Austrians’ collective memory, during the second half of the 20th century (Kühschelm, 2005). Based on these findings, this article focuses on how Manner’s television commercials reflect this distinct relationship of the company with the Austrian nation’s past and with consumers’ memories, and on how nostalgic references are illustrated and commodified.

Although Manner had good preconditions for the use of nostalgia in its commercials, this strategy was not applied until the late 1990s. While symbols associated with Vienna and Austria were commonly utilized in older Manner ads, they were always referred to in a humorous way rather than a nostalgic one. This changed in the course of the 100th birthday of the famous wafers

<sup>1</sup> According to the ranking in *Horizont online*, which also includes international brands, Manner reaches ninth place in 2016; According to a survey made in 1999 by AC Nielson

the brand was known to 97% of the Austrian population, see: Kühschelm, 2005, p. 99.

in 1998. On this occasion they produced a series of TV-spots that clearly referred to nostalgia. One of these shall be analysed in detail and then be compared with two commercials from 2015 which refer to the 125<sup>th</sup> birthday of the company. The main question thereby is, how nostalgia is visualized and communicated (through images, sounds and words), and in what specific ways advertising strategies from different decades appeal to nostalgia.

## The meanings of nostalgia

Nostalgia can be described as a particularly emotional form of remembrance, sometimes even as the desire to return to a past state. It is often described as a sentimental or bittersweet longing for the past (Sedikides et al, 2008). This means the emotion comprises positive (sweet), as well as negative (bitter) elements (Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Because of this tension between the sadness about the fact that something is gone forever, and the happiness because of the remembrance itself, nostalgia invites controversy. Authors from different disciplines vary dramatically in their evaluation of the phenomenon. Whereas authors from social sciences and humanities analyse the broader cultural and ideological meaning of nostalgia in society, psychologists try to detect its function for the individual psyche. On the basis of empirical research Sedikides et al. come to the conclusion that nostalgia has positive effects on humans. According to them, a negative emotion such as loneliness, can trigger nostalgia and provoke a process of engagement with one's own or a group's past. Through this, nostalgia "imbues life with meaning, which facilitates coping with existential threats." It also "enhances positive self-regard" and "strengthens social bonds" (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 306).

Contrary to the overtly positive evaluation by the psychologists above, authors from other disciplines emphasise the distinction of nostalgia compared to more neutral forms of remembering. For Lizardi nostalgia always "involves comparison to the present" and "a desire to return to the past" (2015, p. 25), which can obviously never be fulfilled. This form of sentimental engagement with the past may lead to an uncritical glorification of an individual's or a collective's past. In the nostalgic mode of remembering critical or radical aspects might thereby be neglected or forgotten. Furthermore, through the yearning for past states,

the present might be discredited, which could lead to stasis or the inability to change (Cross, 2015, Boym, 2001, Davis, 1979, Steward, 1993).

## Variations of Nostalgia

There are two basic types of nostalgia: one is longing for a past that has been personally lived, and the other is desiring a time that lies beyond one's own individual memory and is shared by a community. The former is referred to as "individual", "real" or "personal" nostalgia, while the latter as "collective", "cultural" or "historic" nostalgia (Marchegiani & Phau, 2010, Muehling & Pascal, 2012). Concerning the first type, which from now on shall be called individual nostalgia, it can be said that childhood memories play a significant role. These memories are obviously more intense than those made in later phases of life. As Roth notes, the "first affective connections to people and places in the child's world" are important "because the first impressions on the brain were permanent" (Lizardi, 2015, p. 3, Roth, 1991, p. 9). The second type, from now on labelled collective nostalgia, applies to past events, symbols or historic phases which are shared by large groups and sometimes took place long before one's birth (Muehling & Pascal, 2012, p. 102). A third type of nostalgia, proposed by Baker and Kennedy is the level of simulated nostalgia that exhibits elements of individual and collective nostalgia. It is described as an "indirectly experienced past [that] may be remembered through the eyes and stories of a loved one" (Baker & Kennedy 1994). Heirlooms or old photographs appear to be typical media for eliciting this type of nostalgia (Ibid.).

From memory theories perspectives, individual and simulated nostalgia would be considered as part of the realm of communicative memory, whereas collective nostalgia has to be considered part of cultural memory (Assmann, 1988). Following Assmann, communicative memory is understood as a form of everyday remembrance that is shared among small groups through personal bonds and primarily through face-to-face communication, whereas cultural memory, shared by large collectives (e.g. nations) can necessarily only be constructed and communicated through media (comprising all types of media, including monuments, objects, etc.) (Assmann, 1988, Erll, 2005, p. 28). As Baker and Kennedy notice, each type of nostalgia, has an "inherent value to add to

marketing” (Baker & Kennedy, 1994). Whereas some marketing experts recommend a strict differentiation between those types (Marchegiani & Phau, 2010), the analysis of the Manner commercials that will follow in the second part of the article reveal that there is also great potential in the entanglement of them.

## Historic Meanings

The term nostalgia did not always have the different meanings and connotations, mentioned above. On the contrary, these variations have to be seen in the light of the historical change in the ways people remember. Various transformations, like changing technological, socioeconomic or media conditions, altered the causes as well as the objects of (nostalgic) remembrance.

The first appearance of the term was in 1688, when the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer coined the term to describe his observations of a strong and paralysing homesickness some Swiss mercenaries, serving in the French army, suffered from, because of the long absence from their familiar geographical and social environments (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 304, Cross, 2015, p. 6-8). Hofer, who described the phenomenon primarily as a physical illness, thereby noticed that nostalgia was often triggered by distinct sensual impressions, like the taste or smell of a certain meal or the melody of a song that reminded the soldiers of their homes. Some of these observations, especially the importance of sensual impressions and concrete objects, still apply to individual nostalgia today (Cross, 2015, p. 11).

During the 19th century the meaning of nostalgia shifted towards designating mainly a psychological phenomenon and a more general melancholic yearning for the past. Alongside the association with homesickness, a meaning which was ultimately lost in the second half of the 20th century (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 304), various other forms and facets of nostalgia developed. Especially the imagination and construction of distant historic epochs, like the middle ages, as a collective cultural past, became a mass-phenomenon in Europe’s emergent civic societies of the 19th century. Crucial for enabling these constructions of collective pasts, were the two dominant types of media of the 19th century: the newspaper and the novel. The nostalgic glorification of distant historic phases can be considered a vital element in romantic and also

in nationalist movements (Cross, 2015, p. 8). The emergence of collective nostalgia in late 19th century has to be seen in the context of increasing mobility and the rapid technical progress, that seemed overwhelming for many contemporaries and for this reason fostered a heightened sentimental interest in the past (Legg, 2005, p. 487, Davis, 1979, p. 6).

A new variation of nostalgia that gained increasing relevance in the consumer societies of the 20th century was the longing for past fashions and styles. Starting in the US in the 1970s “retro” became a part of popular culture. What was first limited to fashion soon expanded to every segment of consumer industry, and can now be seen as a ubiquitous element in western consumer culture, comprising magazines, movies, TV-channels, “Oldie”-radio-stations, restaurants, bars and many more. As Gary Cross remarks, nostalgia has become a “major business” (Cross, 2015, p. 6). Because of the financial as well as aesthetic entanglement with the modern media system (McAllister, 2010), advertising obviously is part of this process of “commodification and aesthetization of nostalgia” (Grainge, 2000, p. 27). At the end of the 1990s about one tenth of the US-commercials were found to be nostalgic (Hetsroni, 2012, p. 120). This development was not incidental, because as recent advertising research shows, adverts who appeal to nostalgia, individual as well as collective, appear to be more effective than ads who are considered non-nostalgic (Muehling & Pascal, 2012, p. 111-115). The researchers therefore recommend nostalgia as a “powerful tool in advertisers’/marketers’ arsenal of strategic weapons” (Ibid., p. 112). It is especially useful because it “can enhance the level of advertising involvement” (Ibid., p. 114) and evokes a

*“self-reflective response [that] may be an important step in advertisers’/marketers’ ability to create self-brand connections between their products/companies and their customers.”*  
(Ibid., p. 113)

The appearance of commodified nostalgia in the 1980s and 1990s fostered a debate in cultural theory. A key question was whether this form of nostalgia reflects a general socio-cultural crisis, rooted in the longing for continuity by envisioning the past (in this case the 1950s) as a stable and authentic “golden age”. While some authors interpreted it as the result of collective

loss and “creative bankruptcy”, postmodern theorists like Frederic Jameson detected a replacement of actual historicity with a superficial “pastness” resulting in collective amnesia (Ibid., p. 29, Jameson, 1991). In this debate the position of Paul Grainge, who rejected both of these perspectives, seems appealing. According to him, in western consumer society the term “nostalgia” today signifies both, “a consumable mode” as well as an “experienced mood” (Grainge, 2000, p. 27). The relationship and connectedness of both meanings

*“cannot be ignored, neither should it simply be assumed. Nostalgic modes are not by necessity, generated by nostalgic moods, or vice versa.”*  
(Ibid., p. 28)

Grainge emphasises that economic and technological developments must be taken into account when analysing mediated and commodified nostalgia. He exemplifies this with the founding of the TV-Chanel “Nostalgia-network” in the mid-80s. The reason for the introduction was by no means a general collective mood, but instead primarily the fact that throughout the 80s the US-television market transformed and channels for various other target groups were founded (Ibid.). The shifts in meaning of “nostalgia” is best summarized by Lizardi who concludes:

*„Nostalgia has progressed from a disease to memory malady to the basis of psychoanalytic desire to an intertextual and postmodern concept.”*  
(2015, p.14)

This last development can also be observed in the analysis of Manner-commercials that will follow later in this article.

## The Manner-Story

The history of Manner reaches back to the late days of the Habsburg Monarchy. The year the company names as a founding-date is 1890. It was the year when Josef Manner started producing his own sweets and moved to the Viennese district of Hernals, where the company has its main factory

and head office to this day (Kühlschelm, 2005, p. 97). The *Josef Manner & Comp AG*, which chose the Viennese St. Stephan’s Cathedral as the company’s official trademark, expanded rapidly and already employed 1.000 workers by 1906 (Andres, 1986, p. 81). Though it is said that the slogan of Josef Manner then was: “Schokolade für alle!”<sup>2</sup>, the product the company is known for today is not chocolate, but the hazelnut-wafers first sold in 1898. The probable reasons for the early success of Manner might be on the one hand that they sold their sweets for relatively cheap prices, and on the other hand that from their early days on they followed a concrete distribution and brand strategy (Kühlschelm, 2005, p. 99). To this day, the pink colour and the trademark with the silhouette of St. Stephan’s Cathedral can be seen as unique features of the brand. As a matter of fact, Manner nowadays is the only company which is allowed to use the Cathedral on their packaging, and since 2002, they even own the copyright to the special tone of “Manner-pink”. The justification for gaining the copyright was, among others, that an outstanding percentage of the population associates the colour with this company (derstandard.at, 5.6.2012).

In the 1960s, Manner started to expand on a grand scale and so the wafers became one of the best distributed consumer-products of Austria (see introduction). A remarkable continuity in the product-design as well as in the marketing strategy of Manner can be observed. The packaging of their main product, the hazelnut-wafers-packs – in Austria just called *Manner-Schnitten-Packerl* – only experienced slight variation throughout its history.

As already mentioned Manner can be considered as part of the Austrian’s collective memory. The historian Oliver Kühlschelm comes to the conclusion that in many discourses Manner is displayed as a symbol for Austrian national identity (2005, p. 123). According to him, the reason why Manner and its wafers actually managed to become a product commonly accepted as being “typically” Austrian is that they occupy a spot at the intersection of Austrian cultural and communicative memory (2005, p.115). He detects three dimensions of diachronic consistency. First, the role Manner played in the communicative memory of individual consumers, who remember the wafers

<sup>2</sup> “Chocolate for everybody!” (translation by MK)



as part of their childhood: Sweets are likely to be associated with childhood because on the one hand they are part of childish desire, and on the other hand they are often used by parents as a reward (Ibid., p. 117-121). The second level of consistency the author mentions is the fact that Manner-wafers by now have been sold since 1898 and therefore can be seen as an invariable commodity of Austrian consumer society. He shows that whenever a paradigmatic artefact for Austrian consumer culture is needed in any historic account of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Manner is a much favoured choice (Kühlschelm, 2005, p. 122f). The third dimension can be seen in the self-representation of the company as part of the heritage of the Habsburg monarchy. For example, Carl Manner once called his company a fossil leftover of the monarchy (Falter, 11.11.1998, p. 76)<sup>3</sup>. This sentimental self-portrayal as a relic from a sunken epoch fits neatly into the nostalgic ways many Austrians still feel and think in terms of the “Donaumonarchie”. Throughout the history of the Second Austrian Republic this focus on the “good old days” of the monarchy can be considered a crucial device for the collective repression of happenings during the Second World War and during the Nazi-reign (Hanisch, 1994, p. 163). Because of these three complementing aspects it seems likely that Austrian consumers associate Manner with nostalgia. The question which shall now be raised is if and how this notion is being reflected and communicated in Manner’s television commercials.

## Theoretical and methodological assumptions

Television commercials are media texts whose main goal is to raise awareness for a brand/product by imbuing it with additional “socially defined meanings, values and illusions.” (Butler, 2012, p. 160). Therefore, ads create “packets of meaning” (Ibid.) that process current styles, trends, symbols, codes, attitudes and sometimes even ancient stereotypes (Kuchenbuch, 2010, p. 326). To achieve the goal of winning the

audience’s attention these “packets of meaning” are communicated in emotional ways. My analysis is therefore based on two methodological concepts. First is the semiotic analysis Thomas Kuchenbuch proposed concerning TV-commercials (p.322-367), which aims at detecting the different layers of cultural and sometimes ideological meanings hidden in commercials. This is based on the assumption that these meanings are not random associations, but possess connotations referring to conscious and unconscious knowledge and attitudes that people have gained during their socialisation processes. Therefore, different social or national groups that do not have the same knowledge about certain cultural codes, might interpret ads differently and are consequently targeted differently by advertisers (Ibid., p. 330). The second methodological concept is the type of film-analysis developed by scholars belonging to cognitive-film-studies (Smith, 2003, Plantinga, 2009). They assume that emotions play a major role in audio-visual texts. In their perspective, thinking (cognition), feeling and bodily experience are all part of the complex that is called emotion. This means that the way moving images make people feel strongly depends on the ways in which they are cognitively willing to engage with these texts, and the cultural knowledge they have concerning symbolic connotations specific to a culture (Plantinga & Smith 1999, p. 1-17). To find out how the different connotations (communicated through image, sound, music, writing, language) interact with each other and how they are used to tell a “story”, a detailed description of every shot was undertaken.

Based on these concepts the key questions in the analysis below are: Which symbols and icons appear in what contexts and how are they related to objects and persons? Are the commercials held in a realistic or fantastic/surreal tonality? What characters appear in the ad? Which common cinematic styles and filmic techniques are applied? Which emotions are displayed through these cinematic templates as well as through gestures and facial expressions? What images are there that refer to the past? What might be the target group?

<sup>3</sup> Interview Carl Manner: „Die Schnitten kratzen mich“ Falter 46/1998. Original quote: „Weil wir übriggeblieben sind. Wir sind ja fast ein Fossil.“

## The commercials of Manner<sup>4</sup>

Manner started with TV-advertising in the 1970s, which is relatively late when compared to other companies. Just like the product design of Manner, the commercials also exhibit a remarkable consistency: In the majority of the commercials only the main product (the square wafer-pack) was mentioned, they used humorous elements and focused on non-verbal communication. The only spoken words were the advertising slogan: "Manner mag man eben!"<sup>5</sup> The materiality of the wafer and the wafer-packs played an important role in these sketches. For example, an action was triggered by the sound of the opening of a wafer-pack; or one of the protagonists would draw the outline of the square wafer-pack into the air and another protagonist responded by pulling out a pack of the wafers from his pocket. Both the nonverbal communication and the humorous tone, that were the dominant strategies in the commercials broadcasted between the 1970s and the late 1990s, indicate a sort of playfulness that is supposed to associate the product with childhood.

### A wafer-pack's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday

The commercials that were broadcasted around 1998, in the wake of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the invention of the Manner-wafers, broke with this tradition. Among the five commercials that refer to the centennial, only one uses humour. The other four pursue a strategy that clearly appeals to nostalgia. Each of them has a length of 20 seconds, starts and ends with the same sequences and basically has a similar plot and structure.

The central stylistic device, that leads the viewers through the whole TV-spot and connects the different sequences, is a melancholic melody. It is primarily performed by a plucked guitar, which is supported by an artificial reverberation. The images of the first five seconds provide a sequential arrangement that consists of a rapid succession of dissolves. The various images fade into each other, producing the effect of three or four overlapping (transparent) layers. The first image-layer shows the Viennese St. Stephan's Cathedral. The sequence starts when an old Viennese tramway in Manner-pink wearing the

brand logo, makes its way from the lower left side into the direction of the camera to the right side of the frame. The transparent pink wagon soon fills almost the whole picture as the Cathedral shines through the wagon. Another pink tramway then makes its way on the low end of the frame in a straight horizontal line from left to right. It is dissolved by the Prater Ferris Wheel and the Viennese city hall. These images are followed by an extreme close-up of the moving tram. In the end one only sees the side of the pink wagon and the Manner logo flashing by from left to right. For a short moment the whole screen is pink.

The next sequence starts when a waiter appears, wearing a black suit and holding a plate with a piece of cake, dissolves out of the pink screen. Behind him one can see the typical interior of a traditional Viennese coffeehouse with dark wooden furniture and a chandelier hanging from a high stucco ceiling. The waiter places the cake in front of a young woman. The camera first focuses on the cake and then on the woman who ignores the cake, because it seems as if something outside of the café has caught her attention. Three layers are then dissolved again: the woman sitting in the coffee-house, a detail close-up of her face showing only her eyes and nose, and the Manner-tramway moving again from the lower left side into the camera's direction. Her eyes are directed to the upper left corner of the frame, while the tram passes from left to right, straight through her face. With a straight cut the viewer is taken back into the coffeehouse. Through a window behind her we see a glimpse of the pink tram. Obviously, this was what attracted her attention when the waiter brought the cake. The tram may have reminded her of something which makes her reconsider her consumer choice. Now she decides that what she actually wants is not the cake but – what else – Manner-wafers. Looking up to the waiter she tells him: "Eigentlich hätt ich lieber Manner-Schnitten."<sup>6</sup> The waiter looks at her with a knowing smile. While saying these words, she draws a square into the air. As she makes this iconic gesture, known to the consumer from older commercials, the melancholic guitar music slows down a bit, uses significant high tones and for a moment almost seems to stop. In the next shot a tablet with a 100-years special edition Manner packaging slides into the frame from the upper

<sup>4</sup> The spots are accessible in the archive of Manner, as well as at the advertising archive (*Werbemittelarchiv*), situated in the Department of Consumer and Marketing Research, WU Wien; <https://www.wu.ac.at/mcore/>

<sup>5</sup> „Manner. You just like it.” (translation by MK)

<sup>6</sup> „Actually I'd prefer Manner-wafers.” (translation by MK)

end. At this point the music accelerates again, indicating that this final moment when the Manner wafers appear causes relief. The image of the pack is dissolved again by an extreme close-up of the woman's hand putting a single wafer into her mouth. The end of the ad shows a tram conductor walking beside the parking tramway with his head bowed down while a male off-voice sights the Manner-slogan: "Tja. Manner mag man eben!"

A variety of elements in the commercial are associated with characteristic features of nostalgia. The first major factor is the melancholic music. As in feature films, music in commercials is an important device for giving viewers a hint about the emotional tone and general mood that is supposed to be communicated. Another function music has in movies is to tell the audience something about the feelings of individual characters (Smith 1999, p. 146-151). In the ad, these two aspects blur, which is supposed to increase viewer's identification with the woman. Throughout the whole commercial there is always movement: Either the objects (e.g. the tramway) move, or the camerawork uses tracking shots to induce the notion of floating. The music thereby accords with the tempo of camera work and editing, which leads to "affective congruence" (Ibid., p. 160) of music and images. Another aspect that indicates individual nostalgia is the fact that the female protagonist sits in the café alone at the beginning wearing a quite serious facial expression. Combined with the music the notion of loneliness is implied. She ignores the cake while looking dreamily out of the café's window. However, when she orders Manner-wafers, she laughs and seems almost childlike. Like a child begging for sweets, she looks up at the elderly waiter with a mischievous grin. What the ad tells us through the images and the music is that in moments of melancholia and loneliness Manner-wafers produce emotional relief by bringing back childhood memories. This narration corresponds with the strategy some marketing experts recommend concerning the use of this nostalgia in advertising (Marchegiani & Phau 2010, p. 88). What is interesting about the late 1990s nostalgia ads is that they do not only refer to individual, but also to collective nostalgia through the reference to the Viennese landmarks, the old tramway and the old-fashioned tram conductor. What is

supposed to be communicated with the help of the dissolving and the constant floating movement is that a sort of not clearly defined daydream or vision is triggered by the pink Manner-tramway in which some of the most prominent symbols representing Austrian and/or Viennese identity appear. This illustrates what Sedikides et al. (2008) described as a core function of nostalgia: the strengthening of identity through the reassuring of one's membership in a group, in this case the Austrian nation. Furthermore, Manner associates itself in a row with these characteristic landmarks, indicating, that, like them, they are also an unchangeable part of (national) identity. Obviously, a spot like the one described would not be possible if Manner would not have already had a certain nostalgic image in Austria.

## The world of the Mannerfakteur

In this last part of the article two current spots that were released in 2015 in the light of the company's 125<sup>th</sup> birthday shall be examined. These spots, each 15 seconds long, exhibit a very different approach concerning memory and nostalgia. They are part of Manner's new marketing concept that is built around the newly introduced advertising character. The Mannerfakteur, who is supposed to represent a timeless quality inspector (Horizont online, 30.01.2012, [derstandard.at](http://derstandard.at), 26.1.2012), first appeared in a commercial in 2012 and is pictured as a tall black haired dandy wearing an old style pinstripe suit and a melon-hat. In his first ad he strolls through an artificial factory (which at the same time is a puppet house) and lectures about the secret of Manner.<sup>7</sup> The antipodes to him are female workers: robot-like housemaids in pink sexualised uniforms. All commercials of this series are accompanied by a friendly song (about the Mannerfakteur) sung by a female voice. The way in which the melody is constantly repeated has some similarities to the tune of a carousel or a musical clock. One sees a mixture of symbols, motives and actions that are not logically linked to each other. These fragments, some of which refer to past times and places, others to pop-culture, are pieced together into a kind of intertextual collage of a fantastic dream world.

By 2015 the setting for a similar commercial is not the factory, but an old, artificial looking

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66kkIwkcHOI> (last visit: 25.10.2016).

cinema-palace. While the audience is made up of the housemaids, the Mannerfakteur stands on the stage in front of the cinema screen and directly addresses the camera by mentioning that because of “us” Manner is more than just a sweet. According to him, Manner also means *childhood-memories, pink energy and love at first sight*<sup>8</sup>. Suitable to his lecture we see fitting images, such as two children, one feeding the other with wafers, on the cinema screen behind him.

A second anniversary commercial is also set in the cinema-palace. It starts with an image that is composed of three layers. In front one sees a huge, old, artificial-looking film projector operated by one of the sexualised housemaids; on the second level the Mannerfakteur strolls into the picture, and on the third level the screen shows a 19th century Manner-store. The shop door opens and a red carpet uncoils into the viewer's direction. We now see the projection of a black and white portrait of Josef Manner. Simultaneously we hear the imitation of an original recording of his voice saying: “Manner für alle!”<sup>9</sup> The Mannerfakteur explains that this had been the slogan of the company's founder and that today Manner belongs to everybody who likes it. Now the camera zooms into the cinema from behind the audience, while there is a 1970s Manner-commercial being shown on screen. Afterwards the Mannerfakteur walks along in front of the screen. Behind him we see images from the 1998 nostalgia commercials (showing St. Stephan's Cathedral and the pink tramway) as well as a 19th century ad-poster with two children. Thereby, he explicitly tells us what Manner is supposed to be about: *Viennese charm and pink childhood memories*.<sup>10</sup> Again the spot is accompanied by the friendly carousel-like song. In the end the commercial references to the webpage *manner.at*.

Although the different strategies from 1998 and 2015 both utilize notions of nostalgic remembrance, they function in fundamentally different ways. Whereas the older commercials tried to visualize an authentic desire and a “real” nostalgic emotion, both individual and collective, the newer commercials assemble fragments of various real and fantastic contexts referring to the idea of “pastness”. The two different strategies

exemplify what Grainge described as the different conceptions of nostalgia understood as experienced mood and commodified mode (Grainge, 2000). Through the combination of a daydream and a slice-of-life sequence, the old commercials exhibit the psychological phenomenon of nostalgia elicited through the sensual impression of the product (eating process), through the brand itself (pink tramway), and through the images of famous Viennese landmarks. The protagonist is a random (Austrian) person in an everyday situation, with whom we are supposed to identify. Compared to this, the protagonist in the new spots is a fantasy-advertising-figure that only indirectly refers to nostalgic remembrance by lecturing about it, and by presenting media-pieces that refer to it (portrait and voice of Josef Manner, old commercials and ad-posters, picture of children eating Manner wafers). Furthermore, a vital difference between the ads can be seen in the general emotional undertone. While the 1998-ad expresses a certain seriousness and tragedy, the ones of 2015 displays a more positive, playful and childish tonality.

Unlike the reliance on non-verbal communication in the older commercials (two sentences), in the newer ones the Mannerfakteur talks throughout the whole spot and explains to the audience what Manner is supposed to mean. The old commercials demanded a relatively high cognitive involvement: The music, through the variations in speed and the affective congruence, plays an active role in telling the “story”, whereas in the newer spots the repeating song serves as mere background melody. Compared to the cinematic quality of the old commercials, the new ones seem more like an accumulation of various nostalgic, but also fantastic, stimuli referring to the past. References are made concerning the history of the company and consumers' memories but also through the use of an “old” looking fantasy cinema-palace, the huge film-projector and the clothing of the advertising figure. Different variations of nostalgia appear in the newer ads, but are not, like in the older ones, connected with each other through one audio-visual narration. Instead the newer commercials demonstrate a highly intertextual quality. The

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.manner.com/de/dank-euch-sind-wir-soviel-mehr-als-eine-suessigkeit> (last visit 25.10.2016), Original text: „Dank euch sind wir mehr als nur eine Süßigkeit. Wir sind Kindheitserinnerungen, rosa Energie, Liebe auf den ersten Blick. Dank euch sind wir 125 Jahre. Deshalb erfüllen wir eure Träume auf *manner.at*“

<sup>9</sup> „Manner for everybody!“ (translation by MK)

<sup>10</sup> Original text: „Und so gehört Manner jetzt allen die Manner mögen ... mit Wiener Charme und rosa Kindheitserinnerungen.“

introduction of a main advertising figure can be seen as a device for connecting different media texts (ad-posters, commercials, the webpage) with each other, thereby creating a parallel Manner-ad-world. In this ad-world nostalgia appears, but also other emotional stimuli, like gender stereotypes (sexualised housemaids/Mannerfakteur), are applied.

## Conclusion

The different ways nostalgia was applied in the commercials of Manner in 1998 and in 2015 has to be seen in the light of the transformation process of the media landscape during the last 20 years. Due to the competition of advertising-images consumers of today are confronted with, not only on television but also on the internet, commercials have generally become faster and demand less involvement. Whereas in the 1990s television was the leading medium, and therefore TV-ads were at the heart of marketing campaigns, by 2015 the internet had become at least as important as television. Consequently, one function of commercials today is to refer to the webpage of a brand/company. In fact, Manner's website actually uses nostalgia as well by employing social-media channels used by Manner fans to share their personal and often nostalgic memories or everyday experiences with Manner products. For example, one Instagram-post shows a wrinkled Manner package, a mountain flower, a piece of bread and two sausages in front of a stony background. The text says: "faithful companion in every alpine hike since my childhood: Manner-Schnitten & Landjäger-Würstl".<sup>11</sup> This is just one example out of many that have remarkable similarity with Manner's own marketing images. This adoption illustrates the complex interaction and entangled character of various forms of "product-communication" (Gries, 2008) in the modern media system.

To understand the reasoning behind the two different strategies one also has to consider that the target audience of the commercials is not the same. Unlike the 1990s<sup>12</sup>, today 60 per cent of Manner's production output is exported to

the countries surrounding Austria. As a result, the advertising strategy since 2012 is explicitly designed for both a national and international audience. The TV-spots have been translated into Hungarian and Czech and were also broadcast in German television (*Horizont online*, 6.8.2014). In the non-German versions, the slogan "Manner mag man eben!" was therefore changed to a more tourist friendly: "Manner, the taste of Vienna."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to the new commercials, which among others refer to aesthetics known from Hollywood movies that are also understood by a global audience, the concept of the 1998 ads was directed towards a national television audience. The whole nostalgia strategy of these commercials is built around the shared collective memory of Austrians. For viewers without this shared knowledge, the spots would probably not have had the same affective potential.

It can be concluded that the late 1990s commercials tried to enhance a real nostalgia that already existed among many Austrian consumers concerning the Manner-wafers (see above), whereas the new commercials playfully engage with nostalgic references without necessarily trying to evoke nostalgia directly. Also, because the 2015 ads only superficially refer to nostalgic memories, they omit negative facets of nostalgia like loneliness. This is one reason why they appear more positive and forward looking. This general positivity, along with the reference to pop-culture, reveals that the new commercials might not only aim at a more international audience, but also a younger one.

This implies that there is an essential weakness of commercials that refer to a "real" experienced nostalgic "mood". A commercial like the ones from the late 1990s primarily works for older consumers who already have actual nostalgic memories concerning the advertised brand, whereas to a younger audience, a crucial target group in the sweets business, the brand might appear old-fashioned. At the same time, as we can see in the 2015 commercials, the superficial use of nostalgia as a commodified "mode" means that the essential quality of this emotion, understood as a bittersweet longing for the past, is actually lost.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.manner.com/de/instagram-image-valentin-s-faithful-companion-every-alpine>, posted by Valentin S. on 18.5.2015. (last visit: 25.10.2016).

<sup>12</sup> In 1994 about one third of production was exported

(Reisinger 1995, p. 197).

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.manner.com/en> (last visit: 25.10.2016).



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# Activating Nostalgia

Cinemagoers' performances in Brazilian movie theatres reopening and protection cases

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## Abstract

Based on two recent Brazilian efforts to protect historical street-level cinemas in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, I aim to analyse the role of audience's activism in promoting engagements for the reopening and maintenance of picture houses, taking into account the handling of cinema-going memories by certain practices, actions, and discourses that I denominate as "activated nostalgia". I discuss the campaign against the closure of the Grupo Estação cinema circuit, located in Rio de Janeiro, and the recovering process of the Cine Belas Artes, an art and essay cinema situated in São Paulo. These movements operate their network across online social media and public events, hence accomplishing significant gains in terms of the maintenance of the places. I investigate the limits and intersections between enthusiastic collective performances and the uses of the cinema-goers' nostalgia expressions by institutional actors and managers involved in the final steps of the restoration projects. I suggest that the activation of nostalgia through cinema-goers mobilizations becomes a crucial axis for the formation of belonging and identity ties among cinephiles. Adding to that, it functions as a component of the uses of memory regarding street-level cinemas and its criteria for preservation, reopening or patrimonialization, often meeting the interests of forces of power engendered within governmental and private spheres.

In recent decades, mobilizations in support of old cinemas on the verge of closing or campaigns that struggle for the reopening of abandoned cinemas have erupted with a certain recurrence in several parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> There are more than few examples of groups, associations, individuals, government institutions, corporations, and other social agents who engage toward the same cause: saving historic cinemas from a definitive sociocultural and urban disappearance.

Within this scope, and in varied degrees, cinema-goers' memories of past cinema-going practices have supported the feasibility of preservation campaigns, projects, and mechanisms to safeguard cinema venues. Traditionally, these film exhibition places have performed a remarkable

role in the urban formation of both small and big cities, as well as in weaving ties of sociability among cinema customers, from regular to sporadic cinephiles, over the last century.

More specifically, this article examines the cases of the mobilizations of cinephiles and enthusiasts of *street cinemas* (traditional cinema houses mostly situated at street-level) against the impending closure of the Grupo Estação exhibition circuit and the Cine Belas Artes, respectively situated in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the two most important Southern Brazilian metropolises – and perhaps of the whole country.

For decades, both Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes exhibition rooms are cultural spaces of reference and symbolic marks of the cities of Rio

<sup>1</sup> There is an assortment of notable campaigns against the closure of movie theatres or its resurrecting through the world, at least in Europe and Americas. Among them, for instance, there are the great community engagement for the Fox Theatre support in Atlanta, Georgia, USA; three fascinating

reactivation process in Belgium (Cine De Roma, in Antwerp; Pathé Palace, in Brussels; and Cameo, in Namur), as well as cases such as the Regent Street Cinema reopening in London, UK; Cinema Imperator/Cinecarrioca Méier, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and Les Fauvettes Gaumont-Gobelins in Paris, France.

de Janeiro e São Paulo. Between 2011 and 2015, they have faced a serious financial crisis that has threatened the continuity of their operations. The Belas Artes was closed, while the Estação circuit had reached the brink of bankruptcy.

Each case involves different levels of participation of private and public actors in relation to business management, daily operation, and how the recovering from the crisis has developed. Still, what is common in these two examples of street cinemas threatened to disappear is unarguably the strong assemblage of enthusiasts, sporadic or frequent cinema-goers and cinephiles on the course of the rescue process of those cinemas.

Through mobilizations which included symbolic embraces, petitions, intense collaborations, social media campaigns, as well as political pressure, audiences engaged for the sake of cinemas united by the fight for the survival of these places in the cultural map and the exhibition market of the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, besides defending the affective relations built over time with the equipment.

A dense web of discourses thus emerged around cinema-going memories was rooted in some sort of activated nostalgia, that is, accounts organized around the evocation, reconstructions, and re-elaboration of longings and personal cinematic memories have supported the collective mobilizations and the critique made by people in both cases studied under the light of the notions of nostalgia and cinema memory.

As we shall see next, another aspect that seems to bring both objects of analysis together was the use of audience mobilizations and the power drawn from the activation of nostalgia as justification and instrument for the concretization of institutional projects. Such projects, which have involved business partnerships, political hindrances, and considerable financial investments have only consolidated right after the audiences initiatives, and were accomplished by private and state actors who were not exactly the protagonists of the demonstrations in favour of the survival of the exhibition houses, except in the case of Grupo Estação, whose manager Marcelo França Mendes was an important agent toward the impelling of the movement

This work encompasses an initial discussion of a wider research on nostalgia, cinema-going, and

movie theatre memories entitled

*“Activating nostalgia: audience mobilizations, cinema-going memories, and institutional strategies in the cases of Grupo Estação, Cine Vaz Lobo, and Cine Belas Artes.”*

(Ferraz, 2016-17)<sup>2</sup>

In that research, I am interested in understanding how people construct and represent their recollections and yearnings regarding picture houses facilities and past cinema-going habits, and how those powerful memories are used by institutional mechanisms related to contemporary cinemas reopening processes. Can the memory of cinema-going practices, which nowadays prompts mobilizations and projects in benefit of cinemas that are threatened of extinction be articulated to nostalgia as a way of structuring cinema-going memories?

The methodology of this study includes participant observation and personal interviews with costumers, activists, and institutional actors involved with the cinemas investigated. It is a multi-situated methodology drawn from ethno-historiographic methods. In this article, I am interested in shedding light on the assemblage of respondents' narratives, in the analysis of their performance on social media, and the historical data collected in archives and press publications, considering cinema as an institutional space connected to a broad cinematic culture and audience practices, taking into account the social environment as well as the economic, cultural, and political backgrounds, thus embracing almost everything that is tangential to cinemas as places. The cases cited here are the first subjects of the main research above mentioned and illustrate how, in spite of shutting down threats and pressures of a myriad spheres of power, community movements and *affective communities* act in defence of a cause that, in general manner, is based in individual and collective constructions of cinema-going memories. I believe the relevance of these cases is associated to recent Brazilian events involving the resumption of old movie theatres, which are promoted and operated by public or private initiatives, as well as the growth of campaigns against the closure or demolition of these cultural facilities. The civil society (former cinema-goers,

<sup>2</sup> This in-depth study is under development at the Centre for Advanced Studies of the Escola Superior de Propaganda & Marketing (CAEPM-ESPM), Brazil. The investigation has

connections with issues investigated by the Ways of Seeing Research Group (ESPM-CNPq). For more details, see: <https://modosvercinema.wordpress.com/>

fan communities, cinephiles, among others kind of enthusiasts) involvement in these actions is becoming increasingly high as well. There are also solid debates around the issue of preservation of symbolic and old movie theatres and other smaller picture houses which are disappearing or being occupied by protestant churches, drug stores, or department stores since the end of the last century in Brazil.

It is not difficult to perceive a kind of collective cultural trauma especially among intellectuals, cultural activists, and individuals from the middle class of Brazilian urban areas, who nowadays face difficulties in accessing films in cinemas, specially art and national films, in art picture houses located in squares or streets, not in shopping malls. From the agenda of the press to academic studies and social media discussion forums, generally, this issue appears loaded with grief for the loss of street cinemas or heavy critiques toward the disappearance of street cinemas from the everyday life. Such critiques are based in quite consistent data.

With the exception of some cultural policies of the governments of presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016), which allowed the advance of the national exhibition market, it is still concentrated in the hands of major companies. In general, these exhibition companies operate multiplexes located into shopping malls, spaces that, in Brazil, follow the logic of fleeting consumerism and, and not rarely promote socio-economical segregation and ethnic prejudice against the poorer or black people. According to official data from Agência Nacional do Cinema (Ancine), in 2015 there were only 306 street cinemas in Brazil: 10,18% of the total 3.005 existing cinema rooms in the country.

Basically, the street-level cinemas that still remain in Brazil do not have more than four screens at best. Most of those that survived the wave of closure of the last 30 decades have become alternative venues to mainstream exhibition chains. Their buildings are integrated into districts, urban centre's streets and squares, and are commonly more accessible to pedestrians. In general, these cinemas have programs focusing on art, essay or pornographic movies. Their tickets are generally more inexpensive than the prices charged by multiplexes localized in shopping malls.

It is also important to emphasize that projects sponsoring the reopening of street cinemas (like exhibition houses or cultural centres) did not necessarily promote the democratization of access to audiovisual productions. Some cinemas that are reopened with public resources are handed by the state to managers from private exhibition companies, without demanding actually efficient return in sociocultural investments. Besides, regarding these cinemas programs, managers go little beyond what is demanded by Brazilian audio visual laws in relation to reserve market of national film.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the events connected to the Grupo Estação and Cine Bela Artes constitute two interesting initiatives on which we can scrutinize some trends of the exhibition market as well as the ways how cultural policies applied to cinema have been working in Brazil. They are also very particular cases of audience engagement against the scenery of cultural and material erasure of historical picture houses and toward the defence of collective cinema-going practices connected to the public space and not shopping malls. Crossing these terrains, there are several uses of cinemas memory and the productive nature of an activated nostalgia by the audiences.

To analyse this frame, we need to consider some valuable meanings of memory and nostalgia, possible links between these concepts as well as the notion of street-level cinema as an urban, collective, and cultural facility as well as a powerful place for the production of memory, sociability, and affects.

## On nostalgia and cinemas: a short literature review

Narratives, feelings and experiences of nostalgia permeate these episodes of mobilizations in benefit of the cinemas' lives and are incorporated to preferred memory versions that cinema-goers construct about their personal and collective stories as associated to picture houses. The accounts and actions which tribute the past of glory as well as the joyous and vigorous cinema-going experiences of a bygone era can be observed as *nostalgia exercises*. It means that the characterization of yearning and past

<sup>3</sup> For more details about the Brazilian cinema policy related to the annual screen quotes, see: <http://www.ancine.gov.br/node/18023>



representations by cinema-goers is much more a distinctive way of being present and active in a delicate moment of threat of cinemas extinction, than an evasive, whining, null or consumerist orientation to the past.

In this sense, it is worthy to quote Katharina Niemeyer's comment on the word "nostalgizing" which, as I believe, is very close to the meaning of *nostalgia exercises* as proposed here. Niemeyer stresses that, although it is not found in dictionaries, the expression "nostalgizing" was used by John Tierney in an article published in 2013 by the New York Times, so to emphasize the constructive appeal of nostalgia. Differently from its given meaning as *state of being* and from the idea of passivity that accompanies the adjective *nostalgic*, the act of *nostalgizing* "would help to develop the feeling of being part of a community or a group" (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 10). Also according to Niemeyer, nostalgia is not only an expression of a feeling, but something we actually do and an act of speech that can be transformed into a creative process.

Bearing this in mind I propose the expression *activated nostalgia* to emphasize the idea of agency (practices and discourses) which seems to lie among the operations around audience activism. That active dimension of nostalgia is also very close to what Svetlana Boym (2011) calls "reflective nostalgia", which can be a creative and potentially critical type of nostalgia in contrast to the homesick, melancholic, and ritualistic "restorative nostalgia". Reflective nostalgia resides "on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging", it puts truth and tradition in doubt, and "does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones" (Boym, 2011). In these terms, nostalgia is not always retrospective, but

*"it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future. Considering the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory. While futuristic utopias might be out of fashion, nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes it is not directed toward the past either, but rather*

*sideways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space."*  
(Boym, 2011)

I argue that the power of nostalgia exercises as practised by the audiences are, in fact, so potent, in the sense described by Boym as "reflective nostalgia", that they prevent themselves from becoming "sentimentalized expressions of regret and yearning for times past" (Keightley & Pickering, 2013, p. 926). So potent, indeed, that they even work as both valuable justifications and instruments for institutional agents involved in the processes of rescuing cinemas like the ones of the Estação circuit and the Belas Artes. As I mention later, in both cases the nostalgic operations of cinephiles and cinema-goers around individual and collective memories related to their cinema-going practices, in different levels, were *sine qua non*-conditions for preventing cinemas from completely disappearing from the urban landscape.

This is particularly due to collective mobilizations and discourse networks which have worked based in a notion of nostalgia that is distinct from the complaints toward compensations or replacements demanded due to a loss; On the contrary, a the nostalgic content of actions and accounts in defence of cinemas has enabled very proactive operations, acting, by the way, as a fruitful reaction against the contemporary trends toward the erosion and erasure of spaces, memories, identity ties, sociability, and affects that, somehow, touch the trajectory of life and death of street cinema rooms.

We are facing two cases in which the production of cinema-going memories, the spontaneous mobilizations, and the collective claim of cinema fans and patrons are shown as essential conditions for the accomplishment of cinemas preservation and reopening initiatives. Nostalgia as a "specific form of passion, directed towards past passionate moments, or at least past moments of significance in a person's life course" (Bolin, 2015, p. 2) permeates that essential conditions from the very moment it is activated, but with a clear regarding to present situations and in attention to ways to avoid a desert future.

Related to memory, nostalgia includes imaginations and exaltation of that which actually we cannot enjoy anymore in the present, for time has consumed it. Often, nostalgia resonates among peers who will ensure the collective meanings of yearning, that what in Portuguese is

called *saudade*, nostalgia also seeks the recovery of a space, a time, a struggle, a feeling, a sensation which will never return with the same brilliance, as we know, until something threatens those sweet memories with the weave of amnesia or some project promises some sort of retroactive incandescence.

Through the praise of a past time and episodes generally imagined as a happy or special era that emerges from the life trajectory of cinemagoers, actions and motivations become organized in the present much in relation with the denial of forgetfulness or the hope that other moments as relevant as the last ones will be able to revive in the future, and this was not a utopian position of the enthusiasts.

In the light of this, we need to consider that the potency of these creations, as seen in the cases of Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes, works also for given strategic uses that find in cinema-going memories copious material for heritage/ patrimonialization processes, marketing projects, political plots, and achievements, profit, commercial arrangements, as well as identity belonging strategies and so on.

As Gary Cross (2015) notes, from the nineteenth century onwards, it became hard to separate the notions of nostalgia, patrimony and identity. The idea of nostalgia grew more and more complex as technology improved, the distances were shortened, and the discontinuous face of time, space, and life became clearer. It is no longer feasible to hold on to the old concept of nostalgia originated in medicine that, with a spatial nature, basically denoted the sense of “homesickness”; nostalgia has gained new contours, also embracing the idea of *lost time* (Cross, 2015; Bolin, 2015).

Over the course of Enlightenment, the non-recoverability and the irreversibility of time were acknowledged with the understanding that the past does not come back naturally; it irrupts the perception that the past can only manifest itself in the present through reconstructions and recreations anchored by rituals, relics, mementos, places of memory (Cross, 2015). “The past is a foreign country”, states Cross, echoing the famous David Lowenthal’s maxim. Gradually, the meanings of nostalgia have also gained a wider perspective, which emphasizes the double aspect of time and space.

Nevertheless, I comprehend that both studied cases deal with the topic of lost and irrecoverable times and spaces, which find in the present the possibility of their social representation

(Niemeyer, 2014; Deleuze, 1997). Processes of remembrance, protection, preservations, and patrimonialisation of movie theatres – as they are considered as spaces that engender a myriad of experiences and resonating moments – are highly dependent on affective and identity bonds cultivated by people as well as on the networks that unite these individuals around a very special place of speech and practice, that is, their conditions as cinemagoers.

The identity ties connecting the individuals to more or less structured symbolic communities often allow notable support for the manifestations of nostalgic tribute toward a lost time-space, passionately qualified as *good*. It is a virtual entity that, without great contingencies, becomes almost mandatorily unforgettable and remains to be actualized. In accord with the framing processes and necessities of the memories drawn in the present, these nostalgia expressions aim

*“to capture the kind of bittersweet remembrance of something past, something that one longs back for at the same time as knows that this moment is impossible to regain.”*

(Bolin, 2015, p. 3)

In this way, cinemas, which have performed comprehensive roles in the formation of audiences in the twentieth century, hence contributing with the urban occupation through cinematographic culture are sources of excellence to produce meanings of identity affirmations.

It is important to stress that the creation of affect bonds between the patrons of these cinemas is not limited to the sphere of the buildings spatial materiality, what confirms once more that nostalgia is not only a matter of a yearning to return to a *homeland*. Logically, the components that concern cinemas corporeality are, indeed, vital to the construction of ties between people and the movie theatre itself. Such tangible aspects pervade and define experiences and dispositions of the public (i.e. comfort and cozy design, spatial arrangements between the seats and the screen, lightning, the luxury of marble and velvet, foyer décor etc.), but although the reopening projects focus on the cinema facilities and its material heritage – as it is clear in the case of Cine Belas Artes, for instance – it is essential to highlight the intangible axis to which correspond the expressions of nostalgia.

Once applied to the cases analysed here, it let us understand that the network of memories

is activated and organized accordingly to imperatives of the present, such as the impending utter disappearance of the Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes cinemas.

### **In benefit of cinemas: the Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes cases**

The cinemas<sup>4</sup> are “collective urban leisure apparatus” (Ferraz, 2012) which have performed since the 20th Century an assortment of roles within the relationships between media and the cities. It participates in the production of the common and of ties of sociability, besides being a special component of urban occupation and the configuration of constructed spaces either in small or big urban centres. When their front doors and signs face the street, cinemas act in the quotidian of passers-by, decorate their paths, change ways, produce memories connected to a street or a square.

Predominant among the mass media of the twentieth century, nowadays, the movie theatre has other relationships with the urban space. In a time when the access to cinematographic audio visual works is enabled in large scale through other miniaturized and domesticated devices, the perception that big urban centres are connected to new levels of media and technologies becomes clear, particularly when we notice the disappearance of the street-level cinemas. It is then when the references to the past of these apparatuses and their role in the formation of sociocultural and generational contexts is highlighted.

Some cinemas, as the cinemas of Grupo Estação and Cine Belas Artes, become admirable spaces due exactly to their absence or risk of disappearing. Whenever saved from demolition and chosen as a token of a past era, they become perfect “realms of memory” (Nora, 1984). Then, the present assumes the responsibility of restoring the dignity

of these meaningful spaces, which are in process of decay due to rearrangements of media, urban, sociocultural, geographic, and political order. Between early 2014 and mid-2015, there arose a strong awareness against the disappearance of a cinema circuit called Grupo Estação, the owner of exhibition rooms in the south and west sides of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

At large, these regions aggregate middle and high classes despite the strong presence of slums and the mixture between wealth and poverty – the marking characteristics of Rio de Janeiro’s geography and social structure. In 2010, an overwhelming financial crisis has assailed the Grupo Estação and, from then on, its future was predicted by the accumulation of debts. After selling part of the shares of the company’s stock for an investment fund which failed to honour the contract terms, Marcelo França Mendes, head of the cinema exhibition circuit, has publicly disclosed the anguishing imminence of the film exhibition circuit’s bankruptcy.

The manager resorted to his own personal Facebook page to announce the crisis by means of unburdening and immediately, a legion of people began commenting and sharing the post, giving rise to one of the most significant mobilizations ever occurred in Brazil toward benefiting a commercial cinema exhibition circuit. Following this online commotion, initially restricted to Marcelo França Mendes’s personal page, there was the release of the campaign Apoio ao Grupo Estação! (Support the Grupo Estação!) through the creation of a fan page on Facebook by some enthusiasts.

The fan page started gathering emotional accounts from people who, in posts, described their life experiences as marked by going to the Grupo Estação cinemas, mainly to the Espaço and Estação Botafogo, significant rooms of the exhibition circuit. Memories of the first kiss, the beginning of a romantic relationship, comments on the movies and festivals promoted by the Grupo Estação and even personal photos and ticket images were posted in large quantities. The

<sup>4</sup> It is important to emphasize that I am addressing cinema both as an enduring medium and technology that, in several ways, is integrated into everyday life and communities, individuals, and cities macro and micro histories. The theoretical and methodological ground for this approach is the paradigm of *New Cinema History*, a research field which observes the triangulation formed by cinemas, exhibited films/film programs, and audience modes of consumption considering their multiple particularities. Based on methods

borrowed from ethnography, oral history, discourse analysis etc., and valuing the production of quantitative databases, the authors representing this trend develop a vigorous thought regarding cinema-going culture in relation to spectators’ everyday lives, tastes, and memories, as well as the spheres of power and ideology, local affirmations of identity etc. (Biltereyst & Meers, 2011; Maltby, Biltereyst, & Meers, 2012; Kuhn, 2002).

testimonials carried a strong affective charge and generally deplored the uncertain situation of the exhibition group.

The account of Denise Lopes, one of the people who writes in the *Apoio ao Grupo Estação!* fan page on Facebook, is one of those where we can perceive the engagement of strong emotional loads connected to personal experiences marked by Estação cinemas:

*"I love the Estação! Simple as that. My life, like many others, is entangled with the life of the Estação. I was proposed to during a film session at the Estação. [...] I was raised at the Estação. Still, regardless of the past, we know quite well how our cinematographic lives will be without those rooms. Nightmare. I don't even want to think about it."*

(Denise Lopes)

Another account that calls attention is Moisés Zylberberg's, who associate the Estação to stages of his life as a cinephile, showing that his cinematographic discoveries necessarily depended on the existence of this exhibition circuit:

*"The place where I have developed my character as a cinephile and human being can't close its doors. So many festivals where I have made friends with Fellini, Truffaut, Pasolini, Hitchcock, Zé do Caixão, Sganzerla, Glauber, Antonioni, Kubrick, Cronenberg, Buñuel, and thousands of others. [...] From 15 to 20 years old, I have regularly attended the Estação rooms, its cinema marathons that began at midnight and ended six o'clock in the morning when to the survivors were served breakfast."*

(Moisés Zylberberg)

It was also through the Facebook online network that the actions and acts of the fans were disclosed and organized beyond the social media network: symbolic hugs, bike tours, t-shirt sales etc. The main thread of all these aspects is the relation of sentimental proximity with such devotees have constructed over the years toward the Grupo Estação cinemas. Both online and offline, the mobilization was a pure exercise of cinema-going memories. Personal and group memories linked to the cinemas were activated and organized

according to imperatives of that present time of collective mobilization.

The modes of operation and intersection of mnemonic narratives about the survival of the Estação, I believe, are articulated in the quality of a non paralysing nostalgia: strong affections, and sentiments of longing and yearning were not meant toward the reconstruction and restoration of a perfect, crystallized past, but rather acted against the voracity of a financial crisis that threatened one of the few Brazilian art cinema circuits, in a sociocultural and commercial context where major exhibition companies prevail with their standardized cinemas.

The mobilizations were paramount in terms of gaining visibility for the risk of bankruptcy faced by the group, also in the local press. It was then when one of the biggest Brazilian cable television companies – the Grupo NET – signed a deal with the administrators of the Grupo Estação, thus assuming the cinema circuit debts. In this way, after the crisis and without risks of closure, the Grupo NET became the sponsor of the Grupo Estação. Due to contractual demand, the exhibition circuit needed to print the NET trademark in all the five cinemas of its network, which accommodate a total of 17 exhibition rooms. The historic Espaço and Estação Botafogo cinemas were renamed and now they are called Estação NET Rio and Estação NET Botafogo. The programs devoted to art films was maintained and Marcelo França Mendes is still in charge of the daily operational management routines of the cinemas.

Amidst all this, there is the interesting fact that, although the risk of bankruptcy has threatened the whole Estação circuit, the campaign's motto and most accounts from patrons were basically focused in the first cinemas of the group, the Estação Botafogo and Espaço.<sup>5</sup> Everything suggests that this have happened because these two cinemas were consolidated as cultural spaces with a prominent role in the formation of cinephiles and cinematographic leisure in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Opened in the 1980s, with programs always far from the Hollywood mainstream, both cinemas are part of a long trajectory of promotion of audience access to Brazilian and international art and essay films. The roots of this vocation is connected to these cinemas very own origins. For instance, the Estação Botafogo, the first cinema

<sup>4</sup> Both cinemas are in the same street at few feet from each other, in the district of Botafogo, a bourgeois region within the carioca south side, with large residential extensions in

spite of its bohemian and intellectual bias, strong commercial activities and the intense flow of vehicles and passers-by.

of the Grupo Estação circuit, was opened as a cinema club in 1985 in the rear of a gallery where Cinema Coper used to be.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, on the Facebook fan page of the movement, the testimonials are loaded with nostalgic references to an almost sacred past of discoveries. Deploring the risk of disappearance of cinemas, these accounts nostalgically recollect a time full of initiation rituals in cinematographic genres, filmographies, or directors, and of construction of cinephile careers, tastes, and identity ties.

That personal and collective memories connected to cinema-going experiences and audio visual consumption in the case of the Grupo Estação were produced and intertwined with the intention of saving the Estação cinemas. Besides that, that powerful activation of nostalgia – in terms of actions, discourses and reflections in benefit of the present and future of the cinemas – was gained an institutional bias when it was served to prove, directly or indirectly, the historical and sociocultural relevance of that exhibition circuit, and so allow tangible chances of take the whole Estação out of the crisis, getting the attention of the cultural marketing sector of the NET Group. In the combination of these vectors, expressions of nostalgia, without contingencies, were activated and intersected this process. However, the audience activism was restricted to Facebook and the acts performed in public spaces; at least until now, it seems to be no sound interaction from enthusiasts after the preservation of the Grupo Estação by the Grupo NET because, after all, that rescue process was merely a commercial transaction.

In the situation of the second object of this analysis, the Cine Belas Artes – a notable art cinema located in the most populated Brazilian city, São Paulo –, what calls attention are the intricate processes of reopening and patrimonialisation occurred between 2011 and 2015 through the active participation of the cinema-goers organized into the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* (Cine Belas Artes Campaign) as well as an assortment of public and private agents and power spheres. The Cine Belas Artes was originally opened as Cinema Trianon in 1956. In 1967, its program started to focus on art and essays movies and its slogan became “spectacle, controversy, and culture” (Soriano & Da Silva). After some reforms in the structure of the building and the division of the cinema into three separate rooms, there was a severe arson fire in 1982 and then it only reopened in 1983

under the management of the French exhibition company Gaumont.

Gradually, the cinema started to deteriorate and after being managed by some administrators (including the Grupo Estação, in 2001), it was led to the verge of closure by a financial crisis. In this occasion, it was organized an early movement in defence of the venue – “Viva o Belas Artes”. In 2003, a group of partners formed by producers and film directors initiated to manage the cinema, which, in the following year, relayed on the sponsorship of HSBC. However, the bank decided to quit sponsoring the cinema in 2010. Lacking funds to pay the costly rental of the building, the main manager of the venue, André Sturm, closed the Belas Artes doors a year later. So, it began the ruin of one of the most important places of São Paulo in terms of audience formation and activities for cinephiles.

For the preservation of what they have called *cultural and affective patrimony*, the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* was founded in 2011 by people who were sympathetic for the cause of the cinema reopening. Regular and sporadic customers and intellectuals still integrate the group that remains united so far. Back then, the objective was struggling in several areas to ensure the heritage listing of the Belas Artes building and its reopening as a cinema. To the context of the mobilization originated by civil society, there were added the steps of an intricate process full of disputes over power including public/government/juridical spheres, the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* itself, the cinema manager André Sturm, and the real estate owners.

Amongst a range of conflicts, an agreement between the São Paulo Mayor Hall, the manager André Sturm, and the national public bank Caixa Econômica Federal has enabled the reopening of the cinema. The bank became the sponsor of the space that currently is called Caixa Belas Artes. Recently, in 2015, on state level, the Belas Artes converted into a heritage listed building due to its importance in the qualified formation of audiences in São Paulo. As to the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* – whose initial work involved the gathering of documents, pressuring the public powers, collecting signatures for petitions, etc., was extremely relevant so that everything could, in fact, initiate – it was relegated to a mere supporting role as the process of Cine Belas Artes became increasingly institutionalized.

According to the one of the leaders of the campaign, Afonso de Lima (personal



communication, May 5, 2016), nowadays the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* has neither a solid participation in the cinema daily operation nor a position in the administration, despite its chair in the Cine Belas Artes Advisory Board, commission that, in fact, does not work regularly. It is also curious to observe that, officially (in Cine Belas Artes and São Paulo Mayor Hall/ State Government websites or even in the press accounts on the restoration of the cinema), the *cinemagoers' performances* represented by the *Movimento Cine Belas Artes* do not accomplish much visibility, despite its crucial participation in the struggle for the reopening of the cinema. For the participants of the *Movimento Belas Artes*, the prevailing narrative, as usual, concedes the success of the reopening to the cinema manager, Sturm, as well as the *benevolences* of the public spheres (which have enabled the cultural patrimonialization of Cine Belas Artes) and Caixa Econômica Federal.

In face of these interests and power relations between the agents connected to the rescue processes in the two cases presented here, I think that the most significant difference between the cases of Belas Artes and Estação lies in the explicit governmental participation in the reopening process and in investment for the economic feasibility of that picture house located in São Paulo, while the cinemas of the Rio de Janeiro's circuit common traits between both cases, such as the huge presence of the private initiative in both administration arrangements and the key mobilizations of the civil society (acting by the cinemas' fans and audiences) against the closures. The nostalgia activation aspect and its uses by the projects is also a touch point between these two cases, as above mentioned.

In this way, considering the associations between nostalgia, media dynamics and communication technologies (the spheres where the dispositive movie theatre is located), as well as their intense contribution for the formation of communities and senses of identity belonging, it is mandatory to underline that the constructive aspect of *activated nostalgia* can be captured by political, commercial, and civil-social purposes.

When these three levels interact, as noted at some points of the analysed cases, the question grows even more complex. In general, what is most noticeable about these uses, after all, are the vectors essentially connected to consumption, marketing, and the promotion of the image of the agents involved in preserving cinemas – be they

governments, corporations, or banks. Niemeyer states that:

*"The use of cultural products and symbols of the past for political issues is frequent. It is also a successful commercial strategy of the economic sector. The marketing of nostalgia is flourishing, playing with the nostalgic emotions of potential consumers."*

(Niemeyer, 2014, p. 6)

The activation of nostalgia through cinemagoers mobilizations becomes a crucial axis for the formation of belonging and identity ties amid cinephiles, as seen above. Adding to that, it functions as a component of the uses of memory regarding street cinemas and its criteria for preservation, reopening or patrimonialization, often meeting the interests of forces of power engendered within governmental and private spheres.

## Short final notes

The experience of memorable moments, the sharing of a common *existential territory* and multiplicities developed for beyond the individual, resulting in a sense of collectivity marked by the *logic of affects* (Guattari, 1992) are aspects that operate in narratives constructions and activations, feelings and experiences of nostalgia. Situations of sociability and private life; watched, felt, and discussed films; smells; tastes; colors; varied sensations... that are assembled vectors which are connected to an intensive participation of the cinemas in the construction of "memory of urban places" (Jodelet, 2010) and personal memories of people who enlist themselves in the urban context by a collective experience.

There will always lay a danger of vectors being captured and of the production of clichés about the past that prevent the creation of alternative (and thus bolder) discourses that, due to their transversality, may escape consensus and homogenization practiced by the instrumentalization and officialization of memory.

The less these powerful aspects related to the expressions of *activated nostalgia* are prioritized by the institutional stages of the cinemas reopening and protection, the less are the chances for the enthusiasts themselves – the figures who actually commanded the departing point of the whole

thing through civil society campaigns and audience activism – to participate with their creative potentials on the fate given to the cinemas that are (or were) so dear to them. The nostalgia works through its active character, such as the movie theatre draws strength from memorable social, artistic and aesthetic aspects which, in turn, resonate in us and in our spaces of sharing. Both, nostalgia and cinemas, can reach much further beyond a simple ode to thematic ruins or profitable mummifications.

Due to the context of bewilderment, where the decline of territorial and symbolic marks which are paramount for the weaving and continuity of some identity and sociability ties is evident, the practices connected to activated nostalgia, understood as memory exercises that deal with the productive force of our forms of remembrance, might suggest alternatives to the establishment of such cultural spaces and collective practices, among which I include street-level cinemas and the cinema-going experiences. On the

account of important media, technological, as well as sociocultural and urban arrangements transformations in the last 30-40 years, street-level cinemas and the uses we make of them, today, are attempting to find the means to keep themselves both active and present in the cities and our lives. I believe customers and cinephiles mobilizations stem from this.

However, at least in Brazil, there is a long way to go until the power of these spontaneous mobilizations can effectively persist on the operations of the reopened and restored cinemas, in spite of the hard structures of the market and government cultural policies. It is urgent to think of meanings and ways of dealing with the potencies of nostalgia in face of the engagement of cinema memory and cinema-going practices; it is especially urgent when the instrumentalizations and strategic uses of these vectors tend to weaken, capture, modulate or crystallize the energies of what Pickering and Keightley (2006) call the “positive dimension in nostalgia” (p. 921).

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# Postcolonial Posts on Colonial Pasts

## Constructing Hong Kong nostalgia on social media

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### Abstract

Hong Kong nostalgia has become a trademark aesthetic in representations of the city from literature and cinema to branding and advertising. This article traces the social construction of Hong Kong nostalgia back to digital media platforms and the everyday activities of users sharing and commenting historical images and textual memories related to the city's colonial past. In dialogue with recent scholarship on time, media and memory, the authors identify a large Facebook group dedicated to the city's colonial times and follow the activities of its members through qualitative methodologies guided by a network sensibility. By engaging with the circulation of historical photographs, personal narratives and material culture; and by examining the media practices involved in sharing and reconstructing local memories, the authors provide an ethnographically grounded portrayal of how everyday social media interactions contribute to a larger process of nostalgizing the city.

*"As Madeleine Albright proclaimed, 'We will be watching to see that the Hong Kong of tomorrow is like the Hong Kong of today.'*

*But what kind of wish, promise, and threat is it to say that we should make sure that the Hong Kong of tomorrow is like the Hong Kong of today? It is a strange notion—a curse even—to want any place to remain the same for fifty years."*

Chow, 1998, p. 103

### Borrowed times

"Long ago and far away..." – With this poetic opening Dagfinn Gleditsch<sup>1</sup> begins a long Facebook group post in which he describes a happy childhood spent in Shatin, a district of the New Territories, the northern region of Hong Kong. The twenty photos he attaches to the post offer the viewers a glance at his personal memories: a blonde little boy standing along with his siblings, his parents, and his friends. According to the architecture of the house visible in the background, they seem to be somewhere in China – as he writes in the same post: "It was a simple white building, but the roof was Chinese-style; glazed, with ornamented corners and a

decorative 'bun' at the apex". Yet other elements of the same pictures, such as the absence of any Chinese person in the frames, give the setting an uncanny aura.

Dagfinn's photos provide an intimate perspective of Hong Kong's colonial era, a time when the city became home to numerous foreign families that had moved to Hong Kong in search of a more comfortable life, enjoying the privileges of living and working under the British administration of the colony. Today, Dagfinn's photos are relics of a bygone era during which the British Crown ruled the city, and yet they have become quite popular online: his post was shared more than fifty times by other members of the particular Facebook group, many of whom are younger

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article, we use the actual names of Facebook users, quotations from their public group posts and screenshots of photos they uploaded after obtaining their explicit consent on a case-by-case basis. We have made this decision in order to respect the authorship of personal

memories, a concern shared by many group members and reflected in the sharing ethics of the researched Facebook group itself. Selective blurring of personal details and pseudonymization have been employed whenever we could not obtain explicit consent from individual users.

Hong Kong locals who were not yet born at the time of the events portrayed in the photos, and who have for the most part grown up in the post-handover period.

After 150 years of British colonial rule, Hong Kong was handed over to China on the 1st of July, 1997 (Chow, 1998). The “return to the motherland”, however, was not experienced by many Hongkongers as a welcomed liberation from a usurping foreign power, but rather as a loss of their cultural home (Mathews, 2000). This sense of loss, that Abbas (1997) has termed “culture of disappearance” leaves young and old Hongkongers with ambivalent sentiments towards their cultural identity (Chun, 1996). In this context, nostalgic images and narratives of the city are often used to piece together a local identity that is constantly in the making (Ma, 1999), and nostalgia itself, for its capacity of filtering the past and selectively reframing history, becomes a strategy to achieve a sense of stability in times of social and political transformation (Huppatz, 2009). In the last decade, with the popularization of mobile devices and the growth of local online communities (Fung, 2006), the making of Hong Kong nostalgia has moved to social media platforms, where users are able to piece together personal memories and archival content through communal practices (Grace, 2007). The resulting repertoires of images, videos, personal narrations, historical testimonies and discussions, all contribute to the construction of a memorialized Hong Kong, ready to be enjoyed and appropriated by larger user audiences attracted by the fascinating atmosphere of an often flattened and romanticized colonial past. Riffing on Ann Anagnost’s definition of “national past-times” (1997), the paper focuses on what we term “colonial past-times”: the sharing and commenting of nostalgic images and texts related to Hong Kong’s recent colonial past on social media. We approach these memory practices by drawing on a wide range of qualitative methods guided by a common movement “from object to flow” (Markham & Lindgren, 2014). Taking a cue from individual posts, links and images appearing on our daily social media feeds, we trace the online dissemination of Hong Kong nostalgia across Facebook pages and other digital media platforms, while also interacting with individual content producers and participating in a large Facebook group dedicated to the city’s past. Through this engagement with the circulation of nostalgic content about Hong

Kong and the media practices involved in its construction, we provide an ethnographically grounded description of how these “colonial past-times” contribute to a larger process of nostalgizing the city, and offer a shared “memory project” to an online community (Kearney, 2012) that interfaces with larger socio-political issues determining the city’s present and its possible futures.

Throughout the following sections, we approach the social construction of Hong Kong nostalgia in dialogue with a growing body of scholarship unraveling the intricate relationships between media, time and memory. Time is both experienced and constructed through media, and digital media in particular play an important role in transforming the temporality of social interactions – in the words of Emily Keightley: “it is in the nexus of interrelationships between media technologies, content and social practices of use that modern mediated temporalities arise” (2012, p. 14). Time is socially mediated, and digital media platforms can become sites for practices of memorization and provide tools for the communal construction of nostalgias.

Coined by Johannes Hofer in 1688 as a medical diagnosis, the term nostalgia has been widely discussed and questioned in differently situated contexts, from East Germans’ Ostalgie for the GDR (Boyer, 2006) to the obsession for elusive post-communist nostalgias (Todorova, 2010) and from the “unsettling” implications of imperial and colonial longings in postcolonial African nations (Bissell, 2005) to the retro-futurist memories mobilizing Shanghai’s urban imaginations (Lagerkvist, 2010). Approached through Svetlana Boym’s productive distinction between its restorative and reflexive extremes (2007), Hong Kong nostalgia diffracts into a hazy spectrum spanning from the *nostos*-oriented restorative rhetoric of former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s threatening promise, to the *algia*-centered reflexive recollections of Dagfinn’s personal memories and faded photographs.

## Asia’s World City nostalgia

The trademark atmosphere of nostalgia that characterizes many representations of Hong Kong has become a kind of aesthetic trend that, as Rey Chow points out, gives the city “an appeal of ethnographic field” (1993, p. 73). In his *Atlas*:



*The Archaeology of an Imaginary City*, originally published in 1997 (the year of the handover), local author Dung Kai-cheung portrays Hong Kong through its imaginary double Victoria, a city unearthed from maps and documents dating back to imperial and colonial times (Dung, 2011). Dung both embraces and criticizes Richard Hughes's definition of the city as a "borrowed place in a borrowed time" (Hughes, 1968), while local poet Leung Ping-kwan titles his collection of poems on Hong Kong *City at the End of Time* (Cheung, 2012). Deeply connected to the city's colonial history, nostalgia has evidently become a central component of Hong Kong's cultural identity, poetic imaginary, and even urban branding. As a result, the concept of Hong Kong nostalgia has been consistently discussed across several scholarly publications about local cultural industries, as well as in anthropological accounts of the city's colonial and postcolonial times (Cheng, 1997; Evans, 1997).

In a similar way, local identity has been often articulated by mass media in terms of memories and nostalgia. As argued in Ma (1998), television has been a central arena for the construction of nostalgic memories in Hong Kong. Popular television programs anchor collective re-inventions of the Sino-Hongkongese identity, which is constructed in opposition to that of the Chinese mainland, and seen instead as a "melting pot" (p. 333). In a later article, the same author analyzes a specific TV commercial narrating the story of a Hong Kong family of fishermen against the background of three crucial historical events (the Typhoon Wanda in 1962, the water shortages of 1963, and the rainstorm floods of 1972) and shot in a style resembling the documentaries produced by the Hong Kong Film Unit, a "publicity arm of the colonial government, headed by expatriates" (Ma, 2001, p. 138). The author identifies in this specific commercial a desire for continuity in the fin-de-siècle context of inevitable change, resulting in an entwinement between local identity and recuperations from the colonial past that Mathews (2000) calls "cultural supermarket" (p. 134) in which Chinese and cosmopolitan identities are selectively picked by Hongkongers in different moments of their social lives according to a diverse array of circumstances (Mathews, 2001, p. 300).

Besides literature and mass media, nostalgia has been taken up as an aesthetic device and a marker of locality by multiple media industries.

Lee (2009) looks at Hong Kong's post-nostalgic film industry, framing nostalgia in relation to its links with memory and locality (p. 2). Nostalgia is for Lee a "post" feeling that underlines both a break from the old and a discovery of the old within the new (p. 6). The intertextual references within nostalgic films are included in "repertoires of clichés" (p. 11) that underpin Hong Kong's history of economic success. Through an analysis of two nostalgic commercials by Vitasoy, a popular brand of soybean beverages, aired during the 1980s and 1990s, Chan (2015) identifies the links between nostalgia and Hong Kong's film industry as a twofold association: on the one hand, it is an imitation of old-school cinema, but on the other it also marks a discontinuity with the past through the reconstruction of the idealized decade of the 1930s during the 1980s, or of the 1950s during the 1990s (pp. 146-147). These two decades have been defined by Huppatz (2009) as the years of Hong Kong's "nostalgia fever" (p. 15), when a nostalgic style was adopted not only in the film industry, but also in architecture, postcards and fashion, with the aim of constructing a local identity as a way to cope with the anxiety caused by the quickening approach of 1997 (Chan, 2015). Huppatz also observes that the framework of reference when talking about Hong Kong's nostalgia is in fact the Shanghai of the 1920s and 1930s, which "embodied Hong Kong's contemporary aspirations and fears" (2009, p. 15). As Abbas (1997) poignantly summarizes, Hong Kong has reacted to the fear of post-Handover disappearance with an explicit use of nostalgia in many aspects of modern life – from architecture to consumer culture – rediscovering its colonial past in search of a viable local identity (p. 4).

## Following the social construction of nostalgia

Our interest in the construction of nostalgic representations of Hong Kong on social media was spurred by the popularity of online content capitalizing on the affective implications of the city's memories. Throughout our Facebook feeds in particular we routinely noticed posts, shared by local residents, expats, tourists and foreigners alike, that played on Hong Kong nostalgia: some were topical, linked to specific

media events, such as *Old Patten family photos making some Hongkongers nostalgic*; others were more general and recurred quite regularly, like *Hong Kong in the 1950s captured by a teenager*. Most of these posts were not original content contributed by a specific Facebook user, but rather links to stories published by news websites or online magazines, and were extensively re-shared and commented as they circulated across social media feeds: “When the Pattens were here, it was pleasant and like Heaven!” reads one of the many comments to the story about the last British Governor of Hong Kong; “I have to say that even if I don’t like the fragmentation of today’s Hong Kong urban landscape, still every time I get to see the Hong Kong of the old times, feeling the breath of life through the photos is endlessly fascinating”, comments another user on the story about celebrated local photographer Ho Fan. As Helen Grace notes, by the late 2000s Facebook had displaced blogging as the most popular platform for sharing content among Hong Kong’s Internet users (2014, p. 11), and its availability is often identified by locals as a factor distinguishing Hong Kong’s Internet from that of Mainland China. Thus, Facebook appeared as the obvious starting point of our exploration of digital media and nostalgia in Asia’s World City. In terms of methodologies, we combined participatory qualitative research and ethnographic studies of everyday digital media

use. Qualitative and participatory inquiry on digitally mediated communications has been thoroughly theorized under different descriptors such as digital, virtual or cyber-ethnography (Boellstorff, 2008; Coleman, 2010; Hine, 2013; Horst & Miller, 2012), and a rich methodological literature provides helpful reminders of the limitations and necessary erasures resulting from ethnographic research focusing on small scales and peculiar socially mediated settings (Modan, 2016, p. 102). Our process of research design for this project has been inspired by the intuitions provided by Markham & Lindgren (2014) in their proposal for the adoption of a “network sensibility” when dealing with heterogeneous forms of data flowing through complex media ecologies:

*“A network sensibility encourages greater sensitivity to movement, connection, and serendipity, both in the phenomenon and in the researcher’s relationship to this flow. The goal is to embody the perspective of moving with and through the data, rather than standing outside it as if it can be observed, captured, isolated, and scrutinized outside the flow.”*  
(2014, p. 11)

What Markham and Lindgren propose is to enrich the participatory efforts of digital media ethnography by generating multiple layers of data, following different kinds of actors (users,

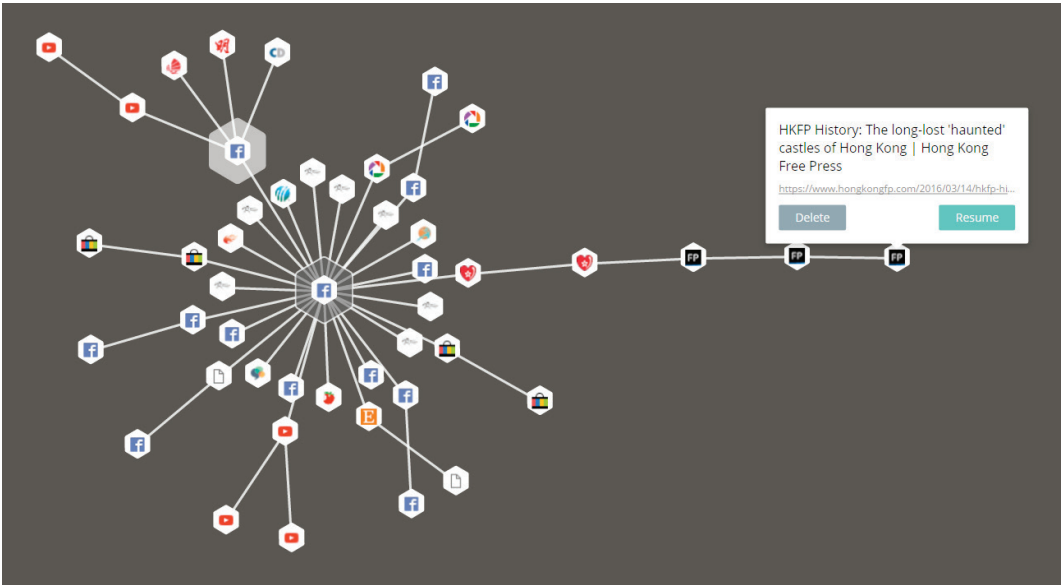


Fig. 1: A browsing map representing one day worth of content accessible through direct links from the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” group page – the majority of links are internal to Facebook, but secondary links point to external sources like news websites, content aggregators, other social media platforms and e-commerce services.

issues, objects, events, technologies, etc.) and iterating ways of mapping them in order to reveal their patterns and their configuration in overlapping assemblages. This is particularly helpful when dealing with different kinds of content shared across digital media platforms forming complex assemblages of memory and nostalgia.

From our serendipitous beginning in the everyday experience of Facebook feeds, we decided to start following the flow of data by conducting one month of regular Facebook usage, recording the content shared by our contacts that was related to Hong Kong and its past, and following links to the original sources. One of the main results of this period of unobtrusive and undirected observation was the tracing of most of the relevant content to several Facebook groups dedicated to different aspects of Hong Kong's colonial past (with names such as "Vintage Hong Kong", "The Battle of Hong Kong", "I Was in Hong Kong When It Was Still British", and so forth). Given the limited scope of this research project, and following the recommendations received from helpful local friends, we decided to focus on the largest of these groups, called "Hong Kong in the '60s", as a starting point for our inquiry into the mediation of urban nostalgia. At the time of writing, "Hong Kong in the '60s" is a public Facebook group counting 9,564 members, among which we discovered several of our own existing contacts. The group is overseen by four administrators, and its description defines it as

*"An inclusive, eclectic and multi-cultural group who are linked by an interest in or knowledge of Hong Kong in the 1960's. This is reflected in our postings and pictures. We ask that members use respectful behaviour and politeness to others when posting."*

We immediately experienced this explicit emphasis on respectfulness and politeness: when we tried to become group members, one of us was rejected and pre-emptively banned, requiring further negotiations with Jonathan Ho, one of the group administrators. As another administrator later explained, this was due to previous disturbances brought about by "some strong characters with interesting personalities" and linked to an "expat HK syndrome" that he described in the following terms:

*"I think part of the expat HK syndrome is partly one-upmanship, i.e. my HK is better than your HK, guilt attributed to privileged lifestyle of the gweilo [foreign] kids, the segregation of society, trying to prove that you're not racist because you went to an ESF school. It would take ages to try and explain. However, I think people forget they are on social media and write the most awkward things at times, without thinking about what they are saying."*

After explaining our research project and its purposes to Jonathan and becoming accepted as group members, we introduced ourselves to the group with a public post that the admins kindly pinned to the top of the group page for an entire week, allowing other group members to take notice of our self-disclosure and leave questions and comments. In the same pinned post, we also asked members of "Hong Kong in the '60s" to take part in a short exploratory survey we designed to get a sense of the group demographics.

Over the first few days, 56 users completed the survey, highlighting the peculiar nature of the most active group members: only 7% of the respondents were aged 20 to 40; the remainder were equally distributed in the 40-60 and 60-80 year-old brackets. Roughly half of them were born in Hong Kong, one fifth in the United Kingdom, and 13% in the United States, followed by only a few born in other countries. Almost 80% of the respondents lived in Hong Kong for more than a year, and they primarily considered themselves as "expats", although "local" or "resident" was the second most popular choice, in some cases with overlaps. Almost all of them (96%) declared to miss Hong Kong's past, and three of four respondents agreed that the city was better in the past than in the present. When asked about their motivation to join this specific Facebook group - and despite the interest-centered self-description of the group - "interest in historical photos" and "keeping in touch with others" were the least popular motivations, with 63% of respondents choosing instead "to share my memories of Hong Kong" and 86% "to enjoy other people's memories".

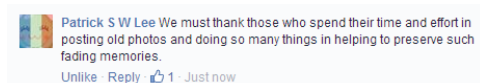


Fig. 2: The many comments and resources shared by other members under our introductory post testify to the connection between the Facebook group, time, and practices of memory preservation.

For the following month, we conducted a period of systematic data collection, participating in the group and archiving all the new posts on a daily basis, taking note of the author, the type of post (text, link, photos, video, etc.), the textual content, the number of “Likes”, “Shares” and “Comments” accumulated in one day, the most representative comment, the main function of the post (personal memory, collective memory, information request, information sharing, etc.) as well as the languages used in both the post and its comments. When possible, we followed up our data collection by interviewing group members (five in total) through Facebook messages and e-mail conversations. In the next section, we present a number of observations drawn from this repertoire of content and from our ethnographic participation in the group, evidencing how nostalgia for Hong Kong’s colonial past is constructed by members of this specific Facebook group out of personal memories, historical photos, comments to news stories, and social media interactions.

### Daily posts about colonial pasts

Besides seeing the group’s posts pop up in our own Facebook feeds, every time we left the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” page open in our browsers we would soon find a notification pointing upwards towards newly posted content. Group members were especially active in the late afternoon and evenings (Hong Kong time), and the posting members seemed to belong to a core group of users: the 176 posts we collected during one month were posted by 53 unique user handles, with the most active user contributing 30 posts in total over a few days. Group posts would sometimes stray away from the declared decade of interest, and the administrators seemed to be quite flexible on the matter – a photo of Lady Diana taken in 1989 was in fact widely liked and re-shared by other members. The large majority of group posts we collected are in English, and only a minority (14 of 176) in Cantonese; two thirds of these posts received comments over their first day, and the language of the comments is also predominantly English (with only 9 posts receiving comments in Cantonese). Members with local-sounding names regularly used English to interact in the comment sections, and members with English names routinely used the automatic translation feature provided

by Facebook to read non-English posts and comments, occasionally complaining about its inconsistency: “Why is the English translation such gobbledygook?”



Fig. 3: A typical post in the group, with various comments praising the memory value of the photo (“Such nostalgic photo Kate”, “Such an evocative photo”), and others sharing relevant information:

- *Tim Song: “I was in QE till 67 and I think I remember your Dad. Mr Chu was then the School Principal and Ms Betty Lee was the Vice School Principal.”*
- *Kate Gubbins: “Thanks Tim. I will write on the back of the photo for future reference.”*

### Photographic memories

Slightly more than half of the group posts we collected included one or more images. These were often digital photos or scans of historical materials like magazines, posters, postcards, and analogue photographs. Some of these images were reposted from already existing collections hosted on other Facebook pages or digital media platforms like Flickr and Pinterest, but most of them were original contributions by individual members, contextualized with personal details and often enriched by additional collective commentary. For example, in a series of posts Ingrid Kivikoski-Schroder shared several re-photographed postcards with the group, which had short descriptions such as “This is a postcard I received from my father – back in 1961” or “Another postcard from my father – dated 1963. On the back it says – ‘small cargo Junk sails across Victoria Harbour’”. These historical postcard photos were liked by many users and even re/shared by two or three people on their own Facebook profile, with some group



members eagerly contributing to an accurate reconstruction of the related memories:

*"With the Mandarin, Hilton Hotel, and the reclamations to the left of the Star Ferry Pier, that can't be 1961, the photo was taken in 1963, maybe early 1964. Are you sure the postmark doesn't say 1964?"*

(Alun Chisholm)

*"I used transfer busses here and often dreamed of taking the Macau Ferry! Alas, I never made it to Macau but I watch the 1959 movie 'Ferry to Hong Kong' every time it shows on Cable TV in Maryland!"*

(Sonny Davis)

Other times, scanned or re-photographed historical photos were shared with the group in search of more detailed information. When posting a dated photo of a trafficked road with cars and trams, Sai Chong Jack Lee asked: "Anyone has an idea of the original source of this photo? Does the date 4/9/1963 refer to the date pictured?" In a few hours, his post received 137 likes, was shared by 15 users, and among the 22 comments someone rapidly identified the source of the image, including the brand of a pictured vehicle:

*"This photo was taken by Government Information Services in 1963 at Shanghai Street, Kowloon. The turntable ladder was made by Leyland/Merryweather."*

(Lam Ka Yan)

As Helen Grace concludes from her research on Hong Kong bloggers, the city presents a peculiar case study for photographic practices because of a "particular intensity of image production in the region" (2014, p. 12) resulting from its history of photo camera manufacturing and its recent concentration of mobile media adoption. Grace identifies "a contemporary nostalgic affection for Hong Kong's 'intangible heritage'" such as open air food stalls and old shops in the photographic practices of digital media users. She also describes social media platforms as "archives of the present" making "material which would once have remained hidden in unedited form" available (2007, p. 470). Yet, Grace attributes this function to the digitality of these contemporary images, suggesting that "ubiquitous user-generated imagery may involve a different relation to time and memory than exists in the case of analogue photography" (p. 473). Conversely, as illustrated by the analogue photographs shared and commented in this Facebook group, the same "archives of the present" can be used to preserve and rediscover the past regardless of the original medium, since the temporality of photography is an open-ended continuum stretching "between the moment of exposure and the subsequent material life of a photograph" (Lister, 2012, p. 45).

## Nostalgic narratives

Photos posted in the group were often accompanied by nostalgic narratives conveying feelings of loss and recovery through memory.

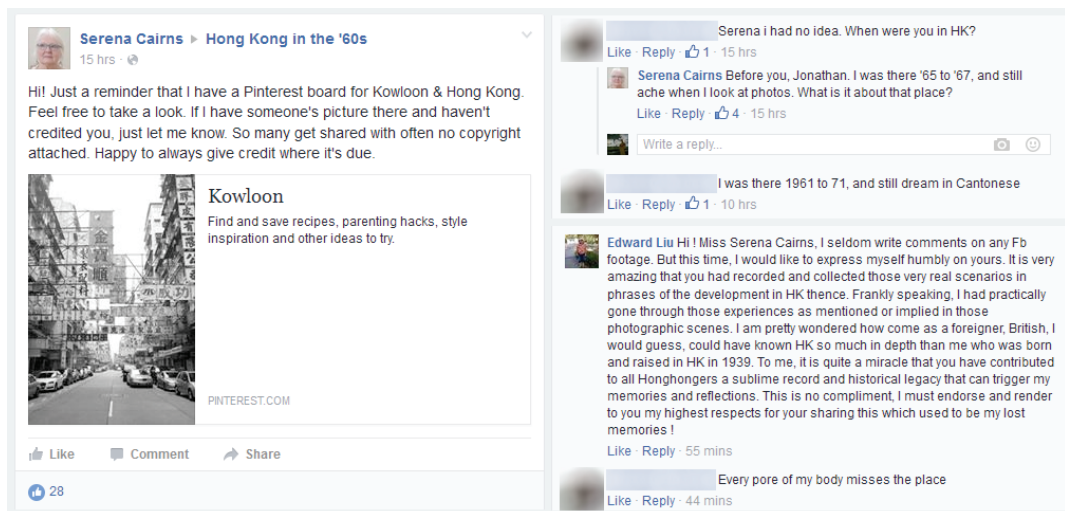


Fig. 4: Serena Cairns shares her Pinterest page dedicated to photos of the Kowloon District, and other group members reply to her "sublime and historical legacy" by sharing their feelings of nostalgia for the city in terms of aching, Cantonese dreaming, lost memories, and physical longing.



Personal family histories were sometimes painstakingly recollected in texts characterized by an emphatic style and attention to the intersection of times and places. Occasionally, group members would wallow in fictionalized memories, providing imaginative descriptions of moments that “could have been” and re-enacting experiences through the present moment of writing. For instance, Billy replies to an old photo of the Causeway Bay area (Fig. 5) with the following comment:

*“Memory goes back to 40 years.....the public light bus station....just the left...you can sit down with wooden seats just a feet up to the ground....table not high with 2-3 feet tall.... order a big size of Congee from there...I still have some clear images on the owner, the team and the design of this congee.”*

In this kind of narrative, actions that were routine in the past become vague memories blurred by time, their active recall expressed through repeated ellipses, and the remembered events are described in the present, providing other group members with a vivid picture of how it would feel to walk through the intersection captured in the photo.



Fig. 5: The Causeway Bay area in the 1960s. Old photos trigger nostalgic memories reconstructed collectively through sentimental narratives. Photo credit: Billy Ho.

Group members were also happy to expand on their personal histories, often only hinted at throughout posts and comments, when interviewed individually:

*“[...] My parents moved to HK in 1954. My father was a chargehand (one down from foreman) in a dockyard in Sunderland. He saw a job advertised at Taikoo Dockyard. About a month later, having never left Britain before, he was on his way. Mum followed shortly after. My sister was born in 1955 and I came along*

*in 1964. Both of us born at The Matilda. We went to Quarry Bay School (The original one opened by Swires on the Kings Road) and then onto Island School. I left after a year to go to boarding school in England. My father retired in 1984. It was my home for 20 years. [...] I fell in love with Modern Asian history as a kid via the causes of the Vietnam war and as an aside I got interested in the Battle of HK during WW2. There were so many veterans around us and having lived in houses occupied by the Japanese a small boy's imagination is sparked.*

*[...] I came back every Christmas, Easter and summer holiday between 76 and 84. It is odd that HK never leaves your system but it affects each of us differently. I mainly lived in the working class areas of HK so saw (HK) life from a different perspective. I think it also helped being born into a family of working class economic migrants, with socialist tendencies.”*

(Interview with Geoff Douglass, March 2016)

Geoff's recollection moves from a detailed chronology of his family history to an explicit reflection on the staying power of Hong Kong and its powerful affects shared, in different ways, by what he identifies as a community of users.

### Materializing the past

Another popular category of content emerged from our coding of one month of group activity: posts about second-hand and found objects resurfacing from the users' past lives in the city. Besides postcards and analogue photographs, group members recurrently shared pictures of all kinds of items they unearthed from boxes or drawers: tattered newspapers and magazines, advertisement leaflets, bills, name cards, watches, toys, and even ice cream sticks preserved in their original wrapping.

As Bissell notes, objects often function as indispensable anchors for the construction of memories: “nostalgia requires an object world to seize on – buildings, fashion, images, and the ephemera of everyday life” (2005, p. 221). Members of the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” Facebook group rediscovered objects tied to their past lives in the city, shared their photos and descriptions, and often commented on the quality of the object, their attachment to it, or the memories it evoked. Consumer goods (or what remains of them) are recognized as anchors tying members who have most likely never met each other to the same local



Fig. 6: Photo of a Dairy Farm ice cream stick and its yellowed wrapping shared by Kelly Mills rediscovering Hong Kong memories in her toolbox.

experiences, becoming “prosthetics of memory and identification” (Boyer, 2006, p. 373). In the comment section of Kelly’s ice cream stick photo (Fig. 6), Jonathan chimes in with a first-person experience: “and we licked the lid to make sure we have got every little bit of ice cream out of it”. Ann, whom Kelly explicitly dedicated the

post to, replies: “Too true Jonathan...I can still picture it in my mind”. In her analysis of the material culture of East German Ostalgie, Daphne Berdahl links the recuperations of GDR consumer products to the central role of the ideology of production in the local identity under Communism (1999, p. 194). Despite



Fig. 7: A photo of a “Made in Hong Kong” yo-yo in its original packaging, found online and reposted by a group member, is an iconic example of local manufacturing nostalgia (Chan, 2013): “Nothing like this made here now” (Gavin T. Shiu).

completely different economic and historical circumstances, the recuperation of “Made in Hong Kong” consumer products as prosthetics of memory provides group members with a similar opportunity of “connecting personal biographies to the passing of time and a state” (p. 203) – specifically, the time of cheap local goods and the ideology of the colonial state.

Social media provide a convenient platform to materialize nostalgia among displaced and diasporic communities. Takaragawa (2015) describes how a Facebook group dedicated to artifacts made by Japanese-American prisoners in WWII internment camps manages to mobilize a community of concern around an issue of representation even when its members are dispersed by historical vicissitudes. Although quite different in its historical background and positionality, the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” Facebook group presents a similar case of a community of dispersed people sharing a local past, constructing nostalgic memories around recuperated fragments of everyday life in the colonial city. Moreover, pretty much everything in the city and its heritage can become a prosthesis of memory; Joseph, a group member defining himself as one of the maximum experts on the history of Hong Kong’s iconic trams (known in Cantonese as dingding), explains his passion in terms of loss and grieving:

*“I have lived on the island until now, awakened by the ding ding sound in the early morning since when I was young and started researching trams. The most shocking time was when I wandered in the tram depot and saw an abandoned body. I witnessed detailed changes of the trams and now feel the sorrow of recording their final stage, it’s like losing a friend. The tram is a Hong Kong icon and a worldwide attraction with a more-than-centenary history, and is still running although facing many challenges.”*

## Conclusion

In the few months we spent following the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” Facebook group, we noticed how activity on the page marked the passing of time. The administrators changed the group’s header image a few times, gathering numerous “Likes” and comments. When photographer and movie director Ho Fan – whose black and

white photos of the city were the protagonists of a piece of content widely shared on social media – passed away on the 19th of June 2016, he was warmly remembered on the group page for days. Furthermore, a newly-pinned post by administrator Jonathan Ho in response to recent controversies warned group members to give credit to image sources and obtain permissions before sharing personal photos.

Through our participatory engagement with this specific Facebook group, our survey of its users, our interviews and collection of content, we have been able to gain a partial perspective on how Hong Kong nostalgia, which is widely presented as a trademark aesthetic of the city, is socially constructed on digital media platforms. As one of the largest Facebook groups dedicated to the colonial memories of Asia’s World City, “Hong Kong in the ‘60” is followed by thousands of users, yet the majority of its posts are arguably contributed by a minority of active members characterized by a peculiar demographic – middle-aged and elderly expatriates and their offspring – coming together around their shared nostalgia for the city’s past. Memory (fading and to be preserved) and nostalgia (to be voiced and shared) are constant themes throughout the group posts and comment sections, regardless of their specific content. Family photographs, personal narrations and found objects are shared and discussed, becoming enriched with details and prompting other members’ reminiscences. Albeit self-defined as a community of interest, “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” can be seen as a spontaneous “memory project” (Kearney, 2012) through which a group of dispersed people sharing an historically situated experience of locality sustains and preserves certain narratives and longings.

As evidenced by the practices of group members, nostalgia is not simply an aesthetic style but an active, affective and social form of doing something with digital media (Niemeyer, 2014, p. 7). The extension of memory projects from mass media like literature, poetry, cinema and television to more participatory media like social networking platforms evidences how nostalgia is hardly a stable form of affect, but rather the outcome of practices of nostalgizing, “something we do actively, either superficially or profoundly, alone, with family or friends or, on a larger scale, with media” (p. 11). Confirming what has been argued in similar studies, the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” group illustrates how pre-existing

social circles and communities such as alumni networks, school cohorts and company clubs can find new media platforms to reassemble, and become in themselves the medium for practices of nostalgizing (Bardon, Josserand, & Villesèche, 2014). We have begun this article by proposing to call these practices “colonial past-times” to reflect the specific historical context of Hong Kong. Ann Anagnost defines the “national past-times” of contemporary Chinese citizens as the

*“sometimes ephemeral ways in which the nation becomes an object of contemplative reflection, whether in the hidden spaces of everyday life or as a commodified space of leisure activity.”*  
(1997, p. 1)

In her view, the surprising feature of these national past-times is how the supposed unity of the ‘nation’ becomes shattered and fragmented by layers of temporality and social memory that “break up the continuum of the recent past” and “become expressed as modes of nostalgia or lament for moments when the nation had been ‘imagined’ in very different terms” (pp. 1-2). In the case of Hong Kong, the layering of temporalities and nostalgizing happens for historical moments in which the ‘colony’ was imagined and experienced in different terms. As some of the many posts uploaded every day by members of “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” are re-shared by other Facebook users on their own timelines, and at times picked up by stories in news media or included in larger collections of historical materials about the city, Hong Kong nostalgia becomes detached from its active production and is reconfigured by the

sociopolitical tensions and urban moods of the time. The “silent majority” of group members, thousands of Facebook users who have arguably not experienced life in Hong Kong’s colonial past yet enjoy following the group’s activities, might be portrayed as partaking in the sort of “armchair nostalgia” deprived of “lived experience or collective historical memory” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 79) that is often attributed to conservative or even reactionary publics (Davis, 1977, p. 420). News stories extrapolating and curating content from social media profiles might be actively repurposing colonial longings against the encroachment of Mainland Chinese authorities onto the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, siding with the restorative extreme of nostalgia politics (Boym, 2007, p. 13). These possibilities fall beyond the scope of this article, and present intriguing directions to develop further investigations. What we can conclude for now is that behind the aesthetic trope of Hong Kong nostalgia we find the reflective practices of nostalgizing in communities such as the “Hong Kong in the ‘60s” Facebook group. For them,

*“the past provides an imaginative resource – a realm rich in invention, critical in possibility – [...] to secure what can no longer be found in the future.”*  
(Bissell, 2005, p. 240)

For many who lived through its recent history, the Hong Kong of today has not turned out to be anything like the Hong Kong of yesterday, and the closest approximation of a homecoming is to be found in Dagfinn’s return to his New Territories childhood memories.

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# Nostalgia Commodified

Towards the marketization of the post-communist past through the new media

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## Abstract

In this paper post-communist nostalgia in contemporary Poland as a specific form of cultural practice is examined. The phenomenon is characterized by the references to space, time, people and human activities evoking nostalgic feelings and emotions rooted in past of a particular human group and it is defined through the media practices as a certain kind of product functioning in and by the media.

The post-communist nostalgia is presented as a kind of folklore that functions mainly in the new media as a sphere of cultural commodity of emotions and is manifested by the internet blogs, shops (one can obtain the communist era products), 'memory' sites profiled to bring the recollections from the communist past (virtual museums, fora discussing TV shows, TV series, toys, books, products, etc. coming from the 1970. decade), websites chatting about people (politicians, artists, sportsmen), places or events coming from the socialist era.

The commodification of nostalgia is a phenomenon rooted in the cultural space of Western societies: Its manifestations can be found in almost every generation, in relation to almost every bygone era. The example of nostalgia commodification shown in the present text is discussed as a special kind of human behaviour because of the following three reasons. Firstly, we show how the adaptation of the Western cultural patterns influenced the processes of commodification of culture in the post-communist countries takes place. Secondly, the notion of post-communist nostalgia is discussed as a relatively strong and vivid phenomenon that refers also to generations that have not experienced the times (or experienced them with less intensity) to which they refer in their cultural and communication practices. Thirdly, we shall examine the process of commodification of nostalgia for the past in

the context of the nature of the socialist regime, imposed from the outside on Polish society in 1945 as a result of the post-war geopolitics: The state was called Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (PRL; that is Polish People's Republic<sup>1</sup>).

The main objective of the paper is to analyse the category of post-communist nostalgia in the context of commodification of goods. Nostalgia itself is perceived as any other good present in the market: Contemporary manifestations of the phenomenon indicate that it can serve as a tool for selling or advertising merchandises, and it is also used for managing services or generating market demands. We assess that post-communist nostalgia is present in the cultural sphere of today's Poland as a kind of vintage fashion, mainly in the Internet sphere. Such fashion is oriented towards the reconfiguration of elements known from the cultural past and their incorporation

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation "PRL" is used in the whole text to label the discussed post-war period of the socialist regime in Poland (from the end of World War II until the fall of the socialist regime at the break of 1989/1990). The political system prevailing in Poland during that time was based on a command-and-distributive economy and it was accompanied by the dominant position of ideology in socio-political life, stemming from the post-Yalta geopolitics with the Soviet Union

as the leader of the East European bloc. The political power was executed without real political support of the Polish society (for instance, the general elections during this period were of facade and nondemocratic character), which made the political legitimization non-democratic and artificial. The system as a whole was characterized by the constant shortage of consumer goods, political repressions, the violation of basic human rights and total political dependence of the official mass media.

in the processes of creation and maintenance of social identity of today's generations. Also, it means that vintage fashion and PRL nostalgia are used as important factors employed in the means by which a unique brand is constructed in the market. Thus, the aim of the paper is to present such fashion manifested in culture as a parallel one to the phenomenon of cultural commodification.

## Nostalgia as a social phenomenon and the commodification of cultural practices

The notion of nostalgia in the humanities and social sciences is understood in various ways. As Svetlana Boym observed:

*"Nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams. In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress."*

(2001, p. 12)

Bryan S. Turner (1987) recognized it in his concept as: (a) the feeling of hankering for the past; (b) the experience of lack of the continuity of identity and comprehensive experience; (c) the loss of direct and authentic social relations; and finally (d) the decline of emotional approach to the world the one lives in, relations based on spontaneity, natural character and simplicity. Nostalgia then is a psychological approach in which one emotionally glorifies the feeling of positive attitude towards places and people, rooting those phenomena in the past. In other words, nostalgia is a kind of "a journey to the past" with a tendency to underline the importance of the *Gemeinschaft* type of social bonds and their advantage over the *Gesellschaft* kind of bonds, as the past experiences of an individual are valued univocally positively (Tönnies, 1940). Moreover, Elizabeth Guffey implies that

*"obviously the past is simpler and less painful than the present. It has been lived through. In a world with very few standards left, the past offers those standards whether you live by them or not."*

(2006, p. 122)

Thus, the experience of the past is a sphere of sensations in which an individual treats his/her own personal background as a field of positive recollections, that embrace only the cultural aspects which are important for the one in the context of the past experiences reflected in the present activity. Such an understanding of nostalgia prevails in the works of Svetlana Boym (2001; 2007), Janelle L. Wilson (2005), Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies (2010), Maurice Halbwachs (1992), Maria Todorova (2010), Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (2010), Dominic Boyer (2010), or Olivia Angé and David Berliner (2016). As Marek Jeziński (2014) indicated, nostalgia is a special form of approaching the past which implies the existence of a coherent cultural framework rooted in past activities and which creates positively connoted meanings. Moreover, it is important that the rooting in the past could be socially verified to some extent: People refer to the elements of social experience transmitted between generations.

The commodification of culture is not a new phenomenon: Its origins are related to the appearance of consumption processes on the wide scale. The model of production of commodities was changed together with the dynamic economic and social growth at the turn of the 19th century: The consumption chain was longer and the local character of the producer-consumer relation was canceled (Birmingham, 1995, in: Paterson, 2006, p. 13). Coming into being of the capitalist mode of production and the new mode of social relations as the results of capitalism (even in the early stages of its development) marked the fast growth of consumption processes and significantly influenced the phenomenon of culture commodification.

During the postwar period important social changes were done in Poland, namely, the changes which opened the possibilities for the decline of the role of the traditional system which embraced the producer – the commodity – the consumer chain. The common denominator of these changes was mass dissemination and unification within the cultural sphere which took place in Poland (manifested in the dynamic development of the cities; the massive migrations of people from the countryside to industrial territories; education was disseminated in Poland and the processes of Polish countryside development were imposed; the mass media was totally subjugated to the political power). Poland experienced total transformation into mass culture based on the

mass production of goods in Poland during that period (Kłoskowska, 2005), and as a result, the process of commodification in all its forms took place in the PRL. This point is crucial because Polish economy was the one characterized by the constant shortage of goods and commodities, ineffective attempts towards building a totally genuine socialist society and political and economic dependence from the Soviet Union. It means that the processes of consumption, although the mass ones, were based upon the colonial model rather than on totally independent models of capital flow.

The process of commodification was further accelerated by one more important phenomenon, namely, the political, economic and social changes which took place in Poland after 1989. The transformation of a real-socialism economy into a neoliberal economy is crucial for understanding the commodification process as a whole: The country rapidly took the capitalist patterns, which did not take into account Polish social and cultural specificity. After 1989 the new social and political elites came into existence: For them, consumption was one of the main tools to underline their social position. This process took place with no reference to former class divisions (founded on the opposition between the working class and intelligentsia) and it effected social changes after 1989. The ruling class came from the communist party establishment with the newcomers of the “Solidarity” movement. It was reinforced economically with cross-class *nouveau riches* enriched on transformation and privatization processes. It resulted in dynamic changes in the social structure that escape demographic designates (cf. Domański, 1994; 2002; 2004; Domański, Rychard & Śpiewak, 2005). From today’s perspective, it could be noticed that social and cultural traces of those changes are strongly present in the contemporary public discourse, as they are present in the growing differentiation of society, and that they indicate the processes of social classes development. These elements shaped the commodification of nostalgia and the way Poles perceive the “good times” of the PRL.

## PRL nostalgia

In the context of contemporary Polish culture at the beginning of the 21st century, the Polish People’s Republic, as the epitome of *ancien régime*, is perceived by numerous Poles as a state

of social security, stability, full employment, and the period of happy childhood and youth. As social research indicates (see e.g. Brocki), in the case of Poland, PRL nostalgia means the hankering related not to the political sphere, but to the period which fulfills the characteristics of nostalgia defined by Bryan Turner’s concept (1987). Marcin Brocki indicates that one can find here a certain narrative form related to the individual’s memory, which transforms the past into the categories significant to an individual in the present because, as Kirsten Hastrup indicates: “Memory does not preserve the past, but adapts it to present conditions” (1997, p. 24). In other words, the phenomena and facts remembered from the past are each time interpreted in the contemporary context. In fact, the individual’s experiences from the PRL period are viewed as the elements of nowadays life, defining in the first place today’s identity of an individual and a group: All those interpretations of the past stem from the current social, cultural and material status of an individual. In the case of Polish PRL nostalgia one can observe the simultaneous occurrence of the four nostalgia levels indicated by Turner. The qualitative change of the political system in Poland as the social, political and economic transformation was accompanied by a nostalgic view of the past socialist era. This point was accompanied by psychological phenomena which negatively charged the citizens not prepared for the new economic conditions and competition in the market, characterized by such points as: uncertainty of employment, no perspectives, and the constant concern about basic existential problems. It should be stressed that the relations between nostalgia and politics and the present tendencies to shape history are relatively evident (Atia and & Davies, 2010), as Boym (2007, p. 18) indicated: “Nostalgia tends to colonize politics and history” (2007, p. 18). Such colonization can be observable on different levels of the system, including its structure and functions. Moreover, nostalgia is a feeling common in political systems that underwent specific systemic changes (i.e. political transformation, as the cases of the post-Soviet states indicate) (see for instance Nadkarni & Shevchenko, 2016; Lankauskas, 2016).

The PRL memories are very often treated with smile and laugh, which relates to the artifacts from history, vulgar folk culture, cars, books, or toys and films for children (TV series loaded with communist propaganda or evening TV shows for the youngest kids) (Grębecka, 2010). This

phenomenon takes a form of special activities which manifest as websites with memorabilia going back to socialist times in Poland, i.e. “PRL Bus-stop” (<http://przystanekprl.pl>), “Born in the PRL” (<http://www.inprl.pl>), “PRL Legends” (<http://legendy-prl.pl>), “nostalgia.pl”, or “PRL Magic” (<http://www.czarprl.pl>); shops trading with PRL-like souvenirs and PRL-like stylized artifacts, i.e. Pan Tu Nie Stał (<http://www.pantuniestal.com>) or Spod Lady (<http://www.spodlady.com>) and some of the Internet stores that function also as real shops; reminding literature and art from the era (films, TV series, songs, artists, comic books); eateries stylized according to the PRL look; and virtual museums, i.e. Muzeum Dobranoczek (<http://muzeumdobranoczek.pl>) or Muzeum PRL (<http://www.mprl.pl>).

From the perspective adopted in the paper the presence of nostalgia in the virtual space is the crucial manifestation of the phenomenon. Websites, forums, posts, blogs, etc. are frequently dedicated to memories related to the PRL, and they are the objects of research on nostalgia. The activities of people writing their blogs or running the sites frequently stem from the willingness of “preserving from oblivion” the cultural artifacts, non-material activities or memories of the individuals. It means that the experience of an individual is supplemented and augmented by the multiplication of such experience: The individuals present their memories and share them with one another on the forums and blogs and in this way a kind of common memory occurs. More importantly, this kind of recollection is characterized by selectivity: Its components are mainly valued positively, they are particular and non-synthetic, bearing the traces of various standpoints presented by the Internet users. The PRL is remembered as the safe land of childhood, as the “good old times”. The individuals try to present good points of the past, giving themselves the bases for perceiving their own life in positive categories (which is a significant element of an individual’s identity).

The authors of the blogs and websites on “PRL nostalgia” exchange memories and create a community that might be named as “community of the longing”. What comes from the past becomes an element that creates community values, promotes certain socially shared vision of reality, and, hence, influences the group’s interpretation of the past. It works on the same basis as “wiki” projects – a person does not have the entire knowledge about a particular issue, yet the

community members share their own experiences and join the missing dots. What seems the most characteristic is the constant contradiction between the past and the present times, and evaluative labelling them: The past is marked as the time of youth, innocence, innovations, a good time for the arts and entertainment, a good time in general sense; the present, on the contrary, is characterised by a tumbledown of values, an atrophy of social ties, and the downfall of artistic skills.

## Methodology

In this inquiry we use critical visual analysis (Rose, 2002) and implement it to the study of images and their meanings. Drawing on Gillian Rose’s sites and modalities we are able to capture entire process of how visibility is produced and implemented in social practices. Rose establishes the notion of sites as a sort of relation, in which

*“the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences.”*

(Rose, 2002, p.16)

Moreover, every site is manifested in three aspects named modalities: technological (visual technology used to produce and look at the image), compositional (formal elements of the image), and social (perceived as economic, social or political relationships, institutions and practices in which an image is located and used) (Rose, 2002, p.17).

This approach was complemented with Edmund Leach’s theoretical concept that bridges anthropology (both structuralism and functionalism) with linguistics and semiotics, which he coined as a “communication event” (1976, p. 11). Leach believes that every communication act, in our case it is online communication, composes of two elements: (a) the actual communication between the “sender” and the “receiver”; and (b) the actual expressive action where the first one chooses and communicates the message and the later one interprets and circulates it further (or stops the action). This has to be enriched with a whole symbolic layer and translated into actual meaning circulation between the “sender” and the “receiver”. It means that every act of online visual communication is



not just the simple transmission but the actual symbolic social practice focused on the creation and circulation of the meaning.

We translated these approaches into case studies of interrelated commodified nostalgia examples in the online environment. To sketch the background we shall fill it with examples of how PRL nostalgia evolved in the Polish Internet. Then, we present a detailed analysis of the commodification chain composed of three Polish companies, which use nostalgia as their visual and communicative *modus operandi*: Pan Tu Nie Stał (PTNS), MAMSAM, and Geszeft. These companies cooperate, and have a similar background, audience and market orientation. Yet, they have different functions in the chain in economical and communication terms. PTNS is one of the oldest producers of multiple PRL-based nostalgia commodities (from posters and postcards, through jewellery, to cloths), it operates vividly online (web store, Facebook, Twitter) and offline (stores, design industry). MAMSAM produces mugs that refer to PRL design and sells them (among others) via PTNS. Geszeft is a shop with local products as well as a coffee house, which cooperates with PTNS (sells via their website and regular stores). All these brands aim at the similar public but in different ways and through diverse means. To run our research, on the one hand, we gathered data from the online interactions in social media feeds (Facebook and Instagram) of the aforementioned producers. These were interactions related to visual content posted by the brands. On the other hand, we gathered qualitative visual content data from the websites of these brands (photos and graphics). The data were collected in the span of time between 12th December 2015 and 2nd April 2016.

## The case studies: Pan tu nie stał, MAMSAM, Geszeft

As we pointed out before, one of the commodification processes present in the PRL times was the commodity fetishism, which resulted in many cases of commodified nostalgia. In this case study we present three interrelated companies that establish a direct link to the past and restore it

through their online media communication. One of such examples that is based on the symbolic value of PRL commodities is the family enterprise Pan tu nie stał (PTNS)<sup>2</sup>. Pan tu nie stał is a company that – as its founders write – was built

*“from the liking for good Polish design. During childhood we were soaked through with a specific visual culture, to which we go back today and we serve it with modern idea to our clients. First visual stimuli, toys, books, clothes, and items that surrounded us have had non-trivial influence on our aesthetic preferences.”*

(<http://pantunieststal.com/o-nas>, 01.04.2015)

PTNS started to operate in 2006 with a blog on Polish design and, as they admit:

*“We wanted to have a shop exactly the same as a house interior from the 70s – with a wall unit, a Turkish carpet, with homely atmosphere. Everything was made gradually, from writing on the blog, or the first produced t-shirts that were printed in the garage, to launching the online store and production contracted out to professional companies. Initially, in the PTNS assortment there were only t-shirts with prints, then we offered other stupid stupidities.”*

(<http://pantunieststal.com/o-nas>, 01.04.2015)

Similarly, MAMSAM is a brand that produces mugs and incorporates PRL and German Democratic Republic (DDR) style in the design:

*“The first projects referred to Polish graphics from the 1970s, but with time designers who cooperate with us started to treat them as the comment medium on contemporary times and on actual events and cultural texts.”*

(<http://mamsam.pl/o-nas>, 02.04.2016)

All mugs are produced in limited editions (not more than 100 pieces, but usually only 30 with one design) with no extra outlay. MAMSAM cooperates with over 50 Polish designers. In economic terms, MAMSAM's commodities are limited and, thus, characterized by a shorter commodity chain. At the same time, it establishes the uniqueness of these products. In our case, MAMSAM is the example of a brand that

<sup>2</sup> During the socialist times the sentence “Pan tu nie stał!” was used in the shop lines to point out that somebody wants to enter rapidly the queue in the shop to avoid long waiting;

it means literally “You weren't here, mister!” or “It is not your place in the queue!”

specialises only in one commodity, which results in a very narrow group of visual representations. At the same time, the mugs' design refers directly to well-known and popular shapes from the PRL cantinas.

The last brand, that is Geszeft, is a store, book store, independent regional promotion point and coffee house in one place (with an online store and a Facebook account). It promotes design and designers, authors and artists from Silesia:

*"You can find coal jewellery, t-shirts that promote Silesian language, illustrations of Silesian myths, and books about local modernity as well. All these serve to show the identity of the region in a new, contemporary glance, which is not ashamed of its tradition, but proud that it gains the best of it."*

(<https://geszeft.co/strona/7/onas>, 02.04.2016)

Commodities produced by the aforementioned brands refer in language and graphic layer to the characteristic style of the past. To capture it fully, one needs to critically analyse visibility and communication between PTNS, MAMSAM, Geszeft and their audience (market) in the online environment. The netnographical inquiry of interactions between PTNS and its audience allows noticing one more element of commodified nostalgia processes: the positional consumption (Lury, 1996), in which commodities are acquired to mark social position and not to fulfil basic consumers' needs. Such form of consumption appears stronger when acquiring of the commodity is related to establishing someone's social status or group affiliation through, for instance, differences in fashion style. As Mark Paterson notes, quoting Mary Douglas:

*"[...] any consumer society is competitive and the way we signal to others is through how we consume – and this relies on the maintenance of some distinction between luxury and necessity."*  
(Paterson, 2006, p. 41)

As mentioned above, in our commodification study we use Rose's (2002) toolbox where she illustrated three sites of an image analysis: production, image, and audiencing. The sites are composed of three modalities: technological, compositional, and social. In the analysis of PTNS, MAMSAM and Geszeft nostalgia visual representations, the first site – production – has a crucial meaning, especially in the technological

modality. Analysed data are the works of professional photographers and graphic designers, both on the level of commodity production and its visual representations. Hence, the technology used to produce images and to modify them was fully arranged. Furthermore, people responsible for the websites and social media accounts of these brands use common mobile photography tools to create and submit the content. This approach means a quasi-professional production on that level. For instance, in the case of MAMSAM's Instagram account one can observe two kinds of production. The first are professional photos of mugs, but the second is constituted by pictures loosely connected with the company's products (e.g. holiday brochures) or pictures that show the mugs in diverse cultural contexts (e.g. the usage of mugs). On the contrary, PTNS's Instagram content is dominated by pictures made during professional sessions, similarly to those presented on the website or on the online store.

Social modality plays an important role in the context of the PRL nostalgia commodification process. From this perspective, we cannot assume what the role of the image as a visual element is, but we are able to capture its meaning in the cultural industry formation. The cases analysed in this paper present specific producer's strategy and market positioning based on nostalgia. In that case, the usage of PRL nostalgia is understood strictly as an economic phenomenon. Drawing on the past visual and cultural patterns, it uses contemporary marketing and communication technologies to create a consumption niche, which ties commodification processes with the symbolic sphere of PRL nostalgia. It is done within contemporary digital technology in entourage of the closest past, that is, PRL times exemplified with vintage design.

The second site – perceived as the image itself – is relevant to PRL nostalgia as it circulates around its formal elements. Standardisation on the level of technological and compositional modality limits the presented images to look book or lifestyle sessions, on the one hand, and mobile photography, on the other hand. In the case of look book photos, we observe the domination of models wearing PTNS cloths placed against a neutral background. Lifestyle/fashion for the "Ruch" (that is, "movement" or "exercise") session collection was located in the visual context of the old YMCA gym in Łódź. If we take a look at visual codes used by PTNS once again, we shall notice that these cloths are

captured just like any other cultural commodity. However, what seems to be crucial, the codes are used in the case of the cloths, which link directly to commodified nostalgia. For instance, t-shirts: “Camp Chair” presents a picture of a times camp chair characteristic for the PRL period, “Agrobiznes” exposes the “rural” typography used in the 70s and 80s in the headline of the TV show “Agrobiznes” (a Polish TV show focusing on agricultural issues), or “Pan Kleks” with the image of Ambroży Kleks (eng. “Mr. Inkblot”), who was a character of the popular youth movie “Akademia Pana Kleksa” (1988). Likewise, MAMSAM sessions are compositionally simple: white mugs on white background. The product itself has a minimalistic logo-style graphic, which plays the role of nostalgia denominator, e.g. the Polish Cities Series only with names of cities in specific PRL-like typography (mugs: Kraków, Gdynia, Zakopane, etc.), or the German Design Series inspired by the GDR design (mugs: Berlin, Buxtehude, Sucht, Trödel, Cigaretten, etc.). Mobile photos are less rigid in the form and allow to capture the media practice dimension of the image site in the context of their regularity, social orientation, responsiveness for human needs, and normativeness (Couldry, 2012). As we observe in the case of Geszeft, all these practices oscillate around everyday shop activities, commodities, and social interactions. Although commodity on the level of a fashion line is quite typical, the style of graphic design is responsible for its nostalgic power. That is, visual codes used by PTNS, MAMSAM and Geszeft are transferred in cultural semiotic resource with what Mary Douglas called “semiotic richness” of objects (Paterson, 2006).

The last site – audiencing – is crucial in order to establish the social link between commodification and PRL nostalgia. Although technological and compositional modalities are important in interviewing PRL nostalgia in everyday social practices, they are not referring directly to it. Within their frames it is possible to circulate the meaning of images faster. Hence, the more people have access to the analysed cultural phenomenon, the stronger it is assimilated in culture and triggers the past-related cultural patterns based on actual or imagined memories. Especially when PRL nostalgia commodification is targeting youth, as in the cases presented in this paper, technology-based communication enables to reach them through well-known channels. Technological and compositional modalities effect commodification due to digitalisation, which allows publishing

and receiving these pictures on computers and mobile devices almost continuously. Hence, the consumers and users have nearly unlimited possibilities to generate and restore meanings online and, using Leach’s notion, in everyday cultural practices.

The modality of audiencing is important to understand the commodification of PRL nostalgia as social and cultural practice. Rose (2002, p. 27) indicates its two important aspects: the social practices of spectating and the social identities of spectators. The first one relies on the place where one spectates images (or the device on which one does it). The second one focuses on the viewer’s social, cultural or class background. It basically means how is one watching and who is he or she? The case studies enabled to specify three modes of spectating. Firstly, website online viewing concentrated on positional consumption (in the cases of the websites and web stores of PTNS, MAMSAM, Geszeft). Secondly, social media accounts activities that fork into: (a) commenting (usually about how, when, and where to buy products), sharing and “liking” practices; (b) transferring to positional consumption activities (e.g. web stores); (c) the drop outs (e.g. commodities costs). Thirdly, spectating in “real” stores. The nostalgic practices of spectating were directly related to the digitalisation of images. Hence, the practices of images’ presentation and decoding were highly individualised but at the same time networked. It limits the chance to oppositional decoding of the meaning, hence, nostalgia-based symbolic communication was ruled by the brands due to semiotic and formal strategies. In the cases analysed, the processes of PRL nostalgia commodification were reinforced by similar patterns of the presentation of images, usages and circulation of the PRL-style codes within the images, their visual attractiveness, their website and social media composition within the image and with other images.

PTNS, MAMSAM and Geszeft models depict entirely the mechanism by which nostalgia is commodified and the media *modus operandi* attached to them on the level of interactions with the customer. These relations are handled online in the brand’s social media feeds on Facebook and Instagram. Firstly, due to the accessibility of these channels of communication for both brands and users, and, secondly, due to the characteristics of the brand’s customers, who are mainly 18–34 years old cities’ inhabitants. PTNS founders admit jokingly that with their offer they address

*“not necessarily those people who remember ‘Teleranek’. Other clients are diverse – well, it’s the assortment for healthy and diseased, that means for everybody.”*  
(<http://pantuniestal.com/o-nas>, 01.04.2015)<sup>3</sup>

It confirms the previous assumptions that the commodification of nostalgia process must not necessarily be connected to the real past experiences of an individual. The appropriate usage of media, references to shared symbolic patterns and processes of idealisation allow to successful framing the nostalgia into a fashionable hipster cultural trend package of “vintage”, which is appealing to younger generations.

## Concluding remarks

Nostalgia for the PRL period serves as an example of a commodified cultural trend that functions in the new media. It is manifested in blogs, web forums, online stores, and social media platforms as a vast range of elements that evoke memories and associations with the past. Commemorating posts, photos, films, TV series, commodities (books, toys, and gadgets), or memories about

people are used to trigger affective feelings in both spheres, emotional (for the people who lived then and remember these times) and cognitive (people for whom the PRL is known from memories of the older generations or from cultural texts). These dimensions of nostalgia function perfectly in the new media environment: The decades of the PRL, perceived as a kind of cultural material, are processed, commodified, and redefined as a type of nowadays folklore.

Nostalgia, as a kind of cultural activity, roots certain spheres of humans’ emotions and expectations in the past. The latter is perceived as a real domain where emotions or activities are placed and manifested as physical objects relevant to the lives of particular people. The context of commodification of nostalgia stems from the fact that it comes from a symbolic sphere maintained by people not only in real activities held in the public sphere but by the domain of emotional introspective meanings in the first place. Hence, it relates to a positively evaluated period of history – the sense of modern times’ liquidity is correlated with the gone stability of socialist times, and, as a result, it creates a cultural sphere, which is the basis for the PRL nostalgia experience.

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<sup>3</sup> *Teleranek* was a TV show for children broadcasted on Sunday mornings from 1972 on TVP1.

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## Reviews

MICHAEL MEYEN & ANKE FIEDLER: *Wer jung ist, liest die Junge Welt. Die Geschichte der auflagenstärksten DDR-Zeitung*. Berlin: Links, 2013, 279 Seiten.

Heute erscheint die *Junge Welt* im Verlag „8. Mai“, herausgegeben von der Genossenschaft „LPG junge Welt eG“. Blickt man in das Blatt, so ist die politische Ausrichtung des Blattes ebenso wenig überraschend wie offenkundig: Marxistisch, anti-kapitalistisch, antiimperialistisch und pazifistisch, wobei einzelne Inhalte sicher noch weiter links zu verorten sind als Aussagen der Linkspartei. Allein: War die Zeitung mit einer Auflage von über anderthalb Millionen zum Ende der DDR „Auflagenkönigin“ unter der dortigen Tagespresse, erreicht sie heute nur noch ein gutes Hundertstel der damaligen Ausgabenhöhe. Heutzutage nahezu in der Bedeutungslosigkeit verschwunden, war die 1947 gegründete und ab 1952 täglich erschienene Zeitung als „Schalltrichter“ der Freien Deutschen Jugend hochgradig generationenprägend und wurde sicherlich keineswegs nur von Jüngeren gelesen. Schon allein deswegen überrascht die auch von den beiden Autoren mit Verwunderung konstatierte Tatsache, dass ein von der DFG gefördertes, kürzlich abgeschlossenes (und insgesamt überaus lobenswertes) Projekt zwar die drei DDR-Tageszeitungen *Berliner Zeitung*, *Neues Deutschland* und *Neue Zeit* für die Jahre 1945-1990 vollständig erfasst, digitalisiert und kostenfrei zur Verfügung gestellt, die *Junge Welt* dabei jedoch ausgeklammert hat.

Dass sich mit Anke Fiedler und Michael Meyen zwei Medien- bzw. Kommunikationswissenschaftler dieser auflagenstärksten DDR-Tageszeitung widmen, nimmt wenig Wunder: „Historiker interessieren sich immer noch nicht wirklich für die Massenmedien“ (S. 8f.), konstatieren beide in der Einleitung des zu besprechenden Buches. Dies ist zwar nur teilweise richtig, denkt man etwa an die wegweisenden jüngeren Darstellungen etwa von Thomas Lindenberger, Christoph Claassen oder Stefan Zahlmann. Doch haben Fiedler und Meyen mit ihrer Behauptung auch nicht völlig Unrecht: Es war bislang weniger die Geschichtswissenschaft, die den Quellenwert eines nicht nur in totalitarismustheoretischen Modellen häufig als monolithisch gedachten DDR-Mediensystems jenseits von Kontrolle, Gängelung und Zensur kritisch „neu“ las und damit verschüttete Potentiale frei-

legten. Diese Ergebnisse sind Kommunikationswissenschaftlern zu verdanken – wie allen voran Fiedler und Meyen selbst, die seit Jahren am Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) rege zum Thema publizieren. Die Folge dieser weitgehenden Vernachlässigung war unter anderem, dass bisher keine wissenschaftlich fundierte Untersuchung über die meistgelesene Tageszeitung der DDR vorlag. Diese Lücke schließt nun die quellengesättigte, interdisziplinär ausgerichtete und methodisch sehr reflektierte Studie, in der die Autoren Archivrecherchen, Inhaltsanalysen und Zeitzeugeninterviews miteinander kombinieren.

Vorab: Wer eine nüchtern-trockene Schreibe präferiert, wird durch diese Textform anfangs durchaus befremdet sein. Der Reportagenstil des Buches wechselt munter, oft unvermittelt mit Interviewpassagen und längeren Porträts, immer wieder eingestreut werden ferner historisch-analytische oder genuin kommunikationswissenschaftliche Abschnitte. Dieser ungewöhnliche, wenngleich überzeugend gewählte textuelle Zugang erweist sich als die große Stärke der leicht zu lesenden Studie. Da sich das Buch auch als Biografie versteht und gerade die Innensichten aus der Journalistenstube einfangen möchte, kommen vormalige ProtagonistInnen der *Jungen Welt* in der DDR ausführlich zu Wort. Statt hier mit erhobenem Zeigefinger zu werten, anzuklagen oder zu verurteilen, zeichnen Fiedler und Meyen ein komplexes, weitgehend abwägend-differenzierendes, teils Sympathie evozierendes und doch immer distanziert bleibendes Bild. Begeisterung und Ideale, Überzeugungen und Motivationen, Opportunismus und Abweichungen, Spielräume und Resignationen innerhalb der journalistischen Arbeitswelt werden ebenso thematisiert, wie die zentrale Funktion der *Jungen Welt* nicht ausgespart oder geglättet wird, nämlich die einer Erfüllungsgehilfin der SED-Vorgaben.

Prolog und Epilog des Buches bilden den Brückenschlag zur Situation der Zeitung heute, ansonsten ist das Buch viergeteilt (Lenker, Macher, Zeitung, Publikum). Abschließend dokumentiert eine gut 70 Seiten umfassende Chronologie die Zeitungsgeschichte; zahlreiche Fotografien (mitunter wünschte man sich eine stärkere Kontextualisierung durch detailliertere Bildunterschriften) und ein Personenregister runden das Werk ab. Doch der Reihe nach: Im ersten Teil markieren die Ausführungen zu den „Lenkern“ zentrale (medien-)politische Rahmenbedingungen, wie etwa Argumentations-

anweisungen der Agitationskommission oder den Einfluss der Staatssicherheit auf die Redaktion. Sodann schließt sich das Kapitel über die „Macher“ an. Hierzu kombinieren die Verfasser einen biographischen Zugriff mit sozialhistorischen Befunden, was „klassische“ Karriereverläufe (und -brüche) hervortreten und die JournalistInnen der damaligen Zeit „lebendig“ erscheinen lässt. Wir erfahren, dass 23 von 203 RedakteurInnen beim MfS beschäftigt bzw. vom MfS erfasst waren; doch hüten sich die Verfasser hier vor einer allzu großen Skandalisierung dieses Befundes und vergessen nicht, bedacht auf die zahlreichen, qualitativen Unterschiede der jeweiligen Berichterstattung zu verweisen. Überdies liefern die geheimdienstlichen Akten der Stasi spannende Einsichten in Widersprüche des Systems oder auch über renitentes Verhalten gerade jüngerer Mitarbeiter, das sich nicht selten aus generationellen Unterschieden ergeben konnte (exemplarisch etwa auf S. 86).

Das umfangreichste Kapitel behandelt die Zeitung selbst. Gestützt auf eine qualitative Inhaltsanalyse, der eine Auszählung von 3.500 Beiträgen zugrunde liegt, wird die Vermessung und Einordnung der *Jungen Welt* in das DDR-Mediensystem vorgenommen. Einer der Aufhänger ist die bekannte „weiße Seite“ vom 1. Oktober 1987, als aus Protest über das Ausscheiden der drei DDR-Vereine BFC Dynamo, Dynamo Dresden und BSG Wismut Aue in der ersten Runde des Fußball-Europapokals ein Teil der ersten Seite unbedruckt blieb. Der Leser erfährt hier nicht nur, wie diese Form der Unmutsbekundung intern für allerlei Schwierigkeiten sorgte, sondern im Folgenden ebenso Wissenswertes über die Bedeutung von „Mulle“ – das „allwissende Maskottchen“ der Zeitung. Auch die Briefrubrik „Unter vier Augen“ wird in diesem Kontext genauer inspiziert. Die in dieser Sparte der *Jungen Welt* abgedruckten Beiträge zu Familie, Partnerschaft und Sexualität konnten mitunter Konflikte mit dem Volksbildungsministerium evozieren, etwa im Falle einer allzu offenen Darstellung von Homosexualität. Zwar könnte man die dargebotene Auswahl als irrelevante Anekdoten abtun, doch zeigen sie vielmehr beispielhaft und ohne dabei ins Belanglos-Beliebige abzudriften, die komplexe Vielschichtigkeit und Verschlungenheit des DDR-Mediensystems, das nur kaum allein auf die Nenner „Gleichförmigkeit“, „Zensur“ oder „Gängelung“ zu reduzieren ist. Daneben wird eben auch deutlich, was einen Großteil der Bevölkerung abseits politisch-ideologischer Verlautbarungen interessierte (Sport, Sex, Freizeit, Familie). Hier funktionierten die Modi sozialer Praxis und

Rezeptionsvorlieben in Demokratie und Diktatur vermutlich ähnlicher als gedacht.

In der Gunst des Publikums – diesem wendet sich der vierte Abschnitt des Buches zu – stand die Zeitschrift immer etwas höher als *Neue Deutschland* oder die *Berliner Zeitung*, wurde sie doch gemeinhin als informativer, teilweise gar als kritischer, vor allem aber als unterhaltsamer erlebt. Dies lag allen voran am umfangreichen Sportteil und – je weiter nach hinten man durchblättert – einer weitgehend entpolitisierten Aufmachung. Laut Umfragen war die Zeitung die „Einäugige unter den Blinden“, eine Mehrzahl der Leser und Leserinnen räumte ihr eine gewisse „Sonderstellung“ ein (S. 181). Doch war dies nicht immer so: 1950 etwa las nur jedes fünfte FDJ-Mitglied die damals noch ungleich plumper propagandistisch-opportun daher kommende Zeitung, dann pendelte sich die Auflagenhöhe auf ca. 250.000 ein, ehe ein rasanter Aufstieg begann. Schließlich wurde Mitte der 1970er Jahre unter den Chefredakteuren Klaus Raddatz und Dieter Langguth die Millionenmarke erreicht. Weniger geringe Aufmerksamkeit und Verbreitung, sondern vor allem Papiermangel und Druckstopps bestimmten sodann in den 1980ern das Alltagsgeschäft des Blattes.

Anke Fiedler und Michael Meyen gelingt mit der vorliegenden Studie ein zwar unkonventionell zu lesender, aber gelungener Einblick in die Redaktionsstuben dieser DDR-Tageszeitung mit der größten Reichweite. Das Buch verbindet abwägend (medien-)historische Kontextualisierung mit kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Zugriffen. Es gelingt den Autoren dabei, den Zwangscharakter einer Diktatur zu veranschaulichen, ohne *a priori* Medienschaffende (wie -konsumierende!) als passiv-gleichförmig handelnde Akteure zu homogenisieren. Es bleibt zu hoffen, dass (nicht nur, aber auch) Historiker die hier vorgelegten Ergebnisse breit wahrnehmen und produktiv aufgreifen.

Christoph Lorke, Münster

REYNOLDS, GLENN: *Colonial Cinema in Africa*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2015, 236 Seiten.

Die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit Kolonialismus und Postkolonialismus bringt immer wieder neue Themen zum Vorschein, so auch über das „koloniale Kino“ in Afrika,

vornehmlich in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren. Der US-amerikanische Filmhistoriker Glenn Reynolds stützt sich in seinem Buch vornehmlich auf einige von ihm verfasste Fallstudien, die er bereits in verschiedenen englischsprachigen Zeitschriften publizierte und nunmehr hier zusammenfasst.

In den letzten Jahrzehnten haben mehrere Historiker und Filmwissenschaftler verstärkt rund um das koloniale Kino in Afrika geforscht und publiziert. Bisher hatte die Größe und kulturell-politische Differenz des Kontinents sowie die Anzahl der an der kolonialen Beherrschung des Kontinents involvierten europäischen Mächte und das uneinheitliche Verwalten des in jener Zeit entstandenen Filmmaterials das Entschleiern der Beziehungen zwischen Bildsprache, Kolonialismus und indigener Kultur erschwert. Auch der vorliegende Band kann in dieser Beziehung nicht alle Lücken schließen, auch wenn dieses Thema im Mittelpunkt seiner Fragestellung steht.

Das hier vorzustellende Buch stellt sich darüber hinaus ein anspruchsvolles Ziel, nämlich sowohl die Produktion als auch die Vorführformen von in Afrika gedrehten Filmen nachzuzeichnen, um deutlich machen zu können, wie diese mit welchen heute noch recherchierbaren Folgen während des „Wettlaufs um Afrika“ und in der Zeit der Herrschaft der europäischen Kolonialmächte auf dem „schwarzen Kontinent“ dessen indigenen Bewohnern gezeigt wurden. Der Autor beschreibt, wie erste Tatsachenberichte, filmisches Expeditionsmaterial, ethnographische Dokumentationen und Missionarsfilme im Inneren Afrikas entstanden sind und untersucht die Gründe für die steigenden Zuschauerzahlen vor allem von der schwarzafrikanischen Bevölkerung, die in die Kinovorstellungen der mit und für sie produzierten Filme kamen.

Während Afrikaner in den ersten zwei Jahrzehnten des 20. Jahrhunderts wegen kolonialer Restriktionen als Kinokonsumenten dennoch weitgehend unbeachtet blieben, führten soziale und politische Veränderungen – hervorgerufen beispielsweise durch die stetig steigende Anzahl von Wanderarbeitern in der Zwischenkriegszeit in den Minen im südlichen Afrika – zu einem Umdenken vom Nutzen der „kolonialen Filmpolitik“. Dies beschreibt der Verfasser eingehend. Reynolds ermöglicht somit nicht nur interessante spezifische Einblicke auf die kolonialen Beziehungen zwischen Kolonialherren und Afrikanern, sondern befasst sich ebenso mit dem in Filmen gezeichneten Bild von Südafrika in jener Zeit.

Besonders Missionare, Bergbaugesellschaften und Kolonialbeamte waren nämlich hier die treibenden Kräfte, denn sie erkannten die Bedeutung des Kinos für die Popularisierung ihrer Interessen. In der Zeit des Zweiten Weltkrieges hatte das Kino Schwarzafrika vollständig erreicht, was vor allem die anglophonen Alliierten zu nutzen wussten.

Gerade in dem Kapitel, welches Südafrika gewidmet ist, wird das große Manko des Buches deutlich. Die einschlägigen Forschungsleistungen von deutschsprachigen Wissenschaftlern, die zum Untersuchungsgegenstand vorliegen, werden nicht zur Kenntnis genommen. Es sei nur auf die für die südafrikanische Film- und Kinogeschichte bedeutungsvollen Bücher von Michael Eckardt „Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930 (Stellenbosch, 2006) sowie „Zwischenspiele der Filmgeschichte. Zur Rezeption des Kinos der Weimarer Republik in Südafrika 1928-1933“ (Berlin, 2008) verwiesen oder auf die einschlägigen Bücher und Aufsätze von Tobias Nagl über das deutsche Filmgeschäft in Afrika.

Also, so kann das Fazit lauten, ein interessantes Buch, was Glenn Reynolds vorlegt, welches aber in seiner Bedeutung hätte umfassender und tiefer sein können, wenn auch die nicht-englischsprachige Forschungsliteratur zur Kenntnis genommen worden wäre.

Ulrich van der Heyden, Berlin

**MATTHIAS KARMASIN & CHRISTIAN OGGOLDER (Hg.): Österreichische Mediengeschichte. Von den frühen Drucken bis zur Ausdifferenzierung des Mediensystems (1500 bis 1918). Bd. 1. Wiesbaden: Springer VS 2016, 253 Seiten.**

Soviel vorweg: eine rundfunkhistorische Komponente ist in dieser Mediengeschichte noch nicht enthalten. Das ergibt sich allerdings zwangsläufig, da das zu besprechende Buch, erschienen als erster Band einer zweibändig angelegten Mediengeschichte, für Österreich sich mit der Frühgeschichte des massenmedialen Kommunizierens bis hin zur Ausdifferenzierung des Mediensystems in der Moderne befasst. Konkret wird die Zeitspanne von 1500 bis 1918, also bis zum Ende der ersten Österreichischen Monarchie nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg, durchmessen. Klar ist, dass eine so

breit angelegte Abhandlung zwangsläufig vorwiegend Schlaglichter setzen kann und selektiv auf wenig Schlüsselereignisse, Gattungen oder mediale Ausdrucksformen fokussieren muss.

Im Zentrum des Interesses, so erklären die Herausgeber, steht bei diesem kommunikationshistorischen Zugang, gerade nicht die exakte Rekonstruktion bestimmter Entwicklungen in allen Details, sondern eine Sensibilisierung und ein Nachvollziehen der Interdependenzen zwischen gesellschaftlichen und politischen Veränderungen sowie medialen Entwicklungen und Innovationen. Dieser zu begrüßende Anspruch bettet sich ziemlich gut ein, in jene Diskursumgebung, die ausgehend von den 1970er Jahren und insbesondere seit den 1980ern als Weg zur Kommunikationsgeschichtsschreibung identifiziert worden ist, und sich seither unter dem Begriff Kommunikationsgeschichte durchgesetzt hat. Es lässt sich somit zugleich auch als eine Illustration der Heterogenität an Perspektiven, die im Band verfolgt werden lesen, dass trotz dieses Zugangs von „Mediengeschichte“ gesprochen wird. Wenn hier von Mediengeschichte gesprochen wird, zugleich aber eine Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte vorgeschlagen wird, die eben nicht auf das Medium alleine fokussiert, wenn zugleich aber auch von „Kommunikationshistorikern im Rahmen der Geschichtswissenschaft“ die Rede ist, dann zeigt sich, dass Mediengeschichte in diesem Band ein Gefäß ist, das aus verschiedenen Disziplinen und mit verschiedenen Detailverständnissen was diese ausmache, befüllt wird. Das kann ebenso inspirierend, wie für Einsteiger in das Feld auch irritierend sein.

Der Band umfasst nach einer programmatischen Einleitung der Herausgeber zehn weitere Beiträge, mit jeweils einem spezifischen Themenfokus. Karmasin und Oggolder gehen zunächst besonders auf die Schwierigkeiten eine österreichische Mediengeschichte zu schreiben ein, wiewohl sich das was Österreich war und ist historisch laufend mitverändert hat. Eine weitere Gliederung, etwa nach historischen Zeiträumen, nach Perioden der Medieninnovation oder entlang anderer Zäsuren gibt es darüber hinaus nicht. Das erschwert partiell die Orientierung und Einordnung von Phänomenen in die weite Zeitspanne der vier Jahrhunderte. Insbesondere Studierende und auch Schüler, denen wie als Zielsetzung einleitend beschrieben, mit dieser Publikation ein Handbuch angeboten werden sollte, vor Schwierigkeiten stellen könnte. Die Einzelbeiträge sind durchaus nicht voraussetzungsfrei zu lesen, sondern erfor-

dern, um sie richtig kontextualisieren und einordnen zu können, ein zumindest ansatzweise schon einschlägig vorinformiertes Publikum.

Hilfreich für eine solche Einordnung Österreichs im genannten Zeitraum ist der Beitrag von Christian Oggolder, der einen Kurzabriss der österreichischen Geschichte von der Reformation bis zum ersten Weltkrieg bietet und so einen Rahmen für die Publikation abstecken möchte. Dabei wird, soweit es die Kurzform gestattet auch durchweg auf technologische und politische Entwicklungen eingegangen, die die Grundlagen für eine Entwicklung bzw. ein prosperieren des Medienwesens ermöglicht haben.

Hervorzuheben ist der Beitrag von Katrin Keller zu geschriebenen Zeitungen, mit denen sie sich anhand der Wiener Sammlung an Fuggerzeitungen auseinandersetzt. Das heutige Österreich ist hier primär der Sammlungsstandort, es wird aber im Artikel auch darauf eingegangen, dass es auch im Raum um Wien einige geschriebene Zeitungen gegeben haben soll, die allerdings forschungstechnisch bisher wenig erschlossen sind. Keller stellt die Funktion und Bedeutung der geschriebenen Zeitung und das durchaus im Kontrast zur bisherigen Forschung da und bringt so einen echten Erkenntnisgewinn.

Christian Oggolder vollzieht in seinem nächsten Beitrag zum Band dann den Schritt von geschriebener Zeitung zu neuen Druckmedien des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts und zeigt, dass die typographischen Medien des „konfessionellen Zeitalters“ zunehmend begannen Aufgaben der politischen Kommunikation zu übernehmen. Neben Oggolder ist auch Josef Seethaler – ebenfalls an der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften beschäftigt – als Mehrfachautor in diesem Band vertreten. In seinem ersten Text geht er der interessanten Frage nach, inwieweit es sich beim Kalender um ein frühes periodisches Druckmedium gehandelt hat. Als Co-Autor von Gabriele Melischek setzt er sich danach mit der Entwicklung und den Entwicklungsbedingungen der Tagespresse in der Habsburgermonarchie auseinander.

Gerade dadurch, dass Andrea Seidler in ihrem Beitrag zur Entwicklung des Wiener Zeitschriftenwesens in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts en passant auf zahlreiche am „Wiener Institut“ entstandenen Dissertationen zur Geschichte des österreichischen Pressewesens verweist, wird in Erinnerung gerufen, dass von den Kollegen der ganz als selbstverständlich angeführten Wiener Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft

niemand in Autorenschaft am Band beteiligt war. Angesichts des reichen kommunikationshistorischen Erbes des besagten Wiener Instituts für Publizistik- und Kommunikationswissenschaft ist es jedenfalls betrüblich, dass sich unter den dort tätigen Kollegen niemand mehr als Autor für die im Band behandelte Epoche finden konnte.

Gerade die spannende Zielsetzung des Bandes, eine kultur- und sozialgeschichtlich eingeordnete Perspektive auf Medienentwicklung anzubieten, Einzeldisziplinen zu überwinden, und damit einen integrativen Beitrag zur Kommunikationsgeschichtsschreibung auf dem Territorium des heutigen Österreich zu schreiben, ist – trotz für sich genommenen großteils instruktiver Beiträge

– nur bedingt eingelöst worden. Dafür stehen die einzelnen Aufsätze des Bandes doch zu sehr und eklektisch (Korrespondentennetze, Frauenzeitschriften, Erster Weltkrieg) für sich und wird eine systematisierende und strukturierende Ordnung der Mediengeschichte zu wenig erfüllt. Gerade angesichts des angestrebten Zielpublikums ist zu hoffen, dass der zweite Band und eventuell weitere Auflagen dieses Bandes hier noch eine weitere Orientierung bieten werden, um das Potential des an sich wichtigen und spannenden Projektes noch weiter auszuschöpfen.

Christian Schwarzenegger, Augsburg





# Empfehlung



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## **Geschichte(n), Repräsentationen, Fiktionen. Medienarchive als Gedächtnis- und Erinnerungsorte**

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