

Introduction

Anthropology of Nostalgia – Anthropology as Nostalgia

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La pensée d'un homme est avant tout sa nostalgie.

Camus, *Le mythe de Sisyphe*.

This book explores how nostalgic discourses and practices work concretely in different social and cultural environments. Since the rediscovery of memory by social scientists (Berliner 2005), and in particular its emotionality (White 2006), nostalgia has increasingly attracted anthropologists' attention. Terms including 'structural' (Herzfeld 2004), 'synthetic' (Strathern 1995), 'armchair' (Appadurai 1996), 'colonial' (Bissel 2005), 'imperialist' (Rosaldo 1989), 'practical' (Battaglia 1995), 'resistant' (Stewart 1988) and 'for the future' (Piot 2010) have been applied to it in order to deal with its complexity, at the intersection of the individual, the social and the political. Scholars have realized that nostalgia constitutes a fascinating site for studying contemporary issues of identity, politics and history.

However, fine-grained ethnographies of nostalgia and loss are still scarce (Berliner 2012, Bissel 2005, Graburn 1995, Ivy 1995, Metcalf 2012, Schneider 2000). Most of the topical literature focuses on post-socialist contexts (Berdahl 1999, Boyer 2006, Todorova and Gille 2012). As much as the Holocaust has become a paradigm for research in memory studies (Lapierre 2007), works on nostalgia are paradigmatically 'Eastern European'. This

book intends to expand on this research, ethnographically and theoretically. Drawing on disparate fieldwork around the globe (Argentina, Germany, Cyprus, Spain, Lithuania, Russia and Hungary), the contributors explore the fabric of nostalgia, by addressing its places, interactions, agents, institutions, objects, rituals, politics, codes, critical moments, gestures, banal temporalities and media. They investigate nostalgic feelings, discourses and practices in the fields of heritage and tourism, exile and diasporas, economic exchange and consumerism, politics and nationalism. Although the bulk of the texts are ethnographic in essence, the book gathers a gamut of works based on classical as well as unconventional empirical cases and brings together insights from history, literature, museology and political sciences. Analytically, they all contribute to a better understanding of how individuals and groups remember, commemorate and revitalize their pasts, and the crucial role played by nostalgia in the process of remembering.

Nostalgia, in the sense of a 'longing for what is lacking in a changed present . . . a yearning for what is now unattainable, simply because of the irreversibility of time' (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 920), is a central notion that permeates present-day discourses and practices. Theorists see in it a distinctive attitude towards the past inherent to contemporary culture, 'a reaction against the irreversible' (Jankélévitch 1983: 299) to be found everywhere and now often commodified, the result of 'a new phase of accelerated, nostalgia-producing globalization' (Robertson 1992: 158). Whilst, in *L'ignorance*, Milan Kundera describes his hero, Josef, a Czech man who feels only disinterest towards his past, as suffering from 'a lack of nostalgia' (2005: 87), in many parts of the world there seems to be a current overdose of nostalgia, a reaction to the modern 'accelerism' (the acceleration of modern temporality coined by Robert Musil in *The Man Without Qualities*) and deployed in universes as diverse as nationalism, heritage policies, vintage consumerism, the tourism industry and religious and ecological movements.

Nostalgia, however, has a long history. Reviewing past literature on the subject would be an impossible task, far beyond the reach of this introduction. Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, historians, literary critics, scholars of cultural studies and philosophers have abundantly discussed such history, from Odysseus's homesickness, yearning for his return to Ithaca, to the medicalization of nostalgia (as a physical trouble) by Johannes Hofer in the seventeenth century (Bolzinger 2007, Jankélévitch 1983, Starobinsky 1966). The nineteenth century saw nostalgia lose its clinical connotations and started to take the metaphorical meaning of longing for a lost place and, especially, a vanished time. In Europe, at that period, nostalgia for past times indeed blossomed. Massive changes, such as those induced by industrialization and urbanization but also by the French Revolution, fostered

a ‘perception of history as decline’ (Turner 1987: 150), ‘a dramatization of discontinuity’ (Fritzsche 2001: 1610) and a desire to recapture what life was before. A sense of temporal acceleration prompted by unprecedented social and economic transformations produced, among many European elites, a sense of loss and distance from the past that nurtured their wish to patrimonialize and museumify it, but also boosted their scientific and literary interest in memory and loss (Terdiman 1993). This massive deployment of historiographical and patrimonial consciousness is brilliantly grasped by historian Pierre Nora in his voluminous *Lieux de mémoire* (1984, 1986, 1992) where he explores the impact of the ‘acceleration of history’ on the social fabric of memory in France. Although Nora’s writing is imbued with nostalgia for a time when memory was spontaneous, warm and absolute rather than cold and relative history (‘there are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory’ [1989: 7]), his work cogently teases out the emergence of a modernist posture towards the past, and the role of material culture as quintessential mediation for collective remembering. What historians name the nineteenth century ‘memory boom’ or ‘heritage crusade’ in Europe was undoubtedly a result of this modernist nostalgia, yet it was only by the second half of the twentieth century that the notion entered popular vocabulary. In the West, a ‘culture of nostalgia’ arose in the 1960s and 1970s, a time of great social transformations accompanied by a growing media culture and the commercialization of nostalgia through popular culture (Davis 1979, Grainge 2002, Jameson 1991). ‘Why so much nostalgia *now*?’ writes Davis in the late 70s. ‘Why the almost frenetic preoccupation of nearly every postpubescent age group with fads and fashions from the past?’ (Davis 1979: 105). Even more today, a nostalgic craze glorifying past ways and objects is pervasive in the West and can be observed in the growing success of flea markets and antiques, organic food, ‘natural’ childbirth techniques, eco-museums, vintage consumption, and so forth, such *retromania* invading modern day new technologies (think of ‘Instagram’ that makes your present pictures look ‘instantly nostalgic’ [see Bartholeyns 2014]). A whole field of research about the contemporary forms of nostalgia remains to be investigated, and this book is a commencement only, both theoretical and ethnographic.

To begin with, it is worth noting that, for anthropologists and sociologists, studying nostalgia today resembles a return of the repressed. The foundation of sociology as an academic discipline was built upon a conception of modernity imbued with nostalgia (Shaw and Chase 1989). Durkheim, Weber, Tönnies and Simmel’s theories involve a critical stance towards the emergent Western industrial society, framed by a moral opposition between tradition and modernity. As compared to the former, they share a view of

the latter as characterized by cultural and political breakdown, in a rhetoric permeated with a sense of social degradation (Berlan 2012). Primitivist nostalgia played a crucial role in the formation of anthropology as well, with the first ethnographies by Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, Edward Evans-Pritchard and Marcel Griaule, among many others, fuelled with a longing for vanishing societies and ruptured equilibriums (Metcalf 2012, Rosaldo 1989). While anthropologists in the West were building a science on nostalgia for disappearing distant Otherness, an ethnographic interest for the popular and the rural led to the institutionalization of folklore studies in the second half of the nineteenth century in Western Europe (Bendix 1997). David Berliner opens the volume with a chapter on anthropologists' disciplinary nostalgia, which he terms *exo-nostalgia*, i.e., feelings and discourses about other people's (cultural) loss. Such nostalgia rested on combined ideas about the fragility of traditional societies and the impact of colonialism, all wrapped in a pre-apocalyptic tone. Berliner argues that this posture persists to this day, albeit under different expressions. Anthropologists' favourite others are now the local, the particular and the poor, versus the global, the heterogeneous and the dominant, an attitude deeply rooted in their disciplinary *exo-nostalgia*.

For some time, nostalgia has thus been a structuring temporal framework for the social sciences, when many anthropologists were blind to their own usage of time (Fabian 1983). This probably explains why it only became an object of study in the late 1970s, with the rise of postmodernism and the deconstruction of the *méta-récits*. Long seen as a malaise, as 'bad history', nostalgia was often attacked for its sentimentalism and historical falsification, and it still is. Historian David Lowenthal (1989), for instance, apprehends nostalgia as a modern symptom of memory distortion. For some, nostalgia is regarded as a dangerous misuse of history, trading on 'comfortable and conveniently reassuring images of the past, thereby suppressing both its variety and its negative aspects' (Shaw and Chase 1989: 1). Such distortions make nostalgia prone to instrumentalization by conservative strata of the society, striving to legitimate their privileges and to impede social changes (Natali 2004, Tannock 1995). However, in the wake of the literary turn, researchers paid more attention to the past as it is lived by social agents and to concepts closer to human experience (Ricoeur 2000). Anthropologists and sociologists left the suspicious attitude towards memory that previously characterized many histories for a more phenomenological approach, capturing the way people remember, forget and reinterpret their own past. They became as interested in the reliability of memory as in the memory work itself (sometimes more), and nostalgia found its way in the emerging field of memory studies. Published in 1979, Fred Davis' pioneering *Yearning for Yesterday* provides the

first in-depth discussion on the social aspects of nostalgia. Analysing 1960s' social ruptures in American society (mostly challenges to beliefs around what was seen as 'natural' in terms of race, gender, sexualities and lifestyles) and the 'nostalgia orgy' in the following decade, Davis argued that nostalgic reactions originate in perceived threats to continuity of identity in the context of present fears, discontents and uncertainties, when identities have been 'badly bruised by the turmoil of the times' (Davis 1979: 107). Against the idea of retrospective yearnings as politically regressive and emotionally disturbed, Davis approached nostalgia as an act anchored in present context that says a lot more about contemporary social configurations than about the past itself, as it plays a crucial role in 'constructing, maintaining, and reconstructing our identities' (1979: 31). Recent anthropological literature has confirmed that nostalgia as affect, discourse and practice mediate collective identities, whether they are social, ethnic or national (Bissell 2005, Bryant 2008, Cashman 2006, Herzfeld 2004). Far from only being an evasion towards an irretrievable past, or politically non-subversive (Rethmann 2008), nostalgic laments can involve both moral critique of the present and an alternative to deal with social changes (Parla 2009, Yang 2003). Sometimes, nostalgia is 'a weapon', as Berdahl nicely puts it (1999: 201). Similarly, Atia and Davies emphasize that nostalgia is 'a potent form of such subaltern memory', underlining 'nostalgia's empowering agency' and 'critical potential' (2010: 181). As a matter of fact, nostalgia is mostly approached today as a narrative of loss by way of such 'power/resistance' paradigm.

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The texts that follow push the discussion around nostalgia in four directions. While all the texts engage, by and large, in these ways, some add more focus on one point rather than another. First, it is time to clarify the notional fog surrounding the label 'nostalgia' and to meticulously describe the multiple cognitive and emotional investments that lie behind it. Nostalgia has become a catch-all notion used to refer to an array of memory discourses and practices that sometimes share little commonalities. Katherine Stewart already warned us that if 'nostalgia . . . is everywhere', 'it is a cultural practice, not a given content; its forms, meanings, and effects shift with the context – it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present' (1988: 227). Although rooted in the idea that the past is no longer available, nostalgic longings are indeed multiple. William Bissell invites anthropologists to look at how 'nostalgia takes on very different forms and dimensions, engaging an array of social agents, interests, forces, and locations' (Bissell 2005: 239). In the same vein, Dominic Boyer remarks that nostalgia is not only 'indexical', but also 'heteroglossic', a 'dialogical gossamer

of idiosyncratic references, interests, and affects that are channelled through nostalgic discourse' (Boyer 2012: 20). Some authors have highlighted the need to operate distinctions between different types of nostalgia. Svetlana Boym distinguishes between nostalgias that are 'restorative', aiming at the 'transhistorical reconstruction of lost home' (Boym 2001: xviii), and those that are 'reflective', ironic and longing for the longing itself. Whereas Davis separated 'private' and 'collective' nostalgias (1979: 122), Jameson (1991) suggested a discrimination between the 'nostalgic mood', caused by a feeling of loss, and the 'nostalgic mode', i.e., the consumable style that does not involve memory per se (for an elaboration on Jameson's typology, see Grainge 2002). More generally, the latter designates these 'fragments of the past [that] are energetically manufactured and avidly consumed but do not necessarily correspond to the evidence of experience' (Fritzsche 2001: 1617).

This raises important questions for anthropologists: what forms can nostalgia take and, when identified, how to grasp them in thick description? Is nostalgia an effect (positive or negative?), a social practice, a form of discourse? How to distinguish it from other past-oriented states (such as non-nostalgic reminiscences)? Does nostalgia bring into play a temporality of its own? Nostalgia's psychological mechanisms are habitually left in the shadow by anthropologists, albeit Bloch (1998) and Wertsch (2009) have recommended one take into account the complex workings of mnemonic fixation. A bouquet of studies examines the psychological triggers, contents and functions of nostalgia, demonstrating its ability to generate positive affects (Routledge et al. 2011, Wildschut et al. 2006). Although the present volume does not constitute an exploration into the mental processes of nostalgia, such research (that draw on methods many anthropologists might find irrelevant) opens fascinating avenues for further anthropological enquiries. In his article for this volume, David Berliner calls for an ambitious but nonetheless rigorous use of the notion. A consuming feeling born of the realization that human temporality is irreversible, mostly embodied in the Proustian madeleine experience (that of *In Search of Lost Time* which triggers the author's involuntary memories of Combray), nostalgia can be disconnected from intense emotional feelings and sometimes from personal experiences altogether. Berliner recommends that one disentangles its multiple attachments, some of which are not always nostalgic. Likewise, Gediminas Lankauskas regrets that the conceptual fuzziness surrounding nostalgia and the dominant paradigm of *nostalgification* in post-socialist studies wipes out the very complexity and ambiguity of memory practices that we should strive to describe. His chapter forcefully illustrates an expression of post-socialist nostalgia within an interactive theme park in a bunker of the Lithuanian capital where, guided by professional actors, visitors

experience conditions of life under communism, such as KGB interrogations, medical examinations, civil defence training and so forth. Lankauskas regards these shows (the ‘survival drama’) as commemorative performances where the period of communist rule is represented using memorial media ranging from visual imagery and discourse to acoustic and gustatory effects. Meanwhile, social memories are also contested by participants. Although, in Eastern Europe, many people historically and biographically represent socialism as a ‘vanished home’, in the Bunker, the performances that recall the austerity and harshness of the Soviet era are better comprehended as non-nostalgic recollections, a past to be remembered and forgotten. According to the participants’ glosses on their experience, Lankauskas differentiates between nostalgic longings and ‘memories of bygone’ where the relationship with the past is one of dissociation rather than affective continuity. His article offers several insightful vignettes from the Bunker ‘survival drama’, and argues that after socialism there is more to individual and collective memory than nostalgia.

The same quest for conceptual clarification underlies the important contribution by Olga Schevchenko and Maya Nadkarni. Whereas Lankauskas disentangles diverse memory works in the Bunker, Schevchenko and Nadkarni discriminate among different kinds of references to the past, stressing that not all of them are nostalgic. Comparing the relationship of nostalgia to politics in post-socialist Hungary and Russia in the 1990s and 2000s, they stress the analytical confusion that surrounds many discussions about nostalgia. Often, nostalgia has been associated with a priori political meanings (either progressive or reactionary) and reified into an essentialized object with a given and stable content. Their chapter convincingly shows that there is a multiplicity of meanings to nostalgia, many of which depend on who mobilizes the desire to renew a relationship to the past. Portraying the heterogeneity of nostalgic practices, they argue that similar forms of longing carry very different meanings depending on the political agendas in which they were enmeshed. For instance, expressions of nostalgia in Hungary were considered less subversive than in Russia, because the geopolitical context of Hungary at that time made it impossible to exploit nostalgia politically. A longing for something no longer attainable, nostalgia thus arises relationally. It is precisely these indexical relations that need to be elucidated in the studies of nostalgia.

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Second, the contributions gathered in this book aim at describing the concrete fabric of nostalgia in interactions, facts of communication, places and times, and through texts, objects and technologies (see also Todorova 2012).

Who are the different protagonists of nostalgia? In which social networks and political ideologies does it take place? What are the sites and contexts in which it is expressed? Are words and objects the most powerful vehicles for longing? How is nostalgia transmitted to younger generations? Like Schevchenko and Nadkarni, Chris Hann's chapter advocates a treatment of nostalgia that takes into consideration the larger sociohistorical context, with a focus on its contemporary politicization. Assembling private and public strands of Hungarian nostalgia, he emphasizes the complex entanglement of private and collective memories. Drawing on his long-term research in the village of Tazlar, Hann shows the persistence of nostalgia for socialism in the private sphere, although the prevailing ideology of private property nowadays obstructs public appreciation of the socialist decades. Furthermore, his multi-level ethnography demonstrates how private dissident memories persist in the domestic space, while political elites strive to shape a collective nostalgia rooted in the pre-socialist *mythomoteur* of Hungarian nationalism. We discover how Hungarian politicians today manipulate such pre-communist mythology from which the villagers are largely estranged.

In the fabric of nostalgia, physical objects play an important role. Not unlike the famous madeleine cake of Proust, materialities mediate people's relationship to their past and, often, they trigger powerful mnemonic responses (Parkin 1999, Radley 1990). A literary and dramatic example of this is found in Orhan Pamuk's *Museum of Innocence* (2010), the shattering tale of a young Turkish man who builds a museum to honor the nostalgic memories of his impossible love story. A somehow similar spirit animates the text by Jonathan Bach, who explores the workings of post-socialist nostalgia in the former German Democratic Republic. His chapter revisits the well-known phenomenon of *Ostalgie* (a German neologism meaning nostalgia for the former socialist East [see also Berdhal 1999 and Boyer 2006]) in contemporary Germany. More than two decades after the demise of the GDR, nostalgia for communism remains a contentious semantic space. Bach examines the symbolic and economic appreciation of everyday life objects that came to epitomize the socialist era, emphasizing how they have been transfigured into what he terms 'nostalgia-objects'. Focusing on the material culture of nostalgia expressed in private museums of everyday life under socialism, he argues that massive purchase of socialist objects by local collectors, today obsolete as compared with newly imported Western goods, constitutes a mourning for some aspects of their past. These privately run museums claim historical authenticity in addition to commercial attraction, and coexist in a vexed relationship with scholarly and state archival practices. On the other hand, one finds among Easterners a wide consumption of goods once produced under socialist brands. Consumer objects occupy

the border between a longing for a style of life under communism, and a capitalist nostalgia organized around an aesthetic of kitsch. Rather than a desire to revive the socialist regime itself, consumption of both these kinds of products should be interpreted as a political device for Easterners to position themselves in a field of cultural production dominated by the West. Bach's study of the re-evaluation and re-appropriation of GDR objects further teases out the complex process by which nostalgia intervenes as a vector of cultural transmission.

The relationship existing between objects of nostalgia, cultural transmission and trauma lies at the heart of Joseph Josy Lévy and Inaki Olazabal's chapter. Taking as case the traumatic exile of Spanish Jews in 1492 after the Catholic kings religiously unified the kingdom, they return to the very first meaning of nostalgia as a longing for a lost geographical home. Scattered, Jewish exiles reorganized their communities in new countries and kept over centuries a rich heritage by which nostalgia for Spain was maintained alive and reactivated in daily and ritual occasions. In memoirs, historical texts, folklore and contemporary novels (like Marcos Aguinis' *Gesta del marrano*, Eliette Abécassis' *Sefarad* and Jorge Semprun's *Twenty Years and One Day*), Levy and Olazabal scrutinize the persistent presence of *La llave*, the key of the lost house that Sephardic Jews are said to have carried throughout their exile, a powerful symbol of their ancestral house, evoking a longing for Spain. And the key continues its social life, 'formalized as heritage' producing 'legitimacy through aestheticization' (Roy 1994). It is now a cultural icon publicly mobilized by Spanish politicians to restore relationships with Jewish communities around the world and used by national and international agencies to develop tourism.

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Third, far from being a feeling hidden in the confines of the self only, nostalgia is 'a force that does something' (Dames 2010: 272). Such a transformative aspect of nostalgia is elegantly captured by Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* when he writes: 'In the sunset of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine' (1984: 4). Therefore, anthropologists must investigate its pragmatic conditions and effects. What and how do nostalgic memories make act? How may nostalgic longings constitute operators for social transformations? When used for social and political concerns, nostalgic discourses and practices do not necessarily involve the melancholy with which it is usually associated. In some cases, they bond diverse categories of actors and constitute a source of mnemonic convergence. Such convergence remains relatively under studied by anthropologists, in favour of stories of clashes and misunderstandings

between multiple pasts. For instance, in Luang Prabang (Lao PDR), David Berliner has observed the flourishing of a mnemonic community centred on nostalgia for the Indochinese past among Western experts, expatriates, travellers and some Lao from the diaspora, whilst frictions about meaningful heritage opposed UNESCO experts and locals (Berliner 2012). In her text for this volume, Rebecca Bryant forcefully highlights one function of nostalgia, namely the reification of social identities and the production of cultural boundaries in context of important changes. Her article examines discourses of nostalgia in north Cyprus that have emerged in the past decade, after almost thirty years of relative silence regarding the pre-conflict past. With the division of Cyprus in 1974, more than two hundred thousand persons were displaced from their homes. Almost fifty thousand Turkish Cypriots moved from the island's south to a new, ethnically cleansed homeland in the island's north, where they engaged in practices of forgetting their former homes. Bryant describes a new emphasis by Turkish Cypriots on their displacement and life before conflict, evident in a flood of books, television programs and newspaper articles that document homes and villages left behind. Non-recognition of the Turkish Cypriot state, a flood of immigration and the 2003 opening of the border have resulted in doubts about gains and a new discovery of loss. But unlike many other forms of nostalgia that emphasize a prelapsarian moment and longing for its return, these nostalgic productions are non-utopian, pointing to the 'fall from grace' of coexistence with one's former Greek Cypriot neighbours. In certain cases, nostalgia may be used to facilitate forgetting and to stress irretrievability. Furthermore, she discusses how nostalgia is strategically deployed to define thresholds, boundaries and hence orientations towards the future. Her ethnography reveals that nostalgia constitutes a longing for an idealized and stereotyped self image that one believes is irremediably lost. A 'longing for essentialism', as she terms it, it fosters a well-defined representation of oneself that has irretrievably gone.

Olivia Angé adopts a similar angle and looks at the efficacy of nostalgic discourses in economic exchanges between Highland and Lowland peasants in Argentina. Studying barter fairs in the Argentinean cordillera, in a way that is reminiscent of Cretan shepherds' 'structural nostalgia' (Herzfeld 2004), she examines how the trope of a vanishing balanced reciprocity is mobilized during barter haggling in order to increase rewards, without necessarily involving affective attachment to the past. Angé suggests that one distinguishes between 'nostalgic dispositions', implying emotional investment, and 'nostalgic discursive devices', strategic utterances targeting present benefits. Through the use of these nostalgic devices, fairs' transactions manifest a moral and symbolic continuity with an ancestral past. It

is by lamenting its loss and denouncing its violation that barter between Highlanders and Lowlanders is displayed as a normative ideal. Moreover, corroborating Bryant's statement, repeated allusions to the ancestors' code of exchange and its vanishing contribute to essentializing ethnic identities in a context of social liminality.

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Fourth, and finally, nostalgia reveals relationships that exist between the past, the present and the future. As Dominic Boyer lucidly puts it, 'nostalgia always carries with it a politics of the future' (2012: 25). 'Nostalgia', writes Boym, 'is not always about the past. It can be retrospective as well as prospective' (2001: xvi). Following the historian Koselleck (2004 [1979]), one must consider nostalgic discourses and feelings about the passing of time as *always already* framed within the 'horizons of expectations' in the present. Comparing Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot histories of their island's partition, Bryant has lucidly shown how visions of lost homelands are also visions of 'homelands yet to be realized' (Bryant 2008: 399). The women's narratives that Bryant analyses 'complicate our notions of nostalgia through a longing for a homeland that is not absent but rather apocalyptic – a homeland not of the past but of the future' (2008: 404). Nostalgia is being crafted within such horizons of expectations and anxieties about the future. And hope is never far from nostalgia, as shown by recent ethnographies of hope and the politics of future (Cole 2010, Piot 2010). The final chapter by Petra Rethmann discusses the defeat and promise of communism in GRD. Since socialism has been declared an 'extinction event', its structure, shape and configuration can only be imagined as ruin. In inverse relation, leftist ideologists such as Fredric Jameson, Slavoj Žižek and Jodi Dean hold on to the idea of socialism as utopia and dream, a political horizon to which contemporary critical and leftist thinkers should aspire. In her article, Rethmann studies if and how socialism can still constitute a meaningful horizon in Germany today. Building on her research in a conference entitled *Kommunismus* organized in Berlin in 2010, she approaches two manifestations of 'left-wing nostalgia' and their attempt to reimagine a fair future.

This last point brings us to a key question on nostalgia, that of temporality. Since the foundation of the discipline, anthropologists have been interested in the cultural constructions of time (Gell 1992, Munn 1992). If nostalgia implies a specific positioning towards the past seen as irreversible, an awareness of something which has disappeared or is disappearing, it is reasonable to ask whether it is universal. Without giving a definitive answer to such a riddle, it is fair to point out that every society around the world has faced breaches and crises and that all human groups have experienced

some reflexive distancing from their past, often taking the form of longings for a lost past. In that regard, we follow Maurice Bloch in his famous discussion of Geertz's appraisal of time: people, he claims, can hold different conceptions of duration depending on the context (Bloch 1977), a point that is made clear about nostalgia by some of our contributors to this volume (Lankauskas, Schevchenko and Nadkarni). As a matter of fact, nostalgia takes place within very specific ontological temporalities (see also Naumescu 2010 on schismatic Orthodox Old Believers in Romania). As anthropologists, our intellectual endeavours consist of grasping the expressions of such nostalgic laments in the midst of historical contingencies. But studying nostalgia not only invites us to refine our understanding of the experience of temporality. As social representations and practices undergo constant mutations, but still persist in time, it also directs our attention to operations of continuity and discontinuity. Atia and Davies underline that 'whatever its object, nostalgia serves as a negotiation between continuity and discontinuity' (Atia and Davies 2010: 184). An anthropological exploration of nostalgia (as well as other mnemonic states) indeed nurtures such a reflection upon the durability of human societies in the face of the ruptures of history. For the anthropologist, this born nostalgist, nostalgia constitutes a fascinating angle to explore the creative persistence and the disappearance of cultural forms. Even more importantly, it allows a number of important reconciliations: between the anthropological, the historical and the psychological; the continuous and discontinuous; the persistent and the mutable; but also between the past, the present and the future.

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