



MEMORY, NOSTALGIA AND THE POLITICS OF SPACE AND PLACE

POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE, 4TH JULY 2019, UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON

PGR Conference Programme
Brighton, 4th July 2019
Centre for Memory, Narrative and Histories

- 9.00** Registration
- 9.30** Welcome
- 9.45** Panel One: A 'Sheltered time?' Imagination, Nostalgia and Loss
- 11.15** Coffee Break
- 11.30** Panel Two: Nostalgia, Memory and Oral History
- 1.00** Lunch
- 2.00** Panel Three: 1989-2019: Communism and Nostalgia
- 3.30** Coffee Break
- 3.45** Keynote address by Prof. David Berliner
Followed by a Q&A and concluding remarks

PANEL ONE: A 'SHELTERED TIME?' IMAGINATION, NOSTALGIA AND LOSS

Discussant: Edward Hogan

Edward Hogan is a lecturer in creative writing at the Open University. He has written five novels, including *Blackmoor* (2008), winner of the Desmond Elliott Prize, and *The Hunger Trace* (2011). His current research interests include the contemporary short story cycle, and the uses of oral history and ethnography in fiction. He is from Derby, and now lives in Brighton. *The Electric* is published by John Murray, in 2020.

1. 'Sheltered Time: A Phenomenology of Nostalgia'

Rikus van Eeden (KU Leuven)

In this paper I develop a phenomenological account of nostalgia, focussing on the unique form of spatial and temporal consciousness it involves. I argue that nostalgia involves a sui generis configuration time consciousness that I call 'sheltered time' which, because of the peculiar configuration of the future- horizon in memory, lends time certain qualities of lived spatiality. In so doing, I contend that: (1) while accounts of nostalgia usually emphasise the role of either space or time, lived spatiality and temporality are so intertwined that we cannot analyse either in isolation, (2) nostalgia shares phenomenological characteristics with memory, on the one hand, as well as with reverie and phantasy, on the other, and, (3) the allure of nostalgia rests on the above-mentioned phenomenological characteristics, rather than the specific object of longing. I primarily draw on Edmund Husserl's phenomenological work on memory and Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological approach to daydreaming and habitation, with reference to contemporary work on nostalgia, memory, and imagination (Bernet, Boym, Casey, Lowenthal), as well as literary sources (Pessoa, Proust, Kundera). While my account of nostalgia does not approach political questions head on, it contributes to their clarification by critiquing a conservative phenomenology of nostalgia which, by emphasising the role of memory and neglecting that of imagination, allows for nostalgia to be mischaracterised as inherently politically conservative. While nostalgia can take different forms, which can be differentiated, for example, in terms of whether they involve consciousness of a determinate object or only vague and diffuse consciousness of longing, I focus on nostalgic memory with a relatively determinate object. I do so because this form of nostalgia is most amenable to a conservative interpretation. Demonstrating that the conservative interpretation of nostalgia is an oversimplification even in this favourable case, allows my argument to be extrapolated to more complex examples.

Rikus is a PhD candidate at the Husserl Archives (Centre for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy) at KU Leuven, Belgium. His current research explores the relation between two conspicuous features of contemporary society: the 'cult of performance' and the 'depression epidemic' from the perspective of phenomenological psychopathology, psychoanalysis and critical theory. His broader interests include phenomenology, philosophical and social anthropology, and South African intellectual history.

2. 'The Memory Trap: Writing Nostalgia and Misremembered Memories'

Genevieve Fox (University of Surrey)

This paper considers fiction, memoir and what it means to create a palimpsestic space in fiction to counteract the tyranny of memory and nostalgia. I will look at writing nostalgia in my novel-in-progress and my memoir, 'Milkshakes and Morphine' Vintage, 2019, and at Proust, Woolf and Ishiguro, and at how we can preserve, create and destroy memory; how memoir can be used as a palimpsestic tool. I look at the deterministic nature of memory, the mechanisms of memory, and the illusion of free will; I will then examine its interstices with fiction and consider how far the process of memory can serve as a template for writing memory. A key consideration is whether restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym) can co-exist. My fiction explores the intersection between a private space that is free of a traumatic past even though you are both nostalgic for that time and its spaces and landscapes.

In looking at memory's mutability and its constantly changed and changing nature, the illusory nature of free will, and the key role played by nostalgia are also considered. In my own creative practice, my characters search for means of selective amnesia. This quest is embodied by the protagonist's act of painting - created, and then destroyed; layered over; brought into being, destroyed, familiar and not familiar. The relation between free will and the tyranny of memory underpins the plot, structure and prose style of my novel, while in my memoir, the act of going back (nostalgia) to a mythologised past creates a future that is free of that nostalgia.

Genevieve Fox is a second year PGR at the University of Surrey. She is doing a TECHNE-funded interdisciplinary practice-based Creative Writing PhD, entitled 'Writing the Mind'. She is writing a novel about memory and the perils of forgetting. She is the author of Milkshakes and Morphine: A Memoir of Love and Loss (Vintage 2019).

3. 'Time Frames of Love'

Jenni Cresswell

My work seeks to explore the use of clothing, specifically dresses, in providing the inspiration and canvas for my own autoethnographic research. By deconstruction of these garments to reveal their own intrinsic stories, and embellishment of them to imprint my own stories, I produce multi-layered, multi-narrative pieces.

Nostalgia and loss often play a key role in my work, and I am currently working on a project that aims to explore the phenomenon of what Boym (2001) terms 'prospective' nostalgia. Prompted by an event in my own life, I have sourced a number of second hand children's garments to help me tell the story of my unborn daughter as I imagine her growing up. The sense of nostalgia I feel for this person is an intense one and brings about a longing for a time that did not come to pass. This time frame can be preserved and deconstructed over and over using a new dress to represent another year of my daughter's life, marking the key points in her life. The space within which I seek to understand my feelings about this real/ not real person is akin to a physical place; the sense of loss and longing for that person in the place is akin to memory.

Through my developing project I will explore these phenomena of place and memory within this chronotopic viewpoint, drawing on the work of others such as Behar's (1996) observations around memory and loss, Turkle's 'evocative objects' (2007) and Stanley's (1992) perception of the significance of the presence of the observer in artists' work. My findings are presented alongside the dresses and illustrated by visual images of the work.

Jenni Cresswell is a textile artist with a passion for using second hand/acquired clothing (usually dresses) as a medium to express her personal stories about heritage, memory and loss. She feels that dresses already contain their own stories and through deconstructing and embellishing them, and filming and photographing the process, she strives to expose something more fundamental about herself, the stories of the dresses, and indeed, the stories of those viewing the work.

PANEL TWO: NOSTALGIA, MEMORY AND ORAL HISTORY

Discussant: Stephen Hopkins (University of Leicester)

1. 'Nostalgia for 'HMP Divis' and 'HMP Rossville': Memories of everyday spaces in Northern Ireland's high rise flats'

Garikoitz Gómez Alfaro (University of Brighton) and Fearghus Roulston (University of Brighton)

The Divis Flats in West Belfast and the Rossville Flats in Derry were both modernist housing projects built in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and demolished in the 1980s. Largely occupied by Catholic residents, the complexes embody the entangled history of the politics of social housing since partition and, especially, of the deployment of the British army in Northern Ireland after 1969. Both sites were central to the urban landscapes of conflict in Belfast and Derry.

Strikingly, the iconicity of both flats as synecdochal with the histories of housing discrimination, state oppression and violence against Northern Ireland's Catholic communities is only fitfully present in the memories of former residents. This article examines oral histories of both housing complexes to consider what the remembered experience of everyday life in the flats reveals about the material culture of conflict in Northern Ireland. It proposes that attending closely to how former residents narrate their relationship to these spaces offers an insight into two related key questions.

The first concerns the interconnectedness of the domestic and the private in sectarian logics of violence and surveillance. The second deals with the affective landscape afforded by these new concrete buildings and the specific experience of the conflict created by that landscape. The article thus traces how the memories of former residents are characterised by an awareness of the ways in which the buildings were weaponised and securitised against their resident population while also dwelling upon highly nostalgic tropes that celebrate the loss of a tight-knit 'community' that disappeared with the demolition of the buildings. In doing so, it emphasises the importance of tracing and historicising the quotidian material consequences of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Garikoitz Gómez Alfaro is a doctoral candidate at the School of Humanities. His main topics of research are commemorative geographies, affect theory and the politics of time. He is an affiliated researcher at the Centre for Memory, Narrative and Histories.

Fearghus Roulston completed his PhD at the University of Brighton, an oral history of the punk scene in Belfast during the Troubles, in 2019. He is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Brighton working on an oral history of Northern Irish migration to Britain.

2. 'Memory, Refugeeeness and Subjectivity: Uses of "the past" in Asylum Procedures and Migrant Activism'

Konstandinos Gousis (University of Roehampton, London)

The aim of this presentation is to critically examine the role of memory related to migrant legal and political subjectivity. Theoretically, I will build on Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci and more concretely on the former's notes on repressed memories and the role of the past in political struggles and the latter's philosophy of praxis. I will then turn to Asylum Procedures trying to understand what it means to remember and narrate life stories during asylum interviews aiming at vulnerability assessments and the examination of the well-founded fear of persecution based on the UN Refugee Convention. Drawing conclusions from various radical critiques to victimhood, the effects of this kind of "forced memories" on asylum seekers' consciousness formation will be emphasized. Turning to political subjectivity, I will try to stress alternative uses of "the past" in migrant struggles. For this reason, I will bring into discussion examples of migrant activism during the last decade in Greece examining the possible liberating role of memory as a source of solidarity and as a political practice, ranging from justice campaigns to cultural practices and political mobilizations.

Konstandinos Gousis is an AHRC TECHNE funded doctoral student at the University of Roehampton, London.

3. "'Voice of the Agora": a three-generation narrative on the marketplace and the city, 1938-2018'

Alexandros Daniilidis (University of Sussex)

Prominent architect and theorist Aldo Rossi argued in his highly influential *The Architecture of the City* (MIT Press, 1984) that memory is the consciousness of the city. The city itself is a huge repository of people's collective memory which can be associated with objects and places, creating thus the sense of place. Since classical Hellenic and Roman times, the agora – the marketplace – has been the heart of the city: a space of trade but also a space of sociality, a 'mosaic' of cultural multitude and the actualization – the stage – of the everyday life. In the present era where consumption has been highly mechanized and relations between trader and consumer have been limited to faceless and formal patterns, the role of the traditional public market has gradually acquired a nostalgic aura, remnant of a forgotten authentic past.

By drawing upon principles of memory studies as described by Jan Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs, this paper intends to highlight the marketplace's role in the formation of cultural and social memory through an intra-generation history of a small spices and herbs store in Thessaloniki's Kapani market. What can we learn about society, cultural, political and financial conditions through the memories and experiences of the shopkeepers? How has the market evolved in time and how do time and space interact towards the formation of the store's identity? As part of an urban ethnographic research project and through the methodology of oral histories, the paper aims to outline and explore different cultural and social attributes that are described in each of the store owners' era over a timeline of 80 years: from the times of 1940s immense poverty to the affluent 1980s up to the digital era of 2000s. Three people, three stories, three different insights in society and market culture form the basis of this presentation.

Alexandros Daniilidis comes from an architectural background but has expanded his research interests into cultural and urban studies, construction of identities and the urban experience. Their research is dedicated to the study of public markets from a multitude of perspectives that regard senses, memory and everyday practices.

PANEL THREE: 1989-2019: COMMUNISM AND NOSTALGIA

Discussant: TBC

1. 'Of Men and Walls: Between Banality and Memorialisation of the Berlin Wall'

Chloe Lee (Royal Holloway University of London)

The Berlin Wall symbolises division, totalitarianism and the Cold War – a tense, global political atmosphere with never-witnessed before scope. However the structure which divided the city for more than 28 years, was also witness to snowball fights, gardening, and drunkenness. This paper aims to show how ordinary Berliners incorporated the structure into their daily lives through banal function, as captured in the photo stories of Matthias Hoffmann. His 'archive of collective memory' provides a foil to the visceral images we associate with the Berlin Wall, painting a more ambiguous and complex picture of a highly politicized historical object. The photographs, together with personal anecdotes from contributors, enable individuals to speak into historical discourse usually dominated by the warring ideologies of the period. These snapshot recollections, in opposition to the political rhetoric of the period, suggest why approaches to remembering the divided city have been problematic, insufficient and contradictory. How do we reconcile both the banal and totalitarian reality of living with the Berlin Wall? Consequently, in the 'capital of memory' stuttered attempts to memorialise, remember and (re)imagine the wall, have been criticised as ill-taste memory projects, perpetuating nostalgia for the GDR. Indeed, the many ways the wall continues to physically exist, from small pieces sold as souvenirs to large segments opposing the continuing division of Korea, show the unique place the Berlin Wall occupies in popular imagination. However, this paper will argue the voids and fragments left behind by the Berlin Wall are the ideal counter-monument, capturing Berlin's Cold War past, as a working, living and breathing city divided into two.

Chloe Lee is in her first year of PhD study at the History and Drama Departments, at Royal Holloway University of London. Her latest interdisciplinary work explores the way the Partition of India is taught in schools through the creative practices of drama and theatre. She is especially interested in how historic border-making informs the many facets of identity and how this is replicated, reinforced and/or redirected through pedagogy in public environments.

2. **“Born in USSR”: Nostalgia for the Soviet Union through Digital Communities’**

Benedicte Stoufflet (Free University of Brussels)

The focus of my study is to explore the production of a nostalgic memory within the digital space. My research questions the specificity of choosing a medium, whose use has already its own implications in terms of mnemonic effects, to get involved in a mnemonic practice. To what extent the space of digital communities shapes the production of nostalgia? I have conducted fieldwork on Russian online communities dedicated to ex-citizens of USSR. I analyse how these communities are organized to convert the absence of the past time and place into presence. The members, who were born in a country that disappeared from the map, are invited to interact in order not merely to communicate about a common past, but also to resist oblivion and to discuss official history. In this paper, I wonder whether these online spaces contribute to the emergence of shared empathy, imagination and recognition. I show that online memory is characterized by an interplay between technological devices and mnemonic practices. I have observed different levels of narration. Individual memory is not stimulated in the same way on the timeline, the discussion forum or the photo albums. Such mediations not only translate memory into a public material, but are social triggers that shape individual memory. Above all, the community presents itself as a constructed flow of unintentional remembering, a space of storage that gathers and fixes the traces of the past, and an arena for communicative memory.

Benedicte Stoufflet is a MA Student in anthropology, in Free University of Brussels. She is currently writing her thesis on post-soviet nostalgia and its expression on digital communities.

3. **‘Cappuccinos with Stalin: the aesthetics of nostalgia and the communist past as space in contemporary theme restaurants.’**

Jantine Broek

In recent years, food and drink establishments in large cities in countries formerly or still under communist rule have begun to offer the extraordinary opportunity to travel back in time to the communist period. A hybrid of modern capitalist culture and the communist past, these themed establishments allow visitors to experience the atmosphere of Stasi-ruled Berlin or 1970s Hanoi while having a coffee or a meal. Typical elements are ‘authentically’ austere furniture and colourful propaganda posters which travel guides call ‘quirky’, and some even dress their waiting staff in fake uniforms. Popular with tourists and locals alike, these ‘communist-casual’ establishments offer a menu suited to modern tastes while stirring up nostalgic feelings in their visitors – most of whom weren’t alive during this time, and who may

choose to ignore the fact that this type of establishment would not have existed back then. They get to admire the past from up close – what Svetlana Boym calls “experiencing time as space” – without experiencing the hunger, deprivation or fear of the government listening in on their conversations that characterized it.

This paper compares several examples of ‘communist-casual’ establishments, showing that while some use the aesthetics of the past to offer a contextualised history lesson, others are part of a cottage industry of memory, using the past as a selling point for merchandise. I discuss the detractors who think these places are disrespectful to victims of communism, as well as the various factors that have led to their existence and popularity, including nationalism, the desire of some owners to come to terms with their traumatic past, and that of others to perpetuate their particular ideological view of it. Finally, I examine how these establishments justify the commodification of aesthetics of the past, and where they draw the line.

Jantine Broek (1992) is an MA-graduate, writer and editor from Utrecht, the Netherlands. She has a research interest in literature and memory, wartime nostalgia and the neohistorical novel, and has published several magazine articles on war and literature. She currently runs The Re:war Project, a blog about the ways in which we remember – and forget – the Second World War.

KEYNOTE: 'EXONOSTALGIA

Prof. David Berliner (Free University of Brussels)

There exist various nostalgic tonalities that bring into play a number of cognitive and emotional investments. Certain forms of nostalgia are more or less removed from intense feelings, such as the bittersweet memories I have of unique moments in my childhood, though I have no particular desire to revive them. Some feel nostalgia for places and times unconnected to their roots, like French philosopher Barbara Cassin, raised in Paris, and of Hungarian-Jewish descent, yet who feels an uncontrollable nostalgia for Corsica. Nostalgia can also be completely disassociated from personal experiences. Across the world, young patriots are nostalgic for a country they have never known, and which probably never existed. What I call "exonostalgia" constitutes nostalgia for a past not experienced personally. Unlike episodic memory, which connects individuals viscerally to their past, allowing them to return in their minds to events that they have lived, this vicarious nostalgia encompasses a variety of affects and discourses related to loss, but detached from direct experience. In this talk, I will explore the complex workings of such "prosthetic" nostalgia.

David Berliner is currently Professor of Anthropology at the Free University of Brussels (ULB). He completed his post-doc at Harvard University in 2003 and he taught at the Central European University (Hungary) in 2005-2006. Between 2011 and 2015, he was co-editor of *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale*, the journal of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. His research interests include social memory, nostalgia and cultural transmission. He recently published « *Perdre sa culture* » (Zones Sensibles, 2018) and is the co-editor of *Learning Religion* (Berghahn, 2007); *Anthropology and Nostalgia* (Berghahn, 2014) and *World Heritage on the Ground* (Berghahn, 2016). David Berliner is a member of the Laboratoire d'anthropologie des mondes contemporains (LAMC) at the Free University of Brussels.

POSTER DISPLAY

WHAT IS A NONUMENT? CREATING MONUMENTS THAT PROVIDE SPACE FOR GIVING TESTIMONY

Lily Clifford (University of Brighton)

The research poster will present artwork and insights from Lily Clifford in response to the creation of monuments with participants who identify as under-represented. Between October and December 2018 Clifford devised techniques to provide space for members of the public to rethink and design monuments. Findings from the provided insight into the importance of providing space for oral history sharing and the potential catharsis of creating art around post-memory traumas. These findings on public perception of monuments, the rejection of official memory and how inclusive art practices can support authentic storytelling and the toppling of the uncanny memory resulted in a personal, creative response from Clifford. The work will be on display in Grand Parade from 5th-14th July and will consist of a 'Nonument' which rejects the traditional model of monuments and instead creates a space for sharing narratives and destruction of linear history. The final piece is influenced by Halbwachs' reading of memory and auto-ethnographic art.

Lily Clifford is a MA Inclusive Arts Practice Student working with issues of gender representation and cultural memory. Having originally studied Glass and Ceramics, her work looks at how using clay in the production of figurative sculpture can create profoundly narrative biographies. She has completed research on designing and facilitating inclusive workshops around monument making.