

# Nostalgia Today

Saturday 9 March 2019

## Abstracts

### **The Lost Potential of Nostalgia**

Amy Kenyon

“Nostalgia ain’t what it used to be.” It’s an old line, usually attributed to the late Yogi Berra, a baseball player. Yet we forget too easily the literal truth of his remark. This paper documents the history of nostalgia, beginning with its 17<sup>th</sup> century inception as a medical problem, a disease of an “afflicted imagination” that regularly resulted in death. What happened to the term, to its meanings and uses during the subsequent centuries, to alter it almost beyond recognition? Where is nostalgia the pathology, the set of symptoms in need of diagnosis and treatment? And finally, what might happen if we countered baseball’s cracker-barrel philosopher by reclaiming something of what nostalgia *used* to be?

### **The Permanent Now: How Demographic Bouleversement and Technological Ubiquity Created Incontinent Nostalgia**

Will Self

My Uncle's family lived up the road from the Freud Museum when I was a child. Leaving the museum one morning, I walked past it with my students and found the house boarded up and derelict - a surprising sight for property-obsessed and expensive London. And a sight that tore me, incontinently back into my past – but a very specific portion of my past: the psychic region wherein, in youth, I contemplated my own distant future. What I realise now is that the ontological status of those imaginings of a future me, was in fact greater than my own contemporary existence – and it's on this aspect of nostalgic hauntology that I will animadvert on Saturday...

### **Odyssey’s End: The Psychological Features and Functions of Personal Nostalgia**

Erica Hepper

The concept of nostalgia has undergone a turbulent history. First described as a source of strength and resilience for Homer’s Odysseus, it was long conflated with homesickness, disease and mental illness until a revival in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. A mounting body of psychological and sociological research has clarified and rehabilitated understanding of nostalgia as a social, self-conscious and bittersweet emotion that appears to serve as a psychological resource. This presentation considers personal nostalgia from an evidence-based perspective and outlines what we know so far about its psychological features and functions, as well as key questions that remain to be answered.

## **“Worrying the Carcass of an Old Song.”\* Nostalgia and Psychic Retreat in Individual and Political Memory.**

David Morgan

Nostalgia can repudiate the painful realities of the present by conjuring a fantasy that never was, creating a defensive retreat, at both the individual and political level. In the individual it is a sentimental attachment to an idealised past. In politics nostalgic yearning can be used or manipulated to initiate mass belief in a return to an imaginary less anxious time. Threats to our individual narcissism can be obviated through nostalgic reminiscence in the individual, or to nationalist populist sentiment politically. For example the Right uses racism masked as concerns over migration, citing a lost imaginary national homogeneity, the Left sentimentalises a working class solidarity that no longer encompasses the whole story, whilst marginalising others who do not agree.

\* RS Thomas ‘A Welsh Landscape’

## **Nostalgia, Art and Home**

Imogen Racz

Nostalgia is a complex term that brings together aspects of temporality, memory, objects and people, and gains particular resonance when applied to the concept of home. Nostalgia implies a yearning for what is lacking in a changed present and is frequently triggered by an evocation of something from the past. Focusing on two works – Michael Landy’s *Semi-Detached* (2004) and Donald Rodney’s *The House that Jack Built*, (1987), alongside those by other artists working in Britain, including Lubaina Himid and Rachel Whiteread, this paper will consider how they suggest different frameworks of nostalgia as projected onto the ideal of the home.

## **Performing Nostalgias**

What does youth make of nostalgia? How does one experience longing for the past, when it is not long gone, but in vivid memory? The first-year BA Writing for Performance students at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama explore this question in diverse ways through a series of dramatic monologues and readings examining the concept of nostalgia and inspired by the Freud Museum. Featuring writing by Becky Coote, Dominic Green, Michael Herd, Katy Owen, Carla Rudgyard, Sherwin Ramzani Douki, and Taylor Waggoner.

## **The Nostalgia of Nations: Myths of Harmony and Anxieties of Decline**

Samuel Earle

All over the world political leaders are playing on feelings of decline, harking back to a golden past and promising a yellow-brick road to its return. It is tempting to see each case as a result of specific national convulsions, the ugly offspring of domestic flaws, failures and fantasies, but the confluence of such like-minded movements points to something deeper at play. My talk will discuss the shared pattern of these different pasts, focusing on the idea of an imagined harmony, or wholeness, that once existed in every nation and which, in some eyes, demands to be restored. Why do such imaginings seem so alluring now? Notions of a lost harmony are at the heart of religions, philosophies and psychoanalysis, but when it is channelled through the nation it carries particularly dangerous consequences.”