

Call for Papers

Nostalgia Historicizing the Longing for the Past

In the early seventies, intellectuals and journalists became aware of a new and worrying phenomenon: nostalgia. ‘How much more nostalgia can America take?’ *Time* magazine asked in 1971, soon echoed by *Der Spiegel* in Germany and *New Society* in Britain to name just two. Only a decade before, dictionaries had still defined nostalgia as a medical term for an extreme form of homesickness. Now, it described the sentimental yearning for an irretrievable past. And this yearning seemed to be everywhere: in popular culture, in the rising number of museums and the explosion of museum attendance, in advertising, retro fashions and the booming antique market.

Not much seems to have changed since then. History is as popular as never before, popular culture is still obsessed with its own past, fashion designers continue to look back to earlier decades for inspiration and the current upsurge of heritage television—*Downton Abbey*, *Mad Men*—is again being discussed in terms of nostalgia. What is much harder to pin down are the origins of nostalgia and the changes it has undergone during the twentieth century. Has nostalgia always been around or is it indeed a peculiar modern phenomenon? Did its rise really begin in the seventies? Who feels nostalgic and for what? How do age, gender and class constitute and influence nostalgia? And does nostalgia really account for the popular interest in the past?

While a number of studies on nostalgia have appeared throughout various disciplines, historians have taken surprisingly little interest in the phenomenon. If they use the term at all, it is often with condescension, variously describing nostalgia as a sickness, kitsch or even a sin. What we still know very little about, however, is the history of nostalgia. How can we historicize nostalgia? How did it change over time? Does nostalgia, distort the past, as many historians believe, or does it perhaps foster an interest in history?

These are some of the questions the conference wants to address. It is interested both in theoretical contributions to the history of nostalgia and in case studies of nostalgia in various times, places, groups and contexts. Possible topics are: nostalgia in museums, the heritage industry and tourism, nostalgia in popular culture and the media, everyday nostalgia, industrial nostalgia, postcolonial nostalgia, rural nostalgia, nostalgia and migration, nostalgia and identity, nostalgia as an emotion, nostalgia and material culture.

The conference is transdisciplinary and we welcome proposals for twenty-minute presentations from scholars of all fields, including but not limited to history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and cultural studies. Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words, along with a short CV, by 31 March 2015 to Tobias Becker at becker@ghil.ac.uk. Accommodation during the conference will be covered. A limited number of grants will be given to contributors to cover their travel expenses.