Andressa Schröder, Nico Völker,
Robert A. Winkler, Tom Clucas (eds.)

Futures Worth Preserving

Cultural Constructions of Nostalgia and Sustainability

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[transcript]

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Acknowledgments

The present volume stems from the international conference entitled *For What It's Worth: Nostalgia, Sustainability and the Values of the Present* which took place at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at the University of Giessen, Germany from 28th to 30th April 2016.

The conference provided a platform for the exploration of and debate about multiple cultural aspects of the interrelations of nostalgia and sustainability through scholarly as well as artistic research. Alongside the presentation of academic papers, the conference featured a space for *Creative Encounters* with the contributions of artist-researchers that culminated in a small interactive exhibition and a performance.

The present volume expands, however, beyond the scope of the conference and presents contributions by invited authors that were not part of the initial debate and that have enormously enriched our discussion and the content of the volume.

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The cover picture of this book is similarly based on the poster that was designed for the conference by our fellow researcher Ana Lúcia Migowski. The original photograph was taken in 1915 by Florence Elizabeth James-Wallace who worked as a nurse in a resting camp in the Lemnos Island during World War I. The current picture depicts a poetic reconstruction of the space, juxtaposing the original picture on the approximate location where it was initially taken. It is part of the project 'Now and Then' developed by the blog Through These Lines.[1]

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1   Blog: http://throughtheselines.com.au/. Picture and project available at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/thrutheselines/6340289604/in/ album-72157631694580010/.

Introduction

Why Juxtapose the Concepts of Sustainability and Nostalgia?

Andressa Schröder, Nico Völker,

Robert A. Winkler, Tom Clucas

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> Eliot/Four Quarters

The essays in this volume explore hidden connections between the concepts of nostalgia and sustainability. In current usage, nostalgia denotes a "sentimental longing for or regretful memory of a period of the past" (OED), whereas sustainability concerns forms of human activity which attempt to minimize environmental degradation "by avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources" (OED). At first glance, the concepts seem Janus-faced: nostalgia looks to the past, while sustainability looks to the future. As in the epigraph from T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, however, the relations between "time past," "time present," and "time future" are interwoven in complex ways. The sustainable present becomes the locus/moment in which both notions overlap: cultures and individuals are forced to position themselves, both in relation to what they have been and to what they are becoming. This book shows how the concepts of nostalgia and sustainability intersect in cultural constructions of 'futures worth preserving.'

Drawing on a range of disciplines from the humanities and social sciences, the chapters investigate cultural assumptions about which aspects of the past deserve to be remembered, and which aspects of the present should be sustained for the future. In the process, they reveal how contemporary definitions of sustainability are informed by a nostalgic yearning for the past, and how nostalgia is motivated

by a reciprocal longing to sustain the past for the future. On a cultural level, the two terms are connected as well: cultures cannot envision a sustainable future without drawing on the nostalgic resources of the past. Likewise, nostalgia is fueled by a longing to sustain what has gone before, so that both notions raise similar questions of intergenerational justice. Cultures and individuals continually balance the demands of nostalgia and sustainability as they construct historical narratives of progress and development. The aim of this volume is to explore those narratives and the assumptions which inform them.

The concepts of nostalgia and sustainability are connected by several key themes. First, they both involve the construction of complex temporal narratives about how cultures develop over time and progress from one state to another. Inevitably, the construction of these narratives includes an element of evaluation, as individuals assess whether cultural changes are a form of improvement and progress or of degradation and decline. Second, both concepts involve notions of curation and stewardship, as individuals in the present attempt to shape the environment for future generations and are mindful of their responsibility to those who will succeed them. Faced with the task of selecting which aspects of their present ways of life to preserve, the members of a culture often develop a nostalgic investment in some of its values and traditions. At the same time, they project these values and traditions into the future to imagine how that culture could and should be sustained for future generations.

Third, both nostalgia and sustainability involve the utopian ideal of creating a permanent home in the world. In its original sense, nostalgia denoted an acute longing for home (*nostos*), a medical condition equivalent to the German *Heimweh*. Similarly, the ecological project at the heart of sustainability involves a desire to create a sustainable dwelling (*oikos*) in the natural world. At the heart of this book is the fundamental question of how this sustainable home in the world should look like. The essays in this collection analyze how individuals and cultures construct their images of 'futures worth preserving,' considering where they draw their inspiration from and how they project aspects of past and present cultures into the future. In the process, the chapters investigate the complex relationship between nature and culture, as well as the cultural aspects of ecology, exploring the cultural narratives and cultural memories which people use to understand the relationship between humans, other species, and their environment.

The remainder of this introduction contextualizes the concepts of nostalgia and sustainability individually, before mapping out the connections between them in more detail, as well as providing an overview of the chapters.

NOSTALGIA ISN'T WHAT IT USED TO BE: A VERY SHORT CONCEPTUAL HISTORY

Since it was coined in the seventeenth century, the term nostalgia has lived through a meandering history. The term was first used in 1688 by the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer in his medical dissertation *Dissertatio Medica de nostalgia* in which he characterizes it as a strong case of homesickness afflicting Swiss mercenaries (cf. Reynolds 2012: xxv; Davis 1979: 1; Boym 2001: 3). Etymologically, the word nostalgia is Greek and is comprised of the components *nostos*, meaning to return home, and *algia*, meaning painful condition (cf. Boym 2001: xiii; Davis 1979: ibid). The symptoms, according to Hofer, of those afflicted at the time were "despondency, melancholia, lability of emotion, including profound bouts of weeping, anorexia, a generalized 'wasting away,' and, not infrequently, attempts at suicide" (qtd. in Davis 1979: 1-2). For over a century, nostalgia's status as a medical condition persisted to only change at the end of the nineteenth century when nostalgia "was de-medicalized" (Wilson 2005: 22). It came then to be seen rather as a psychological and social affliction. Further, due to advances made in transportation and communications technology, making the connection with one's 'home' a more realistic possibility, the inherent yearning for a 'lost place' then made way instead for a longing for a bygone time in the concept of nostalgia (cf. ibid: 21-24). This shift from a longing for a place in one's past to a time past further complicated the nature of nostalgia as "[t]ime, unlike space, cannot be returned to – ever; time is irreversible. Nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact" (Hutcheon 1998: 19). As Svetlana Boym in her monograph *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) summarizes, "[a]t first glance, nostalgia is 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: xv).

The concept experienced a further change of meaning in the twentieth century, as "just as nostalgia shed its seventeenth-century scientific skin to become a nineteenth-century symptom of social rather than medical malaise, so within the last few years has it lost its innocence and become a social pariah" (Lowenthal 1985: 18), or as Janelle Wilson puts it, "nostalgia has gotten a bad rap" since "the term 'nostalgia' typically conjures up images of a previous time when life was good" (2005: 1; 21). Boym calls it "a bad word, an affectionate insult at best" (2001: xiv), while the historian Christopher Lasch goes even further in his "diagnosis" of a "victim of nostalgia": "To cling to the past is bad enough, but the victim of nostalgia clings to an idealized past, one that exists only in his head. He

is worse than a reactionary; he is an incurable sentimentalist. Afraid of the future, he is also afraid to face the truth about the past" (Lasch 1979: 65). Even though Lasch's evaluation is representative of the oversimplification of nostalgia in most twentieth-century-thought on the concept, his is nonetheless an important insight about the nature of nostalgia, namely that it says as much about the present and the future as it does about the past. Thus, nostalgia has been characterized as "the search for a simple and stable past as a refuge from the turbulent and chaotic present" (Lowenthal 1985: 21). Linda Hutcheon also makes the case that nostalgia is as much concerned with the present as it is with the past, as, by looking back nostalgically, we create a stable and harmonious past which is the complete opposite of the complex and dangerous present (cf. Hutcheon 1998: 20). Thereby, "nostalgic distancing sanitizes as it selects" and makes the past "so very unlike the present" which in turn results in the notion that "the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past" (ibid). Jan Willem Duyvendak is in line with this reading of nostalgia when he states that "nostalgia says more about contemporary society than it does about the past" (2011: 107).

Svetlana Boym, on the other hand, departing from the historic origins of the concept and its most simplistic notions, provides a more nuanced approach to the nature of nostalgia. She distinguishes two different types of nostalgias, drawing a distinction between "restorative nostalgia" and "reflective nostalgia" which nonetheless both describe "one's relationship to the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one's own self-perception" (2001: 41). However, whereas "restorative nostalgia" puts the "emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps," "reflective nostalgia" on the other hand "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance" (ibid). Of Boym's two types of nostalgia, she traces the "restorative" type back to the (re-)emergence of the nation-state as restorative nostalgia "characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths" (ibid). This relation of (a specific type of) nostalgia and the idea of a (re-)invention of the nation is seconded by Andreas Huyssen who states that "the main concern of the nineteenth-century nation-states was to mobilize and monumentalize national and universal pasts so as to legitimize and give meaning to the present and to envision the future: culturally, politically, socially" (2003: 2). Similarly, Eric Hobsbawm's notion of the "invention of tradition" denotes that "the object and characteristic of 'traditions,' including invented ones, is invariance. The past, real or invented, to which they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices, such as repetition" (1983: 2). Boym's ideas on the character of "restorative nostalgia" ring very much true at this current political moment of

a right-wing backlash against immigration, 'multiculturalism' and the perceived loss of national identity, as she writes "restorative nostalgia is often sponsored from above, however populist, homey, and 'grass roots' it appears to be" (2007: 18).

Boym further nuances her conceptualization of nostalgia with the inclusion of the "reflective" type. Whereas restorative nostalgia "protects the absolute truth," reflective nostalgia "calls it into doubt" (ibid: 13). Whereas "restorative nostalgia returns and rebuilds one's homeland with paranoid determination, reflective nostalgia fears return with the same passion" (ibid: 18). Boym further defines the focus of her second type of nostalgia, "reflective nostalgia," as not being "on the recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth, but on the meditation on history and the passage of time" (ibid: 15). The proponents of reflective nostalgia are concerned with the "irrevocability of the past and human finitude," focusing on "the meditation on history and the passage of time" and thus are able to resist "the pressure of external efficiency" (ibid). Insofar, reflective nostalgia entails the potential to resist and subvert the pressures of modernization and (post-)modern capitalism (cf. Sielke 2016: 13). Another crucial insight into the complicated character of nostalgia comes from Hutcheon who writes that nostalgia has been "articulated by the ecology movement as often as by fascism" (Hutcheon 1998: 22). Here, Hutcheon points us toward the 'transideological' characteristics of nostalgia which far from being used exclusively by conservative or reactionary forces - as conventional wisdom might suggest - rather has transcended the conservative/progressive, left-wing/right-wing divide and has instead proven its usefulness for a variety of political actors and causes.

A further characteristic which has come to fore in nostalgia's recent history is its general productiveness (cf. Sielke 2016: 16). Nostalgia has time and again been used as a means to commodify, a tool to sell all kinds of "retro" products: "Nostalgia for the sounds, sights, and objects of the past has created a whole range of longings. And these have been excited and extended by all kinds of consumer industries" (Cross 2015: 6).[1] However, it has been argued that there needs to be a distinction established between the concepts of 'retro' on the one hand and 'nostalgia' on the other (cf. Dwyer 2015; Guffey 2006). Whereas retro is mostly seen as a mere commercial endeavor, nostalgia possesses, as already suggested above, the potential to critically engage with present practices and to produce moments of resistance in which the demands of (post-)modern capitalism can be withstood. Susan J. Matt's book *Homesickness: An American History* (2011) exemplifies this point by contending that today's negative attitude toward homesickness (the English loan translation of nostalgia) is "predicated on the

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1 For further analyses of this point, see Reynolds (2012) and Cross (2015).

belief that movement is natural and unproblematic and a central and uncontested part of American identity" (2011: 4). She argues that homesickness and the refusal to said mobility might be read as an act of resistance against capitalist overreach as "Americans learned habits of individualism that supported capitalist activity. Central to modern individualism is the ability to separate oneself from home and family [...] and to leave communities" (ibid). Thus, by indulging in homesickness (or nostalgia) and refusing to give in to the pressures of capitalist ideology to move in order to "support capitalist activity," one is able to resist those exact pressures and defy capitalist exploitations.

In over three hundred years of history, nostalgia first transformed from a medical condition to a psychological one, finally further developing into a cultural and economic phenomenon. Through this history it has arrived at this current moment in which the campaign slogan of Donald Trump in the USA "Make America Great Again!" and other right-wing political actors such as the Brexit proponents in the United Kingdom all appealed to an invented, idealized past and have moved us toward a point in time which Zygmunt Bauman calls "The Age of Nostalgia" (2017: 1). These current "retrotopias," as Bauman terms it, have been emerging for some time, "visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future" (ibid: 5). Besides its usefulness for capitalist forces on the one hand and its power to work as an "act of resistance" against those same forces on the other hand, as well as its notable "transideological" presence in recent political discourse, nostalgia has also been hailed as a "positive social emotion" that "generates positive affect, elevates self-esteem, fosters social connectedness, and alleviates existential threat" within psychological research (cf. Sedikides et al. 2008).

As has become apparent in this brief sketch on the conceptual history of nostalgia so far is that no single, all-encompassing theory of nostalgia has been agreed upon. While it has also been used in a vast variety of academic disciplines, still an agreed-upon interdisciplinary theory of nostalgia is not in sight (cf. Sielke 2016: 15). Therefore, this volume takes as point of departure for its contribution to the study of nostalgia a crucial yet often unacknowledged insight into the character of nostalgia. Svetlana Boym writes that nostalgia is not "always retrospective; it can be prospective as well" (Boym 2007: 8) and thus it could be said that nostalgia is also remembers *forward*, being as concerned with the present as it is with idealized pasts (cf. Sielke 2016: 13-15). This notion is crucial to the main idea of this book as it aims to add to the research on a further nuanced understanding of the concept by – instead of applying nostalgia to yet another different subject matter and thus adding to the almost endless array of nostalgias *for* and nostalgias *in* – juxtaposing it with the concept of sustainability. Boym hints

at the relatedness of the two concepts when she writes that our "fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future" (ibid). As sustainability concerns itself with the 'realities of our future,' juxtaposing it with nostalgia will add new complexities to both concepts. Thus, this book presents the case that nostalgia has and is being used in much more complicated and paradoxical ways than it has usually been given credit for, so that in the end, instead of curing nostalgia from its "bad rap," this volume will nonetheless add more nuances and complexities to the conceptualization of nostalgia so as to say that 'nostalgia isn't what it used to be.'

SUSTAINABILITY HAS NEVER BEEN WHAT IT WAS MEANT TO BE: BEYOND LINEAR CONCEPTIONS OF TIME

In contrast to nostalgia, the term sustainability in the English language is argued to have a quite short history, having its contemporary definitions tracking back to the expression 'sustainable development' which emerged in the 1980s (cf. Mebratu 1998; Appleton 2006). This recurrent association can be explained by the popularization of the expression of 'sustainable development' that resulted from the publication of the final report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), *Our Common Future*, in 1987. The WCED was an initiative of the United Nations to identify environmental strategies that would have a long-term impact for the international community, identifying gaps in social equity and enabling the maintenance of economic growth at a global level. It became known as the Brundtland Commission, after its chair Gro Harlem Brundtland, and the report trades under the name *Brundtland Report* which defines sustainable development as the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987: 43). This is the most-often-quoted definition of sustainable development used ever since, which denotes the intergenerational concern evidently present in most of the contemporary discourses and debates surrounding it.

However, as indicated by historian Jacobus Du Pisani, the history of sustainability or sustainable development has a strong connection to the history of the concept of progress, "not only because it was the antecedent to notions of development, but also because it would in due course as its own antipode elicit calls for sustainability" (2006: 84). Following Georg Henrik von Wright's critical perspective on progress as "the Great Idea of Progress" developed by French scientists in the early-Enlightenment period (cf. 1997), Du Pisani indicates an

important relation to temporal perception among the concepts of progress, development and sustainability. He indicates that from its emergence in pre-modern times through the Greco-Roman period and later influenced by Hebrew and Christian theology, the Western idea of progress has been linked to a "linear conception of time" which influences our understanding of sustainable development until today. Passing through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, progress became a secularized concept, "shifting away from a notion of advancement in a divinely-ordained desirable direction to a promised land beyond the grave, to one of a better life on Earth, warranted by scientific and technological development" (Du Pisani 2006: 85). Nonetheless, the linearity inherent in the interpretations of progress was still the measurement for the secularized notion of a "better life on Earth." Von Wright argues in the same direction:

The belief that science could help us in an increasingly complex predictive endeavour is reflected in the origin and rise to prominence of a science of futurology or future studies. I cannot help myself finding the phenomenon intellectually worrying rather than hopeful. I see it as symptomatic of a need of reassessing our present which one mistakenly thinks can be satisfied by anticipating our future. (1997: 13)

Von Wright is an advocate of cyclic approaches to history; he thus emphasizes the processes of cycles of artistic styles and how they develop historically as an alternative historic perspective to understand the dimension and importance of the present (cf. 1997). Coming back to the concept of sustainability, though, one can easily identify forms in which the future-oriented discourses of intergenerational well-being (that very commonly become future-generational responsibilities) come close to the concern expressed by von Wright. More recently, writer John O'Grady also indicated his concerns with a dogmatic tendency embedded in the intergenerational equity debates within sustainability (2003: 4). We will come back to this point in the next section of the introduction.

The history of the concept of sustainability also has different points of origin in other languages, as for example, in French – *durabilité* and *durable*, in German – *Nachhaltigkeit* and *nachhaltig*, and in Dutch – *duurzaamheid* and *duurzaam* (cf. Du Pisani 2006: 85). In German, it was first used in the context of forestry maintenance by Hans Carl von Carlowitz in 1713. Concerned with the exhaustion caused by the mining industry at the time, Carlowitz wrote the forestry treatise *Sylvicultura oeconomica, oder Haußwirthliche Nachricht und Naturmäßige Anweisung zur wilden Baum-Zucht*, in which he refers to a *nachhaltende Nutzung* (sustainable use) of the forest resources (cf. Du Pisani 2006). Later these concerns

shifted to the excessive use of wood and the imbalances it caused for forestry maintenance, as well as the excessive use of coal in the 19th century, when it became one of the central sources of energy (ibid). Some arguments present in the modern definitions of sustainable development can also be traced to earlier concerns about the growing number of the human population already in the 18th century, which was famously expressed by the English reverend Thomas Malthus in the *Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society* in 1798 (cf. Mebratu 1998).

Similarly, the emergence of the conservation movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States reflects concerns and reasonings that can be integrated into the history of sustainability and sustainable development. John Stuart Mill, for example, argued for the benefits of establishing a "stationary state" (1848) that should counter the development of capital and population, but not necessarily of human development. Mill focused on the utilitarian value of nature and the problems that the overconsumption might bring for the human population. Similar to Mill, Gifford Pinchot, one of the founders of the American Conservation Movement, advocated for the "wise use" (1947) of forests and public lands (cf. NRC 2011). The term 'wise use' coined by Pinchot is an almost direct translation of the earlier conception of *nachhaltende Nutzung* by Carlowitz, which was not an unknown term in the forestry management in English speaking circles. John Muir, on the other hand, emphasized the intrinsic values of nature and the reasons for protecting nature independently of human development. (cf. Worster 2005). Muir is considered one of the forefathers of the environmental movement that emerged in the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s and many of his ideas were picked up by the defenders of the Deep Ecology movement (cf. Drengson 2017).[2] The controversies over the debates of intrinsic versus instrumental values of nature are not evident in the conventional definitions of the modern "sustainable development" concept because it includes rather anthropocentric attributes that highlight the instrumental purposes of preserving the environment. Nonetheless, some very recent approaches have also picked up on this debate and used it to challenge the conventional anthropocentric properties of sustainability (cf. Appleton 2006; Butman 2016).

In the mid to late 20th century, the notion of progress as "the secularized Great Idea of Progress" (cf. von Wright 1997) and the blind belief in science and

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2   The Deep Ecology emerged as an ecological and environmental philosophy movement in the early 1970s. The term was coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess who stressed the intrinsic values of nature claiming that it does not exist as a resource for human exploitation and therefore it is to be valued and preserved in its own, deep rights (and not in a shallow value as resource for future human generations).

technology as the ultimate achievement of progress were brought into question in relation to environmental thinking. The benefits of technological and scientific development were challenged in publications such as *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson in 1962, *The Population Bomb* by Paul Ehrlich in 1968, *A Blue Print for Survival* by Edward Goldsmith et al. in 1972, *Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome in 1972, and *Small is Beautiful* by Fritz Schumacher in 1973. Nonetheless, the conceptualization of development in the sustainable development discourses still follows many premises of the linear-based idea of progress and the emphasis on technological and scientific development as well as continuous economic growth.

As previously mentioned, most of the modern and contemporary definitions of sustainability follow the institutional guidelines provided in the UN's Conventions and reports, which are based on a three-bottom-line, or the three-pillar-model of sustainability. These pillars encompass the economic, environmental and social dimensions of development. The initial advances for the three-bottom-line model can be traced back to the publication *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development* by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 1980. This report envisioned the "integration of conservation and development" in the form of a "sustainable development" (cf. NRC 2011). In this sense, the report provided the foundation to formulate the 'environmental-pillar' through the concerns with conservation and the 'economic-pillar' through the integration of development. As this report was based on the idea of intergenerational rights, it already indicated some initial concerns with the 'social-pillar' as well. These ideas were reformulated in the *Brundtland Report* and both the subsequent *Earth Summits* organized by the United Nations and the models of sustainable development based on its three pillars were later improved and widely circulated.[3]

According to the three-pillar model, sustainable development is only achievable if all facets of sustainability and development are in balance. The economic facet is identified by the per-capita income and measured by financial growth, not only encompassing the quantity, but also the quality of economic

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3   The Earth Summits organized by the UN set as one of their main goals the definition of common grounds of development among the state parties without increasing the damage on the planet's environment – the basis for a sustainable development. They were realized every ten years in Rio de Janeiro 1992, Johannesburg 2002 and again in Rio in 2012 and reflected back on the values already established in the 1972 Conference on Human Environment realized in Stockholm, which was one of the landmarks for the recognition of the entanglements of ecological management with social and economic issues (cf. Mebratu 1998: 501).

development (since it is meant to be sustainable); it also involves the understanding of financial stability as enabling human well-being (cf. d'Ercole/Keppler: 2001). The environmental facet comprises the maintenance of the biological information and resources necessary to keep up sustainable productivity and healthy ecosystems, thus moving from the initial forestry concerns to also embracing issues like the protection of biodiversity. Finally, the social facet involves issues like human rights, employment rights, and the possibility of democratic participation in decision-making processes (cf. Baker 2006). However, these models of sustainability have often been strongly criticized for their focus on the economic dimension of sustainable development (cf. Adams 2006). This economic dimension is usually established as the means to measure 'development' and the concomitant definition of development is based on a linear-temporal-thinking of accumulation and growth that could be related to the 'Great Idea of Progress' as criticized by von Wright.

Furthermore, there is a lack of space for the role of culture in the conventional models of sustainability, which according to numerous scholars should be integrated not only as one of the pillars of sustainable development but even as its main dimension (cf. Pascual: 2009; Soini/Dessein: 2016). The role of culture has been further complicated in examinations of the differences between sustainable culture, cultural sustainability, and cultures of sustainability (cf. Brocchi: 2008; Kagan: 2011), as well as in culture *in*, *for*, or *as* sustainable development (cf. Soini/Dessein: 2016). In such cultural critiques, values usually taken for granted in the sustainable development debates are increasingly challenged and the models of sustainability are revealed to require much more flexibility in their conceptualizations and applicability, proving that 'sustainability has never been what it was meant to be.' Consequently, the underlying formulation of a linear temporality, which is usually imposed on sustainability, has begun to fade, allowing instead space for the exploration of its multiple temporal dimensions, which is what this volume aims at contributing to by juxtaposing sustainability with the concept of nostalgia.

FUTURES WORTH PRESERVING: COMPLEX RELATIONS BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND SUSTAINABILITY

The cultural and temporal intricacies of sustainability previously outlined lead one to challenge conventional assumptions about the past and the present when attempting to sustain something for the future. Addressing the tensions in the concept of sustainability, John O'Grady has argued that "in its privileging of

duration or *permanence* as a value, sustainability runs counter to a fundamental principle in nature, namely that 'everything is in flux'" (2003: 3). Most visions of sustainability are founded on the premise of an ideal, or at least a preferable, state of nature which needs to be preserved for future generations. However, this raises the question of how we decide which permutations within the constant state of natural flux are most 'worthy' of being sustained. Critics of sustainability have observed that "[w]e certainly do not sustain nature 'in itself.' Rather, we sustain nature as we humans prefer it. More precisely, we preserve the resources needed for human consumption" (Butman 2016: n.p.). O'Grady frames this debate in the language of "intergenerational responsibility or equity," which has been called the "backbone of sustainability" (Meyer/Helfman quoted in O'Grady 2003: 3). When we attempt to sustain something for the future, we make an implicit assumption that our cultural values will remain constant over time. As O'Grady observes, this begs the question: "How do we know with any certainty what future generations will be like and what they will need to sustain themselves?" (ibid: 4).

Following such critical shifts of focus that examine and challenge the cultural values that inform the decisions about which aspects of nature to preserve and prioritize, as well as the emotional component which inevitably influences these choices, the affective dimension of sustainability has also started to gain more visibility. Consequently, several authors have noted that the concept of sustainability is inextricably bound up with that of nostalgia, which itself operates on notions of affectivity. As stated by scholar Jeremy Davies:

Sustainability describes the search for a form of collective continuity at the level of popular culture and behaviour […] Its fundamental desire is precisely that which the nostalgic yearns for: a stable home, free from the losses of time. Sustainability defines the present time and present way of life as a satisfactory home – satisfactory ethically, emotionally, culturally and politically – by positing it as the place to which the future will always recur. (2010: 264)

As the essays in this collection show, it is not always the 'present time' which becomes privileged as a 'satisfactory home.' There are many versions of sustainability which imagine past or even inaccessible, pre-human times as the locus to which they would ideally return. To this extent, sustainability attempts to evade the influence of human value judgments by imaginatively reversing the destructive effects of human agency on the natural world. However, the thought process involved in this imaginative task is still essentially a nostalgic one: in the process, we construct a value-laden vision of the past as 'a stable home' to which we long to return.

Davies is not alone in identifying the nostalgic logic at the heart of the concept of sustainability. Many scholars have noticed a similar nostalgia present in the works of Martin Heidegger, who is often regarded as a forefather of certain types of ecological thinking. In his 1951 essay "Building Dwelling Thinking," Heidegger posits a "*primal* oneness" between the "earth and sky, divinities and mortals" (1993 [1951]: 351). To make a home on earth, he argues, humans must build and dwell in such a way as to "spare and preserve […] to take under our care, to look after the fourfold in its essence" (ibid: 353).[4] Many have criticized Heidegger's philosophy for the nostalgia implicit in this essentialist vision of the natural world. Yet Jeff Malpas argues that Heidegger's strain of nostalgia is more akin to "mythophilia – a longing not for what is remembered, but for what is known only through its retelling, through story and myth" (2012: 165). Heidegger speaks of humanity's "homelessness" (1993 [1951]: 363) in the natural world, because humans cannot make a home in nature without disrupting the primal unity that they seek to preserve. Accordingly, dwelling in nature involves a recognition of humanity's own disruptive and destructive presence. To this extent, Heidegger's myth of an ideal home resembles Svetlana Boym's conception of 'reflective nostalgia,' which "thrives in algia, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately" (2001: xviii).

This desire to make a home of the natural world explains the intricate connection between the concepts of sustainability and nostalgia. If sustainability is concerned with the creation of a 'stable home,' nostalgia forms the counterpart awareness that such a home might be difficult or even impossible to realize. Yet the longing for this home is not exclusively projected into a mythical past in Heidegger's work; in his 1953 essay "The Question Concerning Technology," he conceives of a meaningful relation between humankind and technology as indispensable for any sustainable future. On the one hand, humanity still disrupts and destructs an essentialist vision of nature as becomes apparent in the essay's famous passage on the Rhine River:

In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears to be something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with

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4 Andrew J. Mitchell provides a comprehensive interpretation of the late Heidegger's opaque philosophy (cf. 2015). The recent publication of Heidegger's Black Notebooks raises the question to what degree his profound antisemitism permeates his entire philosophy - including his ecological thinking; for a balanced account of the impact of said Notebooks on his philosophical oeuvre, see Mitchell and Trawny (2017).

bank for hundreds of years. Rather, the river is dammed up into the power plant. (1993 [1953]: 321)

Within this framework, technology becomes the point of departure for both nature's abuse and humankind's alienation. On the other hand, Heidegger – in a nostalgic recourse to the poet Friedrich Hölderlin – ends his essay on the note that the essence of technology entails the radical potential for humankind to make a 'stable home' of the natural world in a sustainable future.

Timothy Morton contends that a more radical form of 'ecocritique' needs to tie in with Heidegger's second notion of nostalgia which is not directed at a mythical past, but projects its longing into a sustainable future:

It needs to be able to argue for a progressive view of ecology that does not submit to the atavistic authority of feudalism or 'prehistoric' primitivism (New Age animism). It requires, instead, that we be nostalgic for the future, helping people figure out that the ecological 'paradise' has not *occurred* yet. (2007: 162)

At first, the idea of being "nostalgic for the future" may seem contradictory, but this model of a future-oriented nostalgia can be helpful to understand the temporal complexity of sustainability. In the past twenty years, those who study sustainability have increasingly accepted that the "search for past Edens is both idealist and essentialist" (Mukta/Hardiman 2000: 126). As a result, there is a need to resituate the ideal image of an enduring home inherent in the concept of sustainability. Placing this notion of home in the future – as an ideal to strive towards – is one way of enabling people to long nostalgically for a time to come, rather than reverting to an essentialist image of the past.

Oriented towards the future, nostalgic longing can be transformed into the desire to create a 'stable home' for successive generations. As Allison Hui observes, the "dynamics of affects such as nostalgia […] are significantly shaped by the possibility of hope and a return home" (2011: 81). Recently, critics have begun to investigate this relationship between nostalgia and hope, as well as the cultural importance of narratives about returning to an ideal home in the future. In the words of psychologist Jill Bradbury:

[N]ostalgic longing may provide resources for the present and for our imaginative reach toward new possible horizons. Perhaps nostalgia is not only a longing for the way things were, but also a longing for futures that never came, or for horizons of possibilities that seem to have been foreclosed by the unfolding of events. (2012: 342)

Thus, the hopeful narrative of 'longing for futures that never came' transforms nostalgia from a reactionary desire to return to a former way of being into the creative impulse to realize a previously impossible future. Here, the homing impulse of nostalgia begins to sound a lot like the transformative potential of sustainability. The longing implicit in nostalgia can be directed towards the future and used to imagine sustainable narratives of working towards an ecological 'paradise' which has not yet existed.

The transformative power of future-oriented nostalgia is currently being explored in many different fields. As already indicated in the brief conceptual history of the term presented before, besides those working in narrative and cultural studies, scholars within psychology have also come to explore the untapped potential of nostalgia. For instance, Clay Routledge and his team have shown that, on an individual level, "nostalgia can be harnessed to imbue one's life with an overarching sense of meaning and purpose" (2011: 638). Others have suggested that nostalgia may function as an 'existential resource' on a social and cultural level as well, as Jennifer Ladino, who in her study *Reclaiming Nostalgia*, coins the term 'counter-nostalgia' to refer to a form of nostalgia which is "strategically deployed to challenge a progressivist ethos" (2012: 15). Her argument comes very close to the definitions of 'restorative' and 'reflective nostalgia' by Boym already delineated before. She argues that:

[L]onging can be a personal emotion as well as a larger, collective, even national sentiment. While much nostalgia, especially at this national level, encourages its adherents to return to a celebrated origin to find both comfort and justification for the present, counter-nostalgia revisits a dynamic past in a way that challenges dominant histories and reflects critically on the present. (ibid: 16)

Ladino proceeds to show how US-American authors in the environmentalist tradition have harnessed their nostalgic longing for the natural world to imagine sustainable alternatives to present narratives of progress and expansion. In this way, the concept of nostalgia has come to play an increasingly prominent role in contemporary theories of sustainability. Along these lines, Kate Soper has argued for the importance of an 'avant-garde' form of nostalgia which enables individuals and cultures to imagine a 'green renaissance' which may be "energized through the heightened sense of what has now gone missing, but might possibly be restored in a transmuted, less politically divisive, and more sustainable form" (2011: 23).

The nexus of nostalgia and sustainability, in general, and the temporal aspect of the question of how to 'sustain' the nostalgic longing for an absent home, in particular, have also come to structure contemporary cultural critique. Similar to

von Wright's critique of the linear conception of progress delineated before, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht proposes in *Our Broad Present* (2010) that from the Age of Enlightenment until the mid-20th century, the chronotope 'historical thought/consciousness' dominated our conceptualization and experience of time. It was characterized by a linear conception of time, entailing a sense of leaving the past behind in the successive unfolding of events. Furthermore, the future was accessible as an "open horizon of possibilities" (Gumbrecht 2010: 12) with the moment of the present as a point of orientation in which the Cartesian subject was able to make decisions and to have agency.

After the political catastrophes of the first half of the 20th century and accelerated by the recent explosion of electronic technology and its all-encompassing intrusion into daily life, the chronotope 'historical thought/consciousness' has been replaced by a new conceptualization of time. Whereas the past was left behind in a linear path through time, the contemporary chronotope is characterized by a general inability to 'close' and to leave behind the past and hence, "instead of ceasing to provide points of orientation, *pasts* flood our present" (Gumbrecht 2010: 14; original emphasis). In stark contrast to the formally linear experience and unfolding of time, the contemporary moment is characterized by a dimension of varying simultaneities. However, according to Gumbrecht, the new chronotope manifests itself most significantly in its relation to the future:

That we no longer live in historical time can be seen most clearly with respect to the future. For us, the future no longer presents itself as an open horizon of possibilities; instead, it is a dimension increasingly closed to all prognoses – and which, at the same time, seems to draw near as a menace. (Gumbrecht 2010: xiii)

Analyzing the theoretical underpinnings of Gumbrecht's critique reveals its peculiar relation to the nexus of nostalgia and sustainability. Gumbrecht acknowledges the nostalgia inherent in his turn towards the notion of presence and his concordant skepticism towards the current domination of rational consciousness on the one hand and electronic technology on the other (cf. 2010: 15-17).[5] However, it is the consequent non-relation and non-connection of

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5   Gumbrecht's focus on 'presence' – both as methodological category to subvert an apparent omnipresence of hermeneutics in the humanities and as quasi-telos in the individual search for intensive experiences of being-in-the-world – is most programmatically articulated in his 2004 book *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*; for an account of Gumbrecht's conceptualization of presence, see Kreuzmair (2012).

nostalgia and sustainability which enables his critical diagnosis of our present moment in the first place. In accordance with his theoretical stance, Gumbrecht refuses to consider how the nostalgic longing for an absent home underpinning his cultural critique might enable a productive and progressive relation to the temporal complexities of sustainability. Consequently, *Our Broad Present* does not propose any progressive and sustainable political agenda.[6] Within a theoretical framework in which "the future no longer presents itself as an open horizon of possibilities [but] instead, […] seems to draw near as a menace", any notion of sustainability – be it political, cultural, or social – is made impossible.

Coming from a slightly different angle, however, Mark Fisher, in the introduction to his 2014 volume *Ghosts of My Life*, diagnoses contemporary culture as being characterized by anachronism and lethargy. According to him, any sense of "future shock" (Fisher 2014: 8) has vanished from the popular culture of the 21st century. In stark contrast to our current state of affairs, it had been the mutations and developments in popular music which enabled its consumers to measure the transition of cultural time during the timeframe from the 1960s through the 1980s. Our present culture is thus marked by a depressing feeling of finitude and exhaustion. Fisher puts it bluntly: "It doesn't feel like the future" (ibid: 8). Drawing on Frederic Jameson, Fisher conceives of the mode of 'formal nostalgia' as dominating the present cultural moment; formal nostalgia is characterized by the constant artistic and creative recourse to styles, which once were – in the past – new and modern. The current moment is thus marked by an extra-ordinary orientation toward the past, an orientation so all-encompassing that it puts into question the possibility of any clear distinction between present and past: "In 1981, the 1960s seemed much further away than they do today" (ibid: 9). Consequently, since the 1980s, cultural time has been folding back in on itself and the intuitive experience of a linear and progressive development in and of time – what Gumbrecht identifies as a quality of the old chronotope 'historical thought/consciousness' – has made way for a peculiar condition of permanent simultaneities.

Yet unlike Gumbrecht's nostalgia-fueled diagnosis foreclosing a productive engagement with sustainable futures, Fisher's cultural analysis leaves open the possibility of sustainable cultural and political engagement. On the one hand, the particular melancholic and nostalgic moment pervading contemporary popular

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6 For a representative example of Gumbrecht's skepticism towards a political agenda designed for sustainable development, see Gumbrecht (2017). However, this skepticism is counteracted by Gumbrecht's rather optimistic account of the potentialities created by the progress of electronic technology as conceived and produced in Silicon Valley (cf. 2018).

music and cultural artifacts is perceived by him as a result of the stagnation of the present. On the other hand, Fisher insists on the emancipatory potential – both regarding democratization and pluralization – of pop cultural artifacts. It is hence this exact nostalgic moment that also sustains the desire for a different kind of future than the neoliberal-capitalistic one we are inhabiting today.[7]

As delineated so far, from unlikely beginnings, the nostalgic longing for an absent home has become central to contemporary understandings of sustainability, while ideas of sustainability – especially in the form of sustaining the individual's sense of self and their social relationships – have also become important in the psychological study of nostalgia. Furthermore, the nexus of nostalgia and sustainability in the form of a nostalgic longing for an absent home has structured and still structures cultural critique as can be seen with recourse to Heidegger, Gumbrecht, and Fisher. While it is the critique of a linear conception of progress and time, in the sense presented earlier by Du Pisani and von Wright, that is the common ground of this kind of nostalgic longing, the three positions differ with regard to the imagined ways of how "[t]ime present and time past / [a]re both perhaps present in time future [...]" (Eliot 2002: 177). Heidegger's rather vague hope in the essence of technology as enabling the recapture of an absent home is radicalized in Gumbrecht's general skepticism regarding the possibility to work towards any kind of sustainable future – only Fisher lays bare the potential of culture in general, and popular culture in particular, to open up horizons for a future that might escape the current regime of global neoliberalism. This also aligns with one of the fundamental ideas behind our volume which not only features academic contributions, but also creative ones to put emphasis on the potential of cultural and artistic practices to produce more sustainable futures. Hence, our earlier question returns in a different form: namely, how individuals and different social groups select which aspects of their culture and environment to sustain for the future, and which should give way to notions of 'progress' and 'development.'

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7   Similarly, Fisher concludes his polemic *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009) on an almost utopian notion: "The long, dark night of the end of history has to be grasped as an enormous opportunity. The very oppressive pervasiveness of capitalist realism means that even glimmers of alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect. The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again" (2009: 80-81).