

Mapping Nostalgia: Pathways Across Time and Culture(s)

Tobias Becker and Dylan Trigg, eds. 2025. *The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia*. New York: Routledge. 592 pp. ISBN 9781032429205

Angela Yannicopoulou

Over the past ten to twenty years, nostalgia has regained scholarly attention, with an increasing number of studies exploring the topic. *The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia* represents a significant contribution to this growing body of work, offering a comprehensive examination of the concept. As a volume in the esteemed Routledge Handbook series, it aims not only to compile existing research but also to provide a synthesis of the field. Serving as both a foundational reference and a forward-looking resource, the handbook is especially valuable for scholars, educators, and graduate students seeking to engage critically with the study of nostalgia.

The volume is edited by Tobias Becker and Dylan Trigg, two scholars whose expertise significantly shapes its intellectual direction. Becker, who has written extensively on nostalgia, in his recent monograph *Yesterday: A New History of Nostalgia* (2023) argues that nostalgia is a complex phenomenon that not only reflects a longing for the past but also plays a role in shaping visions of the future. Trigg, a specialist in phenomenology, aesthetics, and the philosophy of emotion, brings perspectives that are particularly relevant to the study of nostalgia; these fields offer critical frameworks for understanding the subjective and affective dimensions of nostalgic experience.

Rather than treating nostalgia as a singular concept confined to individual disciplines, *The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia* advocates for an integrated approach aligned with the emerging field of nostalgia studies. This shift – from studying nostalgia in isolation, as was historically the case beginning in the medical sciences, to establishing it as a distinct interdisciplinary field – reflects the growing recognition of the concept's complexity and cultural significance, which demonstrates that nostalgia is a rich and multifaceted phenomenon. This volume embodies such an interdisciplinary and critical orientation: it surveys the current landscape of nostalgia research, raises key conceptual questions, and identifies new directions for inquiry. In doing so, it contributes meaningfully to the consolidation of nostalgia studies as a dynamic and evolving field.

The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia is organised into five thematic sections that together offer a comprehensive and interdisciplinary overview of the field. The first section surveys how various disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, history, psychology, literature, arts, and media studies, approach the study of nostalgia. The second focuses on conceptual foundations, exploring themes such as homesickness, temporality, memory, affect, and wellbeing, while also engaging with emerging ideas like hauntology and solastalgia. The third section addresses nostalgia's political and historical dimensions, including its role in populism, post-socialist memory, feminism, and identity politics. The fourth turns to the material and spatial expressions of nostalgia, examining its presence in ruins, regionalism, and everyday objects. The final section explores how nostalgia operates across media and

genres, from analogue technologies and digital platforms to cinema, gaming, and graphic novels. Through this structure, the handbook not only maps the current state of nostalgia studies but also highlights its interdisciplinary potential and conceptual diversity.

The handbook benefits greatly from the expertise of its contributors, many of whom are prominent figures in nostalgia studies and related fields. Krystine I. Batcho has long been recognised for her influential research on nostalgia, memory, and psychological wellbeing. Similarly, Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut have published extensively on nostalgia, and their research has shaped much contemporary psychological understanding of the topic. From a media-theoretical perspective, Katharina Niemeyer draws on her work at the intersection of digital technologies, temporality, and memory to contribute chapters “Solastalgia” (with Magali Uhl) and “Digital Nostalgias”. Gilad Padva brings the insights developed in his earlier monograph *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture* (2014) to bear on his chapter “Queer Nostalgia”. Among others, Grafton Tanner, known for his books *The Circle of the Snake: Nostalgia and Utopia in the Age of Big Tech* (2020) and *The Hours Have Lost Their Clock: The Politics of Nostalgia* (2021), continues his exploration of nostalgia’s political and cultural dimensions in his chapter “Hauntology”. All contributors ensure the volume rests on authoritative scholarship and reflects evolving nostalgia studies.

One of the volume’s key strengths lies in its thematic and disciplinary breadth. The 45 chapters cover an impressive range of topics, from autobiographical memory and politics to nature and retro aesthetics in popular media. This diversity demonstrates the concept’s remarkable adaptability across historical periods, cultural practices, and academic disciplines. The clear structure of the handbook facilitates comparative reading and invites a layered understanding of nostalgia as a multifaceted cultural and emotional phenomenon. While the volume benefits – and could have benefited even more – from explicit dialogue among individual chapters, its selection and arrangement of topics nonetheless foster productive resonances. For instance, the placement of Martin Deuerlein’s “Indigenous Nostalgia”, Badia Ahad’s “Afro-Nostalgia”, and Jesús Lizardo’s “White Supremacy and Nostalgia” creates an implicit conversation about the racial and political dimensions of nostalgia. Even without direct cross-referencing, this sequencing encourages readers to draw connections, highlighting the value of the volume’s editorial design.

The volume makes clear that further research is needed to clarify even the fundamental characteristics of nostalgia and to refine its conceptual boundaries. Although nostalgia has been widely studied, several chapters reveal that key aspects of the concept remain open to reflection and debate. Susan Matt’s “Nostalgia and Homesickness” traces the historical conflation and eventual differentiation of these two concepts, showing how nostalgia gained its distinct identity over time. Lucia Santa-Cruz’s “Nostalgia Toward the Future” challenges the common association of nostalgia with the past alone, proposing instead a temporally dynamic view in which nostalgia serves as an active force oriented toward the future. Michael Dwyer’s “Nostalgia and Affect” addresses the persistent devaluation of nostalgia as sentimental or irrational, arguing that this perception is deeply rooted in its association with gendered, racialised, and sexualised identities. Together, these and other chapters show that the concept of nostalgia continues to evolve and that the volume contributes meaningfully to ongoing conversations about its complexity and cultural significance.

Building on this conceptual groundwork, the volume also balances long-established areas of nostalgia research with newer and less explored themes. The psychological dimensions of nostalgia, explored by Tim Wildschut and Constantine Sedikides, as well as childhood nostalgia, are placed alongside themes that remain comparatively underexplored. In “Nostalgia, Ageing, and Older Age” for instance, Jessica Stanier challenges reductive, ageist stereotypes that frame nostalgia as an inevitable or regressive feature of later life. Chapters such as “Nostalgia and Populism” by Ezgi Elçi examine how nostalgia shapes the rise of populist attitudes and populist parties globally, underscoring its political potency. Likewise, the chapter “Post-Yugoslav Nostalgias” by Tatjana Rosić Ilić and Goran Lazičić explores how younger generations in post-Yugoslav contexts revisit the region’s legacy. Another notable example is Stefan W. Schmidt’s “Topology of Nostalgia,” which offers a spatial and embodied perspective by drawing on Edward Casey’s concept of “somatography” to suggest that nostalgia often centres less on specific places than on the felt experience of being in them. Taken together, these chapters, among others, demonstrate the field’s expanding scope and ongoing relevance.

It is also worth noting that the handbook makes a thoughtful effort to include a range of perspectives that contribute to a reconceptualisation of nostalgia beyond its conventional Western framing. Chapters such as Martin Deuerlein’s “Indigenous Nostalgia” and Badia Ahad’s “Afro-Nostalgia” are particularly valuable in expanding the discussion to encompass experiences of longing and memory shaped by colonial histories and displacement. While these chapters offer important insights, the volume as a whole tends to engage with such perspectives primarily through Western theoretical frameworks. Considering nostalgia’s complex entanglements with colonial and postcolonial contexts, there may be further opportunities to deepen this engagement through a broader range of conceptual approaches.

Particularly relevant for *Libri & Liberi* readers are two chapters focusing on literature, authored by scholars well known for their work on nostalgia. “Literature and Nostalgia” by Niklas Salmose and Eric Sandberg and “Nostalgia in Comics and Graphic Novels” by Giorgio Busi Rizzi offer valuable insights into the significance of nostalgia within literary and narrative forms. Salmose and Sandberg provide a historical overview of nostalgia in literature, showing that while its expression intensified with modernity, nostalgic sensibilities have long been embedded in literary traditions. They engage with key developments in modern literary nostalgia, drawing on ecocritical, postcolonial, and migrant perspectives to explore the aesthetic strategies that shape nostalgic experience. Shifting to other genres, Rizzi’s chapter not only highlights how comics and graphic novels evoke nostalgia through thematic, stylistic, and structural means, but also underlines processes and characteristics common to other art forms and media, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of nostalgia’s role in contemporary culture. Taken together, these chapters show how literature and its genres are not merely vehicles of nostalgic content but play an active role in shaping how nostalgia is experienced and theorised today.

While the volume covers a wide range of subjects and media, it omits children’s literature. This absence may reflect the common yet misleading assumption that nostalgia is not relevant to literature read by children. However, as demonstrated in the *Libri & Liberi* special issue on nostalgia (2024, 13(1)), even picturebooks can be a rich and complex site

for exploring nostalgia, both aesthetically and culturally. Children's literature suggests a valuable area for further exploration within the broader study of nostalgia.

The Routledge Handbook of Nostalgia stands out as a valuable and ambitious contribution to a growing field. By bringing together a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and thematic approaches, it not only maps the current landscape of nostalgia studies but also helps to shape its future directions. Its interdisciplinary scope, critical depth, and attention to both established and emerging topics make it an essential reference for anyone engaging seriously with nostalgia. For scholars and students alike, the handbook offers both a foundation and an invitation to engage critically with nostalgia as a concept that remains as complex as it is culturally resonant.

Seeing Socialism Through GDR Picturebooks

Jörg Meibauer. 2025. *The Visual Culture of East German Picturebooks 1945–1990: Architecture, Traffic, and Design of Childhood*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter. 248 pp. ISBN 9783111637075

Nikola Novaković

Jörg Meibauer's book offers the first comprehensive examination of East German (GDR) picturebooks as a key component of socialist visual culture. Moving beyond their dismissal as mere propaganda, it reveals them as complex aesthetic and ideological artifacts that visually constructed childhood, space, and citizenship in the socialist state. By tracing how picturebooks depicted architecture, reconstruction, daily life, and ideology, the author situates them within broader systems of visual education and socialisation, showing how images served to form the "socialist personality" while also expressing creativity and artistic diversity under conditions of censorship.

Chapter 1 situates East German (GDR) picturebooks within the broader framework of visual culture, arguing that they offer valuable insight into how socialist ideology, aesthetics, and everyday life were visually communicated to children. Although long dismissed as politically contaminated, these works reveal how the GDR sought to shape the "socialist personality" through visual education. The author emphasises that picturebooks formed part of a child's overall visual environment, alongside films, posters, and urban design, and therefore deserve recognition as cultural documents rather than mere propaganda.

The chapter focuses on descriptive, nonfictional picturebooks that depict real-world subjects such as architecture, reconstruction, traffic, and the designed spaces of childhood: kindergartens, playgrounds, and Pioneer institutions. These ordinary settings served as vehicles for transmitting socialist values like collective effort, pride in the homeland, and international solidarity. Drawing on theories of ideology and propaganda from John Stephens and Jason Stanley, the author shows how GDR picturebooks blended factual instruction with ideological persuasion, often by omission or emotional appeal. Censorship and party control ensured conformity, though some illustrators did achieve some autonomy.

Methodologically, the study adopts a serial-iconographic approach, comparing images across books and decades to trace continuities in socialist visual culture. The chapter