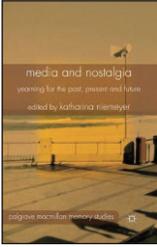


Review



Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future. Edited by Katharina Niemeyer. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 241 pp. ISBN: 9781349477500.

From *Will and Grace* to *MacGyver*, revivals, reboots, and remakes at times feel inescapable and the “Make America Great Again” slogan, harkening back to a mythologized American past, continues to reverberate two years after the 2016 American presidential election.

Even Facebook, cited by one author as “not interested in what we were doing or thinking five years ago” (p. 215) has, since 2015, continually offered up “memories”: reminders of what happened—what was posted—“On this day” each year since joining the platform. The nostalgia wave that Katharina Niemeyer identifies in her introduction to *Media and Nostalgia: Yearning for the Past, Present and Future* continues apace four years after the book’s initial publication.

Niemeyer’s objective with this collection is to bring together a wide range of disciplinary perspectives on media’s relationship(s) to nostalgia. Rather than attempting to systematically or definitively address these relationships, this consolidation is itself Niemeyer’s aim, as her intention is to model work on the topic and inspire further contributions to the area. The assembled works extend the investigation of nostalgia from psychological considerations and retro aesthetics to introduce media as a “projection space for nostalgia” (p. 19), which instantiates and mobilizes the psychic relationships of nostalgia for a wide range of ends.

The collection’s sixteen chapters are organized into four sections. “Analogue Nostalgias” looks at the ways in which retro design and aesthetics are reproduced in digital formats, as in the cases Gil Bartholeyns describes of apps that recreate the appearance of vintage photographs. “Exploited Nostalgias” describes ways in which corporate media projects—advertising, employee networking sites, and news media—harness nostalgia as a tactic for achieving capitalist aims. The chapters in “Screened Nostalgias” consider nostalgia on television and in film, and pick up on the themes of the first two sections, looking at both the nostalgia evoked through recreation and aesthetics and the objectives in pursuit of which nostalgia is deployed. The final section, “Creative Nostalgias,” also contains works that look at nostalgia as a tactic, but looks at works where the nostalgia is itself the focus. Longing for home is central, for example, to *Il treno del sud*, the film described by Morena La Barba, while the works described by Itzhak Goldberg actively seek to strip nostalgia from German imagery tainted by its association with Nazism.

Although these sections serve to structure the collection, they are, as Niemeyer acknowledges, not the only way of grouping the chapters. Each section, for example, includes works that employ a visual aesthetics approach to media and others that focus on social history. Each contains works that are critical of nostalgia as a practice

and others that are descriptive of nostalgia as an emotive state observed in consumers of media—one that may motivate audiences to engage with a given media object or that may be evoked in audiences by the media they consume. While Niemeyer is clear that it is not her intention, organizing the chapters in this way does create the impression of a classification of nostalgia types. Organizing the chapters by scholarly approach may have more clearly reflected the aim of motivating future works on this topic.

Media and Nostalgia succeeds in its objective of bringing together a wide range of media, disciplines, and methods: the area covered and the approaches employed are, in fact, so far ranging that the book does not attempt to coalesce into a uniform whole. On the whole this approach works well, although it occasionally makes for an uneven reading experience. This is, perhaps, inevitable with an edited work, and especially in an edited work that brings together many different disciplinary voices and approaches. There are a small number of instances, however, where the authors of different chapters appear to contradict each other, generally because they have taken such different approaches to considering nostalgia. For example, in “Media and the Closure of the Memory Boom,” Andrew Hoskins discusses memorialization in the context of news coverage of terrorist attacks and the way media have turned to history and historians for templates for coverage and immediate commemoration. In “Journeys through the Past: Contempt, Nostalgia, Enigma,” John Potts addresses nostalgia as a possible attitude with which to engage with the past in dialogue with the present, rather than as a descriptor for a type of practice. Thus, when Potts writes that “Bombings and other killings blend with natural disasters, with no historical depth to give them background or meaning” (p. 213), there is an apparent contradiction with Hoskins’ chapter, arising from the fact that the two authors have taken such different tacks with respect to nostalgia: Hoskins does not focus specifically on nostalgia, but rather on a set of media practices that draw upon a similar dynamic of cultural memory to nostalgia, while Potts considers nostalgia as an attitude with which those practices may be enacted.

There are two ways to approach this book as a reader. Looking at the individual chapters as self-contained works, one can find conclusions about specific media that advance our understanding of those formats: for example, the connections Giuseppina Sapio draws between different stages of the evolution of home videos and the familial norms and values of the time are illuminating in their explication of the political role played by old-fashioned media styles, and so makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of home videos as well as to the broader discussion of nostalgia, specifically nostalgia’s ties to social change. Looking at the chapters together, patterns of nostalgia’s roles within media environments do emerge, like nostalgia as a tactic deployed to achieve specific objectives and nostalgia as a means of negotiating social change, but the primary contribution is the fact that the topic is a fruitful subject of study and one that can be approached in myriad ways. As a result, this book will be of interest both to those academics engaging with the subject of media and nostalgia as a way of orienting newer works within the field, as well as to academics concerned with any of the various media examined in the book’s chapters, for which the relationship to nostalgia is an important aspect of the media form’s relation to its social context.

In keeping with the heterogeneity of the assembled works, the final work, “Poetic Transfer of a (Serious) Situation,” by Marine Baudrillard, is not a traditional conclusion. It rounds off the collection, but does not seek to explicitly tie together the preceding chapters and set a course forward. Rather, as a meditation on death and a reflection on an absent loved one, this letter, from Baudrillard to her late husband, offers a “concrete example of ... personal projection space for nostalgia” (p.19). Fittingly for a volume devoted to one specific cultural–psychological experience, this final work does not merely describe that state but enacts it, presenting it to the reader to witness.

The real measure of *Media and Nostalgia*’s success is its legacy in the four years since its publication. The International Media and Nostalgia Network (<https://media-nostalgia.org/>), of which Niemeyer is a founding member, cites dozens of works published since 2014 that continue the work of examining the mediation of nostalgia through a wide range of media forms and disciplinary perspectives extending beyond what is covered within *Media and Nostalgia*: fashion and gaming, philosophy, environmentalism, and more. As Niemeyer writes, the tradition of studying nostalgia as a function of the technologies of the day is long and varied, and it remains a crucial dimension of the contemporary media environment. Four years on, and this collection remains both fascinating and timely.

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