



The Uses of the Past in Contemporary Western Popular Culture

Nostalgia, Politics, Lifecycles, Mediations, and Materialities

Edited by Tobias Becker · Dion Georgiou



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PART I

Overview



‘Do You Know How Nostalgia Works?’ Pop Culture and the Uses of the Past

Tobias Becker and Dion Georgiou

‘Who wants to be in the present, when you can live in the past?’ FBI agent and former vigilante turned vigilante-hunter Laurie Blake asks Angela Abar in the television series *Watchmen*.¹ Only Angela is already too spaced out to listen. She has swallowed—half accidentally, half on purpose—a ‘lethal dose’ of nostalgia in pill form. So, it is for the sake of the audience rather than Angela’s that she goes on:

Do you know how Nostalgia works? Or how they make it? You know, they insert these little chips into your brain, and they harvest your memories.

¹ *Watchmen* (2019).

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And then they put them in a little pill and you pop one, and you get to experience that shit all over again.²

Originally aimed at patients with dementia, nostalgia brings back old memories at a gulp. However, the pills Angela has swallowed were not her own but her grandfather's: the memories she relives are his and they are full of the institutionalised racism, hate and murder he experienced as a Black man growing up in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. This brings us back to the initial question: who, again, would want to live in the past rather than the present?

Watchmen is but a recent entry in a long series of pop cultural products that play with the notion of nostalgia on various levels, implicitly, by harking back to a series of comic books from the 1980s that itself harked back—as well as subverting—the classic American comic book tradition and by visually invoking all sorts of different eras from American and European history and historical fancy as well as explicitly by calling a memory triggering drug nostalgia.

NOSTALGIA

While nostalgia the drug primarily serves a narrative purpose, allowing the viewers to access the series' backstory through flashbacks, it also latches onto a much older critique of nostalgia. Often nostalgia is understood as—and criticised for—distorting and sentimentalising the past by focusing on what was good and ignoring everything else.³ Yet, this critique itself ignores something: the painful aspect contained in the very word nostalgia (from Greek *nostos* home and *algos* pain), the bitter side of this famously bittersweet emotion. As many theorists of nostalgia have pointed out, what we experience in nostalgia is exactly not the past, but its loss. Far from letting us relive bygone days, nostalgia is the realisation that we will never return to them which is what constitutes its painful properties.⁴ In *Watchmen* the protagonist experiences almost nothing but painful moments after taking the drug. It allows Angela to access her grandfather's memories as if they had been implanted in her brain. Not only does

² Ibid.

³ On this critique see Becker, *Yesterday*.

⁴ See, for instance, Stewart, *On Longing*; Ankersmit, *History and Tropology*.

nostalgia lose the aspect of yearning here, but it becomes synonymous with memory in general. In her think piece in this volume, Sabine Sielke argues that exactly this has happened on a larger scale both in the culture broadly and in academic research and writing more particularly where nostalgia seems to have become what memory was in the 1990s.

It goes without saying that these developments threaten to make an already vague term even more so. Ever since the physician Johannes Hofer coined the term in 1688 to denote a pathological form of homesickness, the meanings of nostalgia have continually evolved and changed. When exactly nostalgia shed its spatial meaning to take on a temporal one is a matter of debate. According to Thomas Dodman this happened in nineteenth-century France, according to Susan J. Matt the two terms drifted apart from the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁵ However, if one goes through earlier editions of major dictionaries, the new meaning doesn't appear before the mid- to late-1960s. At the very same time, nostalgia became associated with popular culture.⁶

It wasn't coincidental that nostalgia rose to prominence at the time it did. Against the background of the Vietnam War, the fear of nuclear destruction, the student movement as well as, come the 1970s, economic recession and the threat of depleting natural resources, the idea of progress seemed more suspect than ever.⁷ But not only progress but the modernist understanding of time as uniform, homogenous, and linear began to become dubious. 'The moderns have a peculiar propensity for understanding time', the thinker Bruno Latour observes, 'that passes as if it were really abolishing the past behind it. They all take themselves for Attila, in whose footsteps no grass grows back'.⁸ Believing the past to be over and gone, the moderns, Latour continues, cannot make sense when it—or bits and pieces of it—resurface, when it is resurrected and revived.⁹

Needless to say, nostalgia in its new sense as yearning for the past, mourning its passing or believing it to be superior to the present did not fit in with the modernist understanding of time. The phenomena and practices characterised as nostalgic were a sign of greater changes in the

⁵Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was*, Matt, *Homesickness*, 130, 174.

⁶See Becker, *Yesterday*.

⁷See *ibid.*

⁸Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 68.

⁹*Ibid.*

way people perceived and experienced time—or rather the realisation that people perceived and experienced time in different ways, that time, to quote Latour again, was not a ‘fine laminary flow’ but a ‘turbulent flow of whirlpools and rapids’.¹⁰ Worse still, nostalgia not only didn’t fit in with the modernist idea of time, it contradicted it, articulating a nagging doubt that the past was *really* over, or that progress would deliver what it had promised. Or perhaps it was the other way round: intellectuals and critics resurrected an old medical term for homesickness to pathologise what they saw as an unhealthy preoccupation with the past and to defend the modernist idea of time and progress, many still adhered to. One way or the other: when using the term today, it is important to keep this history as well as the usually negative connotations nostalgia carries in mind.

More generally, this book does not operate with one definition of nostalgia or one theory or method to approach it. Given the many different ways in which nostalgia has been defined and used both in everyday language and in academic discourse this would be both arrogant and futile. Rather, by bringing together contributions from different disciplines and on different topics it wants to present multiple ways in which researchers across the humanities interested currently employ the term.¹¹ In doing so, it concentrates on the field of pop culture or what it, bringing both together, calls ‘pop nostalgia’. But first: what does this mean?

POP NOSTALGIA

The term ‘pop nostalgia’ was first used by the critic Stephen Holden in an article for *The Atlantic* from 1985 and it is useful to keep in mind that it originated in music criticism rather than academic analysis. Holden was not in the business of coining sophisticated concepts, for him, ‘pop nostalgia’ meant simply that: an increasing nostalgia in pop music, which, he claimed, was undergoing a ‘counterrevolution’.¹²

Of course, Holden was not the first to note pop’s penchant for the past, the beginnings of which he himself traced back to the early 1970s. Nostalgia was counterrevolutionary for him insofar as rock and roll originally had been all about the here and now and the future, associated, first,

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹¹ For an overview of how various disciplines operate with nostalgia see Jacobsen (ed.), *Nostalgia Now*; Jacobsen (ed.), *Intimations of Nostalgia*.

¹² Holden, “Pop Nostalgia.”

with teenage rebellion and then, in the 1960s, with the counterculture. There was, then, a political dimension to Holden's critique, not least when he noted how 'retrograde tendencies in American pop coincide with the Reagan presidency'.¹³ The conservative comeback did not restrict itself to politics, it had seized culture as well.

Holden's critique of pop nostalgia is representative not only for the nostalgia critique that sprang up in the 1970s—today's critics sound very similar. Take, for instance, Simon Reynolds's 2011 book *Retromania*, whose influence on how the relationship between pop culture, retro and nostalgia is perceived in pop criticism, academia as well as the broader public can hardly be overestimated. No other book is quoted more often in the following pages. *Retromania* is at once one of the most comprehensive and thought-provoking and one of the most irksome books on retro. While it shows that retro dates back at least to the 1970s, it nevertheless joins the chorus of those critics that have condemned retro as derivative and, therefore, as a sign of cultural decline. Although retro has been going on for quite a while, without, so far, killing off popular culture, Reynolds still believes that 'there has never been a society in human history so obsessed with the cultural artifacts of its own immediate past'.¹⁴ For Reynolds retro is not just an aspect of pop culture, it threatens to take it over completely.

He also does not differentiate between retro and nostalgia rather for him nostalgia is at the root of retro. 'Is nostalgia stopping our culture's ability to surge forward', he asks, 'or are we nostalgic precisely because our culture has stopped moving forward and so we inevitably look back to more momentous and dynamic times?'¹⁵ This is, of course, a rhetorical question. Whether nostalgia is cause or effect: culture has certainly stopped moving forward.

'Moving forward' is a key term here. It reveals Reynolds as a representative of the modernist understanding of time, according to which the past needs to be killed off—or at least left behind—for new things to emerge. Yet when it comes to culture the idea of progress makes little sense. A tractor may be more advanced than a horse-driven plough but does rock and roll signify a progress over jazz, rap over rock? In culture something is not automatically inferior because it is older. Until modernity seeking

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Reynolds, *Retromania*, xiii.

¹⁵ Ibid., xiv.

inspiration in the past and building on it was the norm: no one is starting from scratch. In the high arts this is called tradition, why should it be called nostalgia, when it comes to popular culture?

Reynolds forcefully rejects the ‘simultaneity of pop time that abolishes history’.¹⁶ While he casts this development in the language of cultural decline, it is possible to make a case for it. Firstly, it acknowledges that older cultural artefacts are not mere anachronisms without a place in the present but testifies to their continued relevance. Secondly, the idea that retro is motivated by nostalgia and simply means ‘revivals, reissues, remakes, re-enactments’ can be contested.¹⁷ As the contributions to this book show, in most cases retro does exactly not mean to copy but to reuse artefacts from the past to create something new in the present. Sampling culture is the best example for this. The emotional engagements both on the level of production and consumption are also more complex than merely yearning for the past or believing it to be superior to the present.

Much as Reynolds’s criticism displays a modernist understanding of time, retro is illustrative of the more complicated temporal whirlpools, Latour emphasises against it. Although we often like to think about retro as consecutive revivals of the 1920s, 1950s, 1970s and so on, there have been many 1950s revivals. Every moment in time is characterised by a mixture of styles from various periods and every revival brings back aspects of many different earlier times. We, therefore, need a new history of retro that takes seriously both retro’s creative potential and its skewed, overlapping, and intersecting timelines. Such a history would also differentiate between retro as a broad, general term for pop culture’s appropriation of the past and different modes to pursue it—or to use the past—of which nostalgia would be only one.

This is what Michael Dwyer does in *Back to the Fifties* by conceptualising pop nostalgia in specific ways. For him, pop nostalgia is not so much about individuals but about production, circulation, and reception on a larger cultural level. Secondly, pop nostalgia can be evoked by pop cultural artefacts even if they are not set in the past through tropes, symbols, or styles. And finally, Dwyer sees nostalgia not so much as embedded within texts ‘but rather in the affective relationships between audiences and texts’.¹⁸ For him, nostalgia is neither a genre nor a reception practice but

¹⁶ Ibid., x.

¹⁷ Ibid., xi.

¹⁸ Dwyer, *Back to the Fifties*, 4.

the 'the un-, semi-, or extra-conscious intensity one experiences with a cultural text that produces meaning for the past and the present'.¹⁹ There are different ways in which to engage with the past, but nostalgia, crucially for Dwyer, is an 'affective cultural formation' and an artefact that lacks this investment that neither addresses nor triggers an affective nostalgic response cannot be said to participate in pop nostalgia.²⁰

While Dwyer's interpretation of nostalgia might be challenged by those who rather stress economic, technological, generational, or political dimensions of the phenomenon, it is an extremely helpful concept to think with: firstly, because it exchanges polemic for analysis; secondly, because it recommends a structured approach, differentiating between how something is invested with meaning by its producers, by critics and by audiences; and finally, because it insists on the importance of affect, and in doing so reconnects the concept with its earlier definition, as something that manifests in the emotions of the individual.

There is a further point to be made with regard to avoiding the stigmatisation of pop nostalgia as a phenomenon, and that is—as per Pierre Bourdieu—the need to recognise the partial autonomy of the field of culture from those of power and money.²¹ Hierarchies of value in the cultural field, while inevitably influenced by hierarchies in politics and economics, will not necessarily mirror them, because of the agency exerted by both gatekeepers to the field and actors within it. One cannot therefore disconnect the apparent surge in pop nostalgia during the late twentieth century from Reaganism and Thatcherism, or deindustrialisation or neoliberalisation, but nor equally should that surge and the sentiments attached be equated with these political and economic phenomena. Rather, there is a need to theorise and consider empirically how those external forces are negotiated by individuals and institutions concerned with cultural production.

USES OF THE PAST BEYOND NOSTALGIA

If, again taking our leave from Dwyer, we recognise nostalgia as a specific way of engaging with the past, we need to recognise that not all uses of the past in popular culture are nostalgic, and that we must go beyond the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production".

concept of nostalgia to explain such manifestations. Cultural memory studies offer useful pointers in this regard. Jan Assmann has identified three levels upon which memory operates: inner, social, and cultural.²² These relate to our temporal frameworks of time, our senses of identity, and type of memory. As individuals, we have our inner memories, which span most of our life-course, relate to our sense of individual self as a bounded entity, and are generated within our neuro-mental systems. Remembering at a social level, meanwhile, is dependent upon communicative memory. This is, broadly defined, an everyday, participatory, and non-institutionalised way of remembering, and typically works over a timeframe of around 80 years (covering three generations), providing a shared source of references between generations and within groups. Finally, there is cultural memory, which institutionalises memories in symbols and objects that are more stable and situation-transcendent. It draws upon remembering that occurs at an inner or social level, but who gets to produce aspects of cultural memory, and who gets to know and remember things, is highly differentiated. It ought to be stressed that these are dynamic and interactive, rather than absolute, categories. Memory is knowledge about ‘ourselves’ which links to our sense of identity, and as those identities are fluid (individual, generational, national, etc.), so are accompanying forms of memory.

Aleida Assmann, meanwhile, has subdivided cultural memory into canon and archive.²³ Both are in the first instance dependent on the norm of forgetting to make space for new information, challenges, and ideas. Such forgetting may be unintentional, as with the death of an individual from natural causes, and with it their individual memory, or arise from intentional destruction of memories, whether through the obliteration of objects, societies, or people. Of what remains, the canon is a society’s working cultural memory. It centres on contested processes of collecting, of ascribing value, and deciding and establishing durability. The archive, meanwhile, is a central institution in the space between canonisation and forgetting and provides the basis of what might be said in the future about the contemporary moment when it has become past. The line between canon and archive is fluid, and what is actively remembered or merely retained is also a process of contestation.

²² Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory”.

²³ Assmann, “Canon and Archive.”

Media technological changes since the late twentieth century have substantially expanded the archival component of cultural memory. Digitisation, but equally prior to that, developments such as analogue video recording, have meant that the portion of cultural production saved for posterity, the portion of individual and communicative remembering retained in more tangible forms, has expanded. Yet as our time, attention, finances, and personal memories are not so elastic, the implications for the canon are less determined; the versions of the past that we actively consume have changed, for certain, in response to changes in the way we store and access them, but not necessarily in predictable ways. With regard to video cassettes, for example, Will Straw noted that they—and the stores in which they were available for rental or purchase—had altered cultural time by enabling old films to be rewatched, but also shortening current films' first cinema runs.²⁴ He argued that new technologies such as this reversed and transgressed traditional chronologies, muddying our sense of historical time, delaying obsolescence, and providing greater space for accumulation. Again, returning to Dwyer, one might question whether such an assemblage is compatible with or tantamount to nostalgia, but it is unquestionably postmodern, and illustrative of how new technologies allowed cultural producers to envisage and engage with the canon in new and different ways.

Postmodernism, however, has been frequently declared dead since the turn of the twenty-first century. In one such interpretation, made in 2009 with the Web 2.0 era now into full swing, theorist Alan Kirby asserted that what has replaced it is the 'digimodern': an era of perennially incomplete electronic texts, socially but hierarchically authored, increasing in length and quantity but declining in quality, and read anti-sequentially but ultra-consecutively.²⁵ One might eschew the normative aspects of Kirby's analysis, but still recognise versions of the phenomenon he described in popular culture both before or since. MP3 players and, subsequently, streaming services such as Spotify, have transformed our ability to accumulate much vaster quantities of music and compile collections and playlists that challenge or fossilise existing canons; the accompanying dematerialisation of music has been linked to its desacralisation, but may also mimic older

²⁴ Straw, "Residual Media."

²⁵ Kirby, *Digimodernism*.

formats.²⁶ New genres of television documentary and drama have been produced in response to a need to finance and produce programming both for a more segmented and more global audience, resulting in celebrity-oriented or personalised commemorative shows and CGI-enhanced drama-documentaries.²⁷ Web memorials for tragic events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina have proven more dynamic and fragmented than official, physical memorials, producing narratives that can be very individualised, or also reify certain narratives and authenticity in pursuit of greater web traffic.²⁸

THE PARAMETERS OF THIS BOOK

The (soft) boundaries of the book's focus are delineated in the first half of its title. Firstly, this book's focus is on contemporary popular culture, by which we imply not a periodisation that reaches backward to a defined point in time, but rather, a collective endeavour to construct a history of the expanded present moment in popular culture, to think about the forces currently in play when it comes to the uses of the past, identifying the trends that have come into being and are still unfolding. Most of the research collated here is born out of disciplines more concerned with the here and now than the past. Historians, on the other hand, if they are interested at all in popular culture, seem to skirt the subject of nostalgia. Yet, both groups could profit from the other's expertise. While historians would be well-advised to look to other disciplines when engaging with media or subjects, they traditionally tend to avoid in favour of the written word, those disciplines could profit from the work of historians. Like the discourse on nostalgia generally, a lot of what is discussed as current examples of nostalgia have a much longer pedigree. Recognising that intellectuals have criticised nostalgia as well as proclaiming ever new nostalgia waves since the 1970s, puts diagnoses about today's 'retromania' and our present as an 'age of nostalgia' into perspective.²⁹

²⁶See Giles et al., "The Psychological Meaning of Personal Record Collections and the Impact of Changing Technological Forms;" Hagen, "The Playlist Experience;" Hogarty, "Memories of the Material/Vestiges of the Virtual;" McCourt, "Collecting Music in the Digital Realm;" Roy, *Media, Materiality and Memory* for more extensive analysis and discussion of this topic.

²⁷See Andrews, "Mediating Remembrance;" Chapman, "Re-presenting War".

²⁸Hess, "In Digital Remembrance;" Recuber, "The Prosumption of Commemoration".

²⁹Reynolds, *Retromania*; Bauman, *Retrotopia*, 1.

Secondly, this book is implicitly and explicitly concerned with nostalgia in Western modernity. Most of the literature on nostalgia—and especially on nostalgia in pop culture—has concentrated on the United States, Europe, particularly Britain, and, more recently, post-socialist Eastern Europe to an extent that both nostalgia and pop culture can appear as Western concepts.³⁰ Nostalgia has been characterised by Peter Fritzsche as stalking Western modernity, as ‘its unwelcome double’, playing the Hyde to modernity’s Jekyll, as Svetlana Boym has put similarly.³¹ However, even if that may be the case, and there is reason for doubt, it seems unlikely that nostalgia unlike other Western concepts hasn’t been adopted elsewhere or that, say, Bollywood films or K-Pop, to name just two of the best-known contributions to global pop culture form outside of the United States and Europe, do not look back to the past in content and form.

There is nonetheless a danger attached in applying a concept so strongly associated with Western modernity, such as nostalgia, to other cultures as well, as to periods in the past that neither had a term nor a concept of nostalgia. Conceptions of temporality beyond the West, though affected by Western ideas of modernity through colonisation, migration, climate change, and other aspects of contact, nonetheless have their own unique histories that require different approaches to understanding apparent manifestations of the past within particular though porous cultures.³² Moreover, the topic of nostalgia and the ways in which the past is used helps us to understand the way that Western modernity and Western culture functions, not as a discrete, pre-existing entity but as something that needs to be continually constructed, haunted also by the others it conjures up and excludes, as much of this research also demonstrates. In doing so, we do not intend to collapse the West itself into a homogenous space, but rather highlight the effects of particular common features that have shaped these societies (such as industrialisation, imperial expansion, and Christianity).

³⁰ See, for instance, Armbruster, *Watching Nostalgia*; Dwyer, *Back to the Fifties*; Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia*; Sperb, *Flickers of Film*; Geraghty, *Cult Collectors*; Padva, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture*; *Media and Nostalgia*, ed. by Niemeyer; Tomaszewicz and Hancox, “Me and the USSR and Everyone We Know.”

³¹ Fritzsche, “How Nostalgia Narrates Modernity,” 62; Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xvi.

³² For discussions of distinctive temporalities beyond the West, see for example Cilliers, “The Kairos of Karos”; Csonka, “Changing Inuit Historicities in West Greenland and Nunavut”; Li, “What is Time?”; Mondragón, “Of Winds, Worms and *Mana*”.

Now finally, to the ‘popular’ dimension, or ‘pop’—a highly connotative abbreviation that fittingly conjures up mental images of Andy Warhol painting soup cans or television programmes showcasing current chart music. Our concern in this regard is with formats designed to reach a mass audience (even if that audience is increasingly fragmented), products of cultural *industries*, whose principal goals are measured in scalar terms (of audience, of profit, of geographic reach) rather than less quantifiable aesthetic ones, even if the latter are the more important for specific producers within those industries, and individual consumers. This links back to those other demarcations in the book’s title, for we would argue that popularity is a hegemonic logic in contemporary Western cultures, setting the boundaries in which the past is evoked.

THE EMPHASES OF THIS BOOK

Having perambulated the shores of this book, we now turn our eyes inland, and discuss in greater depth what lies ahead. Once again, the volume’s title offers a map—or, rather, its subtitle does: ‘Nostalgia, Politics, Lifecycles, Mediations, and Materialities’. We are concerned with how the first of those phenomena, broadly understood, intersects with each of the other four, and the book is structured to reflect that.

Let us return firstly to nostalgia, nebulous though it may seem, given its deployment to define a range of temporal features. We are reluctant to dispose of nostalgia, given its ubiquity as a term. One might reject its application for understanding some individual manifestations of the past in the present, but it remains the dominant frame for thinking about how the past manifests in the present more generally. The usage of nostalgia as a term is of conceptual as well as lexical significance, for if its undertones of pejoration and diagnosis render it loaded, scholars are nonetheless routinely compelled to explain pastness-in-present through and against it as a framework. For the same reason, we are reluctant to rein nostalgia in by narrowing it down to a compact, handsome, all-purpose definition. Rather, our aim is to paint a panorama of both how the past is present, deployed, and understood in popular culture, and how nostalgia and other paradigms for understanding the presence of past in present are conceptualised and studied across disciplines such as history, literature, cultural, film, media, and fashion studies.

In this way, collected volumes of research on nostalgia such as this have contributed not insignificantly to widening and expanding what nostalgia

means. This ambivalence is useful precisely because it allows for a conversation across the disciplines, which trying to impose a clear-cut concept of nostalgia would make much more difficult. This volume therefore reflects the polyphony of voices and the diversity of approaches by assembling contributions on many different topics from many different disciplines. In this spirit of pluralism, we simply pronounce nostalgia here the starting point from which multiple courses shall be plotted in an array of directions, though our individual contributors are far less agnostic as to which pathway is best than we are bound to be here. Accordingly, this book combines research-based with more theoretical chapters, composing and decomposing nostalgia as a means for analysing culture, in between applying, or refusing it in more particular settings. The remaining four terms in the subtitle have a section of the book dedicated to them in turn, each of which in combination with nostalgia enhances our understanding of what the latter is or isn't, allocating it greater specificity and concreteness of meaning through their added presence.

Politics

The first section, though entitled 'Politics', is almost as concerned with emotions, and the intertwining and confusion of these two things. It commences with two twinned think-pieces. In the first of these, Tobias Becker considers how nostalgia has been applied to understand both popular culture and politics, its capacity to explain being transferred from the first of those spheres to the second. This is not, as he notes, a new tendency, but rather one long applied to critique conservative politicians, particularly to explain their popularity, which has recurred recently in responses to shocks such as Britain's narrow referendum vote in favour of leaving the European Union in 2016, or the election of Donald Trump as American President later that same year. Persistently, the term nostalgia is deployed to connect unfavoured politics and popular culture and to damn them both as reactionary. In doing so, Becker highlights, they attribute undesirable aspects of the present to hangovers from the past, thus evading rather than addressing the problem.

Michael D. Dwyer is likewise critical of the notion that nostalgia is politically problematic. For Dwyer, nostalgia is neither inherently good nor bad, but a feeling, albeit one rooted in the conditions of modernity. It does not, he argues, encompass all forms of engagement with the past, but rather specifically those which simultaneously take comfort in it and mourn

the impossibility of returning there. What nostalgia means beyond that, ideologically, is dependent upon the circumstances it arises within, and the ends to which it is put; it can indeed be utilised in ways that are progressive as well as attacked in ways that fundamentally are not.

The combination of politics and affect is explored in-situ in the section's other two chapters. Helen Wagner's centres on the figure of Horst Schimanski, the iconic detective protagonist of long-running German police procedural series *Tatort*, and the way the politics of deindustrialisation in the Ruhr area played out in both his presentation and reception. Though initially resented by civic leaders for the show's apparently declinist presentation of the region, Schimanski's brand of working-class machismo was eventually clung to and marketed as a remnant of the Ruhr's industrial heritage.

Lily Kelting, meanwhile, examines how dining culture in Atlanta, Georgia, evokes a nostalgia for the American South that goes beyond simply cherishing the 'lost cause' tied heavily to the memory of the Civil War. Instead, she demonstrates how, through their combinations of flavours and décor, restaurants have sought to evoke distinctive ideas of history, race, and place that are in different cases progressive, conservative, or hybridised. Both Wagner and Kelting confirm the importance of aesthetics and affect in the political meanings attached to the past, as well as the ideological diversity of those meanings.

Lifecycles

The second section is concerned with the generational and intergenerational dynamics that perpetuate the presence of the past in contemporary popular culture. Gary Cross opens it by arguing that we ought to understand nostalgia as arising through the interaction between 'fast capitalism' and the veneration of childhood and youth, culminating in rapidly evolving cultural formats, like popular music or television sitcoms, aimed at specific cohorts and subsequently still celebrated as emblematic of them. This, Cross states, can bind together people who have little in common, save for being of around the same age, and sharing an urge to respond to the apparent speeding up of time by yearningly revisiting their youths.

The examples drawn upon by Cross are largely American, but the other two chapters in the section demonstrate the importance of lifecycles in understanding the cultural presence of the past in Britain too. Kim Wiltshire analyses remakes of 1960s and 1970s films starring the

London-born actor Michael Caine, which were produced in the 2000s and 2010s; these newer versions often featured the older Caine in a different role from the original, juxtaposed with a younger protagonist. As Wiltshire highlights, contemporary film remakes carry a critical stigma that they lacked in an earlier era, when far greater numbers were produced due to the loss of prior versions. The purpose they now generally fulfil is to bring an old story to a new audience, though they also include nods to the original films with the aim of attaining the acceptance of those acquainted with them. The Caine remakes more specifically, she argues, are demonstrative of anxieties about masculinity among a generation born around the 1960s, to which they responded by trying to ironically reclaim the sexist, assertive masculinity of that period.

Dion Georgiou then shifts our attention from film to music and broadcasting. His chapter examines a media event from 2014, when the BBC held a week-long celebration of what it deemed to be the twentieth anniversary of the rise of Britpop: the genre designation applied to a number of relatively commercially and critically successful guitar-based bands during the mid-1990s. Georgiou highlights the centrality in this event of both radio DJs and popular artists from the period, and their continued presence in broadcasting and music industries increasingly diversifying their production to maintain their appeal to a cohort of consumers who have now exited the age-range which popular music had previously primarily targeted. The narratives perpetuated through this revisitation of Britpop and the 1990s, like those in the Caine remakes analysed by Wiltshire, harked back to mythologised ideals of White working-class masculinity, although Georgiou also stresses how some of the week's programming offered alternative understandings of that decade's musical canon which centred female and Black artists and listeners.

Mediation

The role of media, evident through the previous two sections, takes centre stage in the third section which is concerned specifically with how technologies and formats shape the way the past manifests in contemporary culture. It opens with Sabine Sielke's rumination on this theme. Nostalgia, in Sielke's view, is not a cultural form, but rather a mediated mode of perception. She notes the historical importance here of reproductive technologies, from print through photography to digitisation, which though bound up with processes of commodification, globalisation, and

acceleration, also offer retro aesthetics, creating emotional and affective connections between people and their environments, articulated in manifestations of nostalgia. For this reason, Sielke stresses the importance of distinguishing between nostalgia and retro: the latter is integral to the former but can exist independently, ironic in its appeal but sales-oriented in its objectives, whereas nostalgia often critiques and resists this same logic.

Irony and playfulness, as well as longing, are extensively visible in the intermeshed cultural forms explored in the three other chapters in the section. Susan Baumert's is concerned with 1920s and 1940s-themed party events in New York, Berlin, and London. Using a combination of participant observation and media analysis, Baumert highlights the retro aesthetics of the events' locations, props, and rituals, and the creative work of staff and attendees alike in evoking era. She notes that while the events prioritise period sights and sounds over factual accuracy and socio-economic issues, those present cited a range of motivations for taking part, ranging from escapism to yearning for the past.

Fabrice Leroy's chapter offers a deep textual analysis of the 2013 graphic novel *Atomic Empire*, a collaboration between Belgian writer Thierry Smolderen and French artist Alexander Clérisse. Portraying events occurring between the 1920s and 1950s, *Atomic Empire's* style heavily echoes the optimistic, future-oriented aesthetics of the mid-twentieth century generally, and of the post-war 'Golden Age' of Belgian comics more specifically. Yet Leroy emphasises how, using design software, Smolderen and Clérisse also integrated a range of other visual cues from other media and periods into the novel, utilising these and non-consecutive narratives to capture the dissociated mental state of its traumatised protagonist, and the underlying anxieties of the Cold War. In this way, he argues, they do not merely faithfully recreate or condescendingly mimic the styles of an earlier era, but use them to explore the subjective nature of time and lingering ideological tensions pervading into the present.

Completing this section is Michael Williams's chapter on neoclassical visual imagery in popstar Justin Bieber's media and advertising presence. It focuses in particular on an advertising campaign Bieber did for Calvin Klein's boxer shorts range, in which the scantily clad singer was photographed striking a number of statuesque poses, including one featuring him opposite the *Venus de Milo*. Williams locates this within both Bieber's own penchant for religious tropes in nude and semi-nude appearances, and a longstanding tradition of utilising and evoking statuary to imply divinity, most notably with the marketing of Hollywood stars in the 1930s.