

WHAT GLOWS BENEATH: AFFECTIVE
NOSTALGIA IN *LIFE ON MARS*

Ross P. Garner
Cardiff University

Presentation Overview

- What is Nostalgia?: Methodology
- What is Nostalgia?: Theory
- *Life on Mars* and Narrative
- *Life on Mars* and Narrative Worlds
- *Life on Mars* and ‘Affective Nostalgia’

What is Nostalgia?: Methodology

Once upon a time, in a mythic era known as the 1980s, women and their fashions were different. There was colour and shape, humour and energy. Bring back Tina Turner, with the wild hair, gravel voce and punch-drunk autobiography, or Debbie Harry's seething sexuality and x-ray eyes (Brabazon 2005: 9)

- Davis (1979: 18) – ‘Simple’ Nostalgia: “the largely unexamined belief that things were better ...*then* than *now*”
- “nostalgia is [something] experienced – it is bodily, through the senses, emotions and memory” (Tacchi 2003: 289)
- Nostalgia as discourse
 - Interpretive Repertoires and Subject Positions (Edley 2001: 198 & 210)
- Nostalgia: a discourse that posits a feeling towards an object that performs work on that object through a process of romanticisation and/or idealisation

What is Nostalgia?: Theory

- Nostalgia an academically devalued term
 - Falsifying: “[s]ilenc[ing] the nostalgic soundtrack” (Brabazon 2005: 26)
 - Ideological: “[n]ostalgia is often thought to have an intrinsically conservative bias” (Grainge 1999: 623)
- Rethinking Nostalgia
 - “memories are less about validating or authenticating the past than they are about organising the present and constructing strategies with which one might imagine a liveable future” (Landsberg 2004: 239)
 - “through nostalgic practices, the past, imagined or real ...can be brought into the present, as a feeling that alters the present, and can be further projected into the future” (Tacchi 2003: 293; see also Battaglia 1995)

Why Time Travel?

- “the time travel motif ...has an ideological function because it literally provides the necessary distancing effect that science fiction needs to be able to metaphorically address the most pressing issues and themes that concern people in the present.” (Redmond 2004: 113)
- Combining a discursive approach to nostalgia with the priorities of the time travel subgenre offers an understanding of the concerns and ‘bedrocks’ that inform constructions of identity in the twenty-first century.

Life on Mars and Narrative

- Central Narrative Enigma:
 - Sam Tyler – is he mad, in a coma or having travelled in time?
- *Life on Mars*' Episodic Narrative Structure:
 - Sam/Gene
 - Method/Instinct
 - Cerebral/Physical
 - Evidence/Previous Cases
 - Professional/Amateur

Life on Mars and Narrative



Life on Mars and Narrative

- *Life on Mars*' Episodic Narrative Structure:

Sam/Gene

Method/Instinct

Cerebral/Physical

Evidence/Previous Cases

Professional/Amateur

- Complicated by:

Numbness/Affect

Life on Mars and Narrative Worlds

- a representation “cannot say everything about this world” (Eco 1994: 3) so that what is depicted must be seen as a metonym for “the totality of knowledge” (Ibid: 90)
- “programmes have, at different times, developed colour palettes which the audience learns to recognise and associate with particular moods and atmospheres” (Lury 2005: 36)

Life on Mars and Narrative Worlds



Life on Mars and Narrative Worlds



Life on Mars and ‘Affective Nostalgia’

- Affective Nostalgia:
 - nostalgia is for the ability to ‘feel’ and arises because of the affect/numbness binary that structures both the narrative arc and representation of narrative worlds
- Castiglia (2000)
- Affective Nostalgia as Postmodern Critique?
 - Jameson (1991) – ‘waning of affect’ and ‘depthlessness’

Life on Mars and 'Affective Nostalgia'



Conclusions

- ‘Affective Nostalgia’ within *Life on Mars* despite attempts made to distance ‘nostalgia’ as a reading position
- Present-focused ‘use’ of nostalgia that engages with postmodernist critique
- Idealised past forms of social engagement as ‘bedrock’ of present subjectivities?

Thank you for your time:

GarnerRP1@Cardiff.ac.uk