

BOOK REVIEWS

Analoge Nostalgie in der digitalen Medienkultur

DOMINIK SCHREY, 2017

Berlin, Kulturverlag Kadmos,

pp. 406, illus., bibliography, index, €29.80 (paper)

The growing popularity of analogue media and analogue aesthetics in everyday media is the thematic focus of this study by Dominic Schrey, which is based on the author's PhD thesis at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. Divided structurally into five chapters with three thematic focal points, the book begins with a brief overview of the cultural and media history of nostalgia: its origin, emergence, transformation and integration into various scientific fields as a cultural topos. As Schrey wishes to explore the phenomena of analogue nostalgia against the background of various scientific fields and theories, the inter- and transdisciplinary approach he uses in his book enables him not only to reach a broad audience of fellow researchers from various scientific disciplines but also to attract interested layman, as his precise and understandable argumentation paves the way to a comprehensive overview of multiple phenomena.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the technical and semantic difference between the terms analogue and digital as well as to the historical process of digitalisation and its dominant paradigms, which underwent a nostalgic turn in the 1980s that caused a growing preference for analogue media. Schrey explains this phenomenon based on the concept of aura from Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), where Benjamin argues that the possibility of mechanical reproduction of artworks caused a devaluation of the aura, i.e. of the authenticity of the work itself. This authenticity, combined with other keywords, such as originality, imperfection or even realness, is the key to understanding the nostalgic longing for the analogue, which, in comparison to the digital, offers a more proximate approach to reality or paradoxically even a more accurate depiction of it. The nearness of reality, which also signifies a certain nearness to nature, is therefore an important nexus between the cultural and medial approach to nostalgia, which Schrey predominantly uses to establish his own discourse on the topic of analogue nostalgia in the digital media culture. Combining therefore the critical approach of the *Kulturwissenschaften*, with theorists such as Benjamin, Kracauer or Kittler, with the Anglo-American discourse on media and nostalgia, e.g. the work of Boym, Grainge or Davis, Schrey develops a unique and

integrative perspective on the problematic notion of analogue vs. digital and the associated cultural connotations and perceptions in society.

Following the postulation of the theoretical background of his study, the author delivers in the third and final part of the book various examples of artworks, which not only correspond with his reflections on analogue nostalgia in the digital media culture, but also offer their own contribution to the argued phenomena. Although the artworks vary in shape and size, as well as in view of the medium for or in which they have been made, they all have a common nostalgic framework, which enables them to visually depict this concealed yearning for times passed and to point out this presence of something absent with or within a certain medium. Due to the fact that technological innovations of media in the nineteenth and twentieth century made a significant contribution towards perfecting the possibilities of offering a more accurate digital simulation or visual replica of a longed analogue aspect, the most important trait of modern nostalgia remains this paradoxical dichotomy in which digital media is being used in order to produce analogue effects which are being preferred over digital ones, as they invoke a feeling of realness, naturalness or even a sense of something familiar or homely, which has been lost and can only be simulated, thus signalling again the lack of authenticity in its perception through media.

Although fetishising the analogue in the digital era can be interpreted as retrogressive in terms of modern digital culture and its development, it offers a critical potential in the reflection on the present through the lens of the past, as Schrey concludes in his summary while proposing that a further exploration of the possibilities in the theoretical interplay between culture, media and technology is needed. Following his argumentation on analogue nostalgia, Schrey closes his study with a focus on contemporary development tendencies in digital media technology and their possible connection to the symptoms of analogue nostalgia, posing a question about the temporal limitations of the phenomenon of analogue nostalgia and the possibility of applying its characteristic symptoms to digital media in a different constellation, which remains to be answered. Schrey's book could therefore be recommended not only to students and scholars of media, cultural and technological studies, but also to anyone interested in these scientific disciplines.

AIDA ALAGIĆ

Independent Scholar

© 2018, Aida Alagić

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2018.1459331>



Screening Statues: Sculpture and Cinema

STEVEN JACOBS, SUSAN FELLEMAN, VITO ADRIAENSENS, and LISA COLPAERT, 2017

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press
pp. xii + 276, illus., £75 (hardback)