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Popular Music Nostalgia

Introduction

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The Guest-Editors would like to thank the editorial team at *Volume!* for their help in administering the project and translating articles, the numerous peer reviewers who gave so generously of their time to review a large number of interesting submissions, and the contributors, who have waited patiently for their analyses to be published.

This varied and diverse collection of articles focuses on the wide-ranging phenomenon of nostalgia in a number of national, international and transnational contexts. Engaging with and building on existing studies in disciplines as different yet as complementary as popular music studies, cultural studies, psychological studies and consumer/marketing research, it aims to contribute further towards defining the burgeoning field of popular-music-related nostalgia.

It goes almost without saying that the study of nostalgia is now a well-established area of intellectual enquiry, although still a field in which new approaches and insights are being provided. One of the “problems” of talking about nostalgia is that everyone seems to know what it means in general, but it is still a concept that requires constant discussion in order to grasp its slippery polysemy. The authors in this current collection of studies all “discuss their terms” in different ways, within the context of their individual analyses, but here we offer the briefest of overviews, as a way of approaching our subject. Defined broadly as “a sentimental longing for one’s past” (Sedikides *et al.*, 2008a: 305), the term is now widely regarded as a “common” “emotion” or “experience” (Wildschut *et al.*, 2006: 980, 981; 2010:

582). As Constantine Sedikides *et al.* observe, nostalgia was “regarded throughout centuries as a psychological ailment” (2008a: 307), most notably “equated with homesickness” (2008a: 304). Moreover, as Barbara Lebrun comments, drawing on David Lowenthal (1985: xi and 13),

The notion of nostalgia is traditionally defined as the consciousness of a malaise in the present, and as the selective and imaginary mental reconstruction in the present in order to alleviate this unease (2009a: 42).

Several commentators have also viewed nostalgia in ambivalent terms as “bittersweet” (Hirsch, 1992; Baker and Kennedy, 1994; Madrigal and Boerstler, 2007), combining “joy and sadness” (Barrett *et al.*, 2010: 390, 400, 401–2), “disenchantment” and the “desire for re-enchantment”, “a sense of longing associated with the future” and “loss associated with the past” (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 936), as well as “progressive, even utopian impulses” and “regressive stances and melancholic attitudes” (*Ibid.*: 919). More positively however, Sedikides *et al.* also observe, that nostalgia is now “emerging as a fundamental human strength” and is recognised as fulfilling several “psychological functions” (2008a: 307).

Several categories or divisions of nostalgia have been highlighted in academic accounts of the phenomenon. Fred Davis identifies three orders of nostalgia: simple, reflexive and interpreted. As Davis comments, first-order or simple nostalgia “harbors the largely unexamined belief that THINGS WERE BETTER (MORE BEAUTIFUL) (HEALTHIER) (HAPPIER) (MORE CIVILISED) (MORE EXCITING) THEN THAN NOW” (1979: 18). In second-order or reflexive nostalgia, the individual

raises “questions concerning the truth, accuracy, completeness or representativeness of the nostalgic claim” (*Ibid.*: 21). Third-order or interpreted nostalgia “moves beyond issues of the historical accuracy or felicity of the nostalgic claim on the past and, even as the reaction unfolds, questions and, potentially at least, renders problematic the very reaction itself” (*Ibid.*: 24).

In a similar vein, Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two forms of nostalgia. The first, restorative nostalgia, “stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home”, “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition, and “is at the core of recent national and religious revivals”. The second form, reflective nostalgia, “thrives on *algia* (the longing itself) and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately”, “dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity”, and “calls [the truth] into doubt” (2001: xviii).

Further distinctions have been drawn between nostalgia, which is experienced first-hand (“real” nostalgia) and that which is experienced second-hand via the recollections and reminiscences of other individuals—what may be termed “simulated” (Baker and Kennedy, 1994) or “vicarious” nostalgia (Goulding, 2002), or “historical nostalgia”, “in which the past is defined as a time before the audience was born” (Stern, 1992).

Nostalgia has also been viewed as individually and/or collectively experienced or, to use Jose van Dijck’s terms “individually embodied” and

“culturally embedded” (2006: 359). When nostalgia is experienced individually, concerning “personally relevant events” (Sedikides *et al.*, 2004: 205), the emotion has been regarded effectively as a “cushion” (Bose Godbole *et al.*, 2006: 630) —one that “buffers existential threat” (Juhl *et al.*, 2010) or offers a “self-protection mechanism against death-related concerns” (Routledge *et al.*, 2008: 137). For certain commentators, nostalgia is also experienced particularly during times of disruption, discontinuity (Davis, 1979: 34–5) or instability, particularly when “societies” are “in turmoil ... experiencing troubles, turbulence and transformation” (Brown, 1999: 368). Nostalgia is identified as a response to the “uncertainties” (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 920) or “challenges and threats” of the “present” (Vess *et al.*, 2010: 9), and, more specifically, to modernity (as well as late modernity) with “its relentless social uprooting and erosion of time-honoured stabilities” (Pickering and Keightley, 2006: 922; see also 938). More positively, studies have shown that “nostalgic reverie is a crucial vehicle for maintaining and fostering self-continuity over time and in the face of change” (Sedikides *et al.*, 2008b: 230), countering loneliness and increasing social connectedness and support (Zhou *et al.*, 2008; Wildschut *et al.*, 2010: 582).

Other accounts have differentiated between nostalgia and other similar or related terms. For example, Sedikides *et al.* highlight the difference between “reminiscence and autobiographical memory”, which “are acts of remembering specific events in one’s life, including the order of their occurrence”, and nostalgia, which “goes well

beyond memory veracity or temporal ordering of past events. It is centred on personally relevant events, is dipped in affect, and serves vital existential functions” (Sedikides *et al.*, 2004: 205). Nostalgia is also to be distinguished from retro, which adopts a more detached or ironic view of its subject. For example, as Elizabeth E. Guffey argues:

Where nostalgia is linked to a romantic sensibility that resonates with ideas of exile and longing, retro tempers these associations with a heavy dose of cynicism or detachment; although retro looks back to earlier periods, perhaps its most enduring quality is its ironic stance. (2006: 20; see also Brown, 1999, and Reynolds, 2011: xxx-xxxi)

Furthermore, as a perennial feature of the popular-music field, nostalgia has assumed during recent years an increasing prominence within many national contexts. Existing studies have, for example, explored how nostalgia contributes to the development and status of particular popular music forms and genres. Barbara Lebrun’s study of French *chanson néo-réaliste*, which rose to prominence during the 1990s (e.g. Pigalle, Les Nègresses Vertes, and Têtes Raides), indeed highlights the “incoherences” and “contradictions” of the genre, which is “reactionary and rebellious, old-school and modern, elitist and collective” and combines nostalgia, conservatism, protest and distinction/cultural exclusivity (2009b: 59–60).

The role of popular music nostalgia in identity formation has also been a further concern. As Tia DeNora observes,

Music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one

is [and as] a device for the generation of future identity and action structures, a mediator of future existence" (2000: 63).

Andy Bennett focuses on

how the increasing dominance of the retro market in contemporary popular culture is enabling respective post-war generations effectively to relive their youth and to engage in nostalgic representations of what it means to be young, on "how such nostalgic perceptions impact on perceptions of contemporary youth"

which leads him to question "the validity of terms such as 'Generation X'" (2001: 153).

Media/internet coverage of popular music nostalgia is particularly extensive in many national contexts. Chris Tinker (2012) has, for example, examined the significance of popular music nostalgia on French television, particularly following the launch of the successful *Âge Tendre et Têtes de Bois* ("Young and Headstrong", David Looseley's translation) series of concert tours and holiday cruises. Such coverage has several functions: to represent the past more positively than the present ("simple nostalgia"), emphasise joy rather than the "bitter-sweetness" often associated with it, represent a fantasy return to youth, and promote social and cross-generational cohesion. Coverage also supports popular music nostalgia as a commercial force but problematises its status within the wider musical and cultural field.

Of particular importance are the ways in which popular music nostalgia is experienced by listeners and consumers. Holbrook and Schindler describe, for example, how

via a process called nostalgic bonding, a consumer's

history of personal interaction with a product during a critical period of preference formation that occurs roughly in the vicinity of age 20 (give or take a few years in either direction) can create a lifelong preference for that object (2006: 109).

Cases include informants who "experienced strong nostalgic bonding with musical recordings", a young DJ who "describes his endless hours spent with a particular mixing device" and a bass fiddle/double bass player in New York who "focuses on a Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) button given to street musicians who perform in the subway" (*Ibid.*: 119-120). Arno van der Hoeven examines the development of cultural memories of 1990s dance music in the Netherlands, drawing on in-depth interviews with audiences, DJs and organisers of dance events, distinguishing between "decade-parties", in which "reflective nostalgia" "playfully refers to the passing of popular styles, songs and fashions", and the "restorative nostalgia" of "early-parties", which "aim to excavate original house sounds" (2014: 328).

A further—more institutional—dimension of the imbrication of nostalgia and popular music is the way in which public policy has gradually developed definitions of heritage which extend to cover fields of popular cultural practice and forms, specifically allowing popular music artists, genres and works to be included not only in private/commercial "Halls of Fame", but also in official institutions supported by cultural policy. In the UK, the National Centre for Popular Music was a short-lived example of this trend but in other established museums, popular music is increasingly "remembered" either through special collections, or simply

made more visible through curatorial devices such as the V&A museum's "subject hub" for Pop and Rock music. In France, the Cité de la musique has established a successful intermingling of celebration, education and nostalgia through temporary exhibitions devoted to pop music artists and genres. Nostalgia is a component in the transformation of popular music into heritage.

Presentation of the contributions

Genre

This particular collection of articles will begin by developing further the question of genre and nostalgia with a specific focus on rock and *chanson*. In Part One Deena Weinstein introduces the notion of "constructed nostalgia". She views nostalgia for rock's past as a mediated phenomenon of "neo-nostalgia", involving the contemporary preference for socially constructed nostalgia, rather than a personal past or individual life story, relying upon a multiplicity of mediators, and viewed in terms of an "individualized experienced past that can no longer be recovered". The developing role of critics, museums, information technologies such as video games are highlighted, as is the significance of artists' deaths, and changing generational dynamics as "youth now embraces the older generation's tastes".

Following on from this, Jonathyne Briggs's article uncovers some of the competing forms of musical nostalgia in 1970s France with some musicians recognizing the importance of 1960s translation songs and others ignoring them. Here, the analy-

sis reveals how memory and counter-memory can compete in a contested nostalgic construction of the recent cultural past, popular music in 1970s France serving as a site of contestation and (re) construction of a nation's social and cultural trends.

Next, in a change of perspective developing the place of nostalgia within the artistic strategies of individual performers, Isabelle Marc views nostalgia as a recurrent theme as well as an aesthetic, psychological tool in Charles Aznavour's *chanson* output, linking it to his dramatic style and identifying it as a means by which the music-listening public relates to him. Indeed, Aznavour is recognised as having an ability to evoke memories within listeners and to intensify the nostalgia which characterises *la chanson française* more generally. In addition, Marc identifies Aznavour's use of a form of nostalgia that is located in the future. Finally, we move to a consideration of nostalgia and vocality, rather than text/language.

Catherine Lefrançois's article on the specifically Québécois form of *chanson country-western*, which came to prominence in the 1940s, charts the changes within the genre over the years, identifying specific vocal forms of nostalgia such as falsetto and reverb, and locating nostalgia within vocal expression when this is not necessarily suggested by the lyrics. For Lefrançois nostalgia in the Québécois form of *chanson country-western* is initially associated with modernity and individualised forms of nostalgia in the 1940s and 1950s before tradition and conservatism and a more collective form of nostalgia set in during the 1970s.

Space and place

Part Two of the collection here will contribute towards developing further an understanding of the role of nostalgia in the construction of space and place. In her article discussing the themes of songs associated with the Second World War and British culture and society, Sheila Whiteley highlights the potential of nostalgia as a force for creating and organising personal memories and experiences, as well as the importance of homesickness, attachment to national identity, and positive experiences/feelings such as “camaraderie, heroics, optimism and faith.”

Next, returning to Canada, in a paper focusing on the media, television and the spin-off CD box set, Danick Trottier identifies a process of “double nostalgia” at work, in which nostalgic songs are themselves treated nostalgically. The importance of place and nation within the Québécois context of the Quiet Revolution, the canonization of genre, the importance of objects and artefacts, the notion of cultural legacy as well as generational linkages are all emphasised as elements of this “double nostalgia”.

Staying with the theme of commercialization, but developing it in the context of displaced communities, Keivan Djavadzadeh situates nostalgia within the migration of African Americans (mostly men) from the rural South to northern cities and unpacks its commodification for the South through the “race records” of the 1920s which helped some to combat homesickness and “survive in a hostile world”. Here, the image of the train is shown to represent a particular myth

in the construction of nostalgia, and more generally, Djavadzadeh suggests that this nostalgia for the South was not simply idealized or essentialized, but found its source also in a form of pragmatism whereby displaced migrants used artistic creativity as a buffer against despair, incorporating “fragments” of the South into their new everyday experiences.

On a perhaps lighter note, switching from the study of nostalgia in migrant communities, we consider how the transitory displacements of individuals and groups on leisure vacations can also help us understand the linkages between space, place, music and identity. In his study of holiday records, Richard Elliott discusses the commercialisation of nostalgia, specifically in souvenir records, and distinguishes between “nostalgia” which is described and that which is “prescribed”, identifies a “nostalgia gap” “between what is longed for and the moment of longing”, between “place and its evocation”. He also considers the culturally specific phenomenon of “saudade” and liner notes as “fictions” with claims to authenticity. Related issues of song translation, adaptation and untranslatability are also evoked.

Moving on from space and place and evocation to another investigation which introduces more the element of material culture, Elodie Roy’s following study of nostalgia practices relating to niche independent record labels considers specifically the processes of sampling, naming, reissuing, the rehabilitation of semi-forgotten recordings from bygone eras, the significance of liner notes, cultures of collecting, and views nostalgia as a heterogeneous, fragmented and serialised space and

as an innovative, creative and complex/multi-layered practice.

Time

The third and final part of the collection explores the temporal dimensions of popular music nostalgia, particularly *ersatz* and historical forms. Focusing on the psychedelic rock music of Australian group Tame Impala, Nicholas Russo evokes the concept of “ersatz nostalgia” (suggested by Appadurai, 1996) and examines how this group can tell us more about retro rock music, “armchair nostalgia” and “imagined nostalgia”. Here we are thus focusing not on a “nostalgia for one’s own personal past” but one rather for “a past outside of lived experience”, or “memory unlived”. Russo’s article includes consideration of the “phonographic staging of sound”, the use of particular “sound elements”—“sonic cultural markers of the 1960s”—which appeal to the wider collective memory of that era.

Changing our conceptual and geographical perspectives again, to bring in consideration of subcultures, Kim Kattari next focuses on the contemporary subcultural community of rockabilly revivalists in the US and their nostalgia associated with 1950s countercultural rockabilly rebellion, their rejection of modern culture and emphasis on past music, cars and fashion, the DIY values associated with custom car culture; pride in blue collar status and accompanying feelings of marginalization and alienation from contemporary mainstream culture, emphasis on burlesque/pinup fashions, and alternative ideas regarding female body image. Drawing on personal participant-ob-

server ethnographic research, Kattari shows how nostalgic subcultures can be at once regressive and progressive, reactionary and rebellious.

Catherine Strong and Alastair Greig’s study of Joy Division and New Order focuses on media-tised nostalgia books, promotional materials and films; ersatz or imagined nostalgia; nostalgia aimed at staking a claim on the past; the commercialisation of nostalgia for profit as well as a more nuanced view of commercialism; and the possibility of actively rejecting, or at least adopting an ambiguous, reflexive attitude towards nostalgia.

Tribune

The collection of articles then ends—we can hardly say “concludes”, given the fluctuating and evolving field of nostalgia studies within popular music—with a thought-provoking conversation between Franco Fabbri and Marta García Quiñones, which, through the discussion of some of the intrinsically and inherently personal dimensions of nostalgia, underlines the importance of the act of listening itself and of “generational” perspectives in the nostalgic experience. Just as we initiated this Introduction with a reference to the fruitfully and frustratingly polysemic quality of the term “nostalgia”, Fabbri’s and García Quiñones’s personal self-analysis shows how the understanding of musical events requires the unpacking of multiple layers and levels of personal experience, both mental and physical, in which past and present interact in the ongoing production of nostalgia, memory and identity.

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