DESIGN
RESEARCH

Exploring the contemporary Moon Under Water through illustration: nostalgia and the power of the image

Dr. Stephanie Black

ABSTRACT
This article examines an expanded illustration project in order to explore the potential of nostalgic images to offer critical insights, enabling them to intervene within political discourse. This paper uses examples from Plume of Feathers, an audiovisual project, to cast illustration as a meaning-making practice that shapes the world it operates within and proposes that by making nostalgic images illustrators can exercise their agency as agitators. The project at the core of the article is concerned with the decline of pubs and their social function in the UK, which has seen a 23% decrease in the number of pubs between 2008 and 2018 according to the Office for National Statistics (2018). The image of the pub is embroiled within the visual rhetoric related to the UK's 2016 referendum on leaving the EU and this article explores the ways in which the illustrated image can provide a different view of the pub that reveals its construction and offers a critical alternative. The flexibility inherent within the made image is then examined for its potential to visualize the past differently, to undertake the utopian imaginings of Svetlana Boym's "reflective nostalgia" in order to address problems in the present. The article proposes that reflective nostalgia's utility as a critical tool lies in its consideration of the surface of the image, through the material signifiers of age. Embracing these nostalgic triggers when making images allows us to reconnect to the past with critical distance, thereby returning politics to the surface of the image that Fredric Jameson saw as recuperated and rendered neutral.

KEYWORDS
Illustration
Nostalgia
Public House
Politics
Critical Practice