Kyle MacLachlan in the new season of Twin Peaks: has the Internet helped fuel nostalgia for TV shows from decades past?Rancho Rosa Partnership, Showtime Networks

May 22 saw the long-awaited return of David Lynch's 90s TV series Twin Peaks. Cancelled in 1991 after only two seasons, the show had ended on a cliff-hanger, with the fate of its characters left unknown.

Twin Peaks came out the year I was born (1990), so I didn't watch it until about 2013. By then, it had already developed a strong cult status, with original fans still singing its praises. The return of Twin Peaks was celebrated in various ways. In Sydney, Newtown's Gelato Messina refurbished their shop to resemble the show's infamous Double R diner. Missing Persons posters of the main character, Laura Palmer, were plastered on city streets.

Co-creator Mark Frost claimed the reboot wasn't merely an exercise in nostalgia. Instead, he said, it was an exercise in "engaging with one of the most powerful themes in all of art" - the ruthless passage of time.

The new series will reportedly both tie up loose ends and provoke more questions about its characters. On the evidence so far, the reboot is big on strangeness. Classic Lynchian tropes from the original series - bizarre and cryptic dialogue, odd plot points with seemingly no resolution - are back.

One major plot point that has resurfaced is the fate of Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) who was left trapped while his doppelganger took over his body. Yet while the new series taps into a strong sense of nostalgia, it invariably lacks the intimate atmosphere of the original one. Others have also questioned whether the show can live up to the hype of its impressive marketing campaign.

Still, nineties nostalgia is all the rage ; shows and films that have been - or soon will be - rebooted include The X-Files , Full House , Gilmore Girls , Pokémon , Will and Grace and even Baywatch . Other films from different eras have also just been remade as TV shows, including Picnic at Hanging Rock and Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events . But what are the reasons behind this remake boom? Was TV really so much better back then?

Lauren Graham in Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life (2016)Warner Bros. Television

Pangs for the past

Nostalgia is, of course, nothing new. Johannes Hofer – a Swiss physician – coined the term in 1688, when it was considered a disease. It comes from the Greek words *nóstos* (to return home) and *álgos* (a painful longing).

Since then, a more endearing narrative has emerged around the condition of nostalgia. It has become less a disease, and more of a natural reaction to growing up. As Simon Reynolds says in his 2010 book Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to its Own Past , nostalgia is

thoroughly entwined with the consumer-entertainment complex: we feel pangs for the products of yesteryear, the novelties and distractions that filled up our youth.

Every generation obviously has an extended moment of fond remembrance for the pop culture it grew up with. Is it now just the turn of the 90s, recently dubbed by National Geographic the "last great decade"? It was, writes Patrick J. Kiger, a decade filled with "incongruous motifs without a theme to tie them coherently together". These include events such as the Gulf War, the Y2K scare, the Dotcom bubble, Princess Diana's death, the OJ Simpson case, and Seinfeld.

This fascination is widespread. In Japan , 90s memorabilia such as the Neon Genesis Evangelion films, and TV shows Dragonball Z and Sailor Moon, have made a comeback, with the 2013 film Dragonball Z: Battle of the Gods a box-office smash.

The net and nostalgia

Some theorists have other ideas as to why the 90s is proving compelling today. They argue the internet has largely facilitated this reboot craze, as it offers a more convenient method of archiving recent histories. As Variety magazine editor Pat Saperstein notes :

Fuelled by social media, this interest in the pop-culture trappings of the past, particularly the 90s, has become a fertile area for TV programmers.

Not only are there websites dedicated to celebrating 90s nostalgia , but search engines enable easier access to the past. As Guardian writer Charlie Lyne puts it:

Our pop-cultural past is now just a Google search away, and the immediacy has turned nostalgia into the dominant cultural force.

Some writers are less enthusiastic about the internet's role in propelling 90s nostalgia. While Eve Peyser calls the internet a "cesspool of nostalgia", James Wolcott describes it as an "inexhaustible suction pump that indiscriminately dredges up the dreck along with the sunken pearls".

The internet has made it easier to reflect on the past, with websites such as Buzzfeed and Youtube operating as galleries of nostalgia. But the internet can't be used to explain everything. As Wolcott points out, this "anxious, ravenous speedup of nostalgia" is "more than a reflection of the overall acceleration of digital culture". For many who grew up in the 90s, the decade was indeed a kind of nouveau golden age. It was an age of innocence and optimism before the internet, 9/11, the endless "war on terror" and the growth of extremist groups such as Daesh.

Firefighters fight fires that sprouted up from within the rubble of the World Trade Center on September 19, 2001: is the 90s seen as a more innocent time?Reuters

Still, nostalgia is a tricky phenomenon. Theorist Arjun Appadurai has talked of what he calls "imagined nostalgia". Put simply, this refers to a nostalgia for a particular time period that one has not even lived through. Some critics argue that this is driven by consumer culture playing on our feelings on longing. Nostalgia is thus turned into an act of consumerism.

Indeed, the funny thing about nostalgia in the age of the internet is that people can vicariously partake in it. Many who eagerly awaited the return of Twin Peaks were either too young to be fans or not even alive for the original airing (myself included). So their experience of the show was only enabled through technologies such as video cassettes, DVDs, or streaming. This might be described as a kind of "estranged nostalgia".

The Future of Revivals

The late Svetlana Boym, in her 2001 book The Future of Nostalgia , distinguishes between "restorative" nostalgia and "reflective" nostalgia. The former relates to the "nóstos" aspect of returning home, while the latter relates to the "algos" – or the sense of pain and loss.

The past is comfortable terrain. With the aid of hindsight, it appears more attractive than it may have been when it was our present. Still, the 90s was indeed a thrilling ride when it came to quality TV. Classic shows included Seinfeld, The Sopranos, The Simpsons, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and, of course, Twin Peaks.

It’s worth remembering though that reboots made now won’t be the same as their original source material. Situated in a different time and place, they’ll speak of contemporary fears and concerns, rather than actively taking us back to that comfortable, pleasantly eerie world we once knew.

The new Twin Peaks season, for instance, is set in a different cultural landscape; ironically it sees old characters grappling with the internet and iphone technology. The original series, however, exuded a 50s-era innocence.

Reboots must therefore be seen for what they are – a somewhat disconnected extension of an original. While revivals are all the rage, they can never truly revive a specific moment in time. And nor should they.

Siobhan Lyons does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

Authors: Siobhan Lyons, Scholar in Media and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University

Read more http://theconversation.com/its-happening-again-our-love-affair-with-tv-reboots-78454