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Mad Men: Dream Come True TV. Ed. Gary R. Edgerton. London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011 (258 pages). ISBN: 978-1848853799 (pb).

A Review by Aidan Power, Universität Bremen

In *Changing Places*, the first instalment of David Lodge's timeless campus trilogy, Morris Zapp, Professor of English at Euphoria College and doyen of Jane Austen studies, announces his intention to write the definitive examination of the author's work, a towering analysis, exhaustive in scope, that would:

> examine the novels from every conceivable angle, historical, biographical, rhetorical, mythical, Freudian, Jungian, existentialist, Marxist, structuralist, Christian-allegorical, ethical, exponential, linguistic, phenomenological, archetypal, you name it; so that when each commentary was written there would be simply nothing further to say about the novel in question. (44)

Zapp, in short, would be sole gatekeeper to the full cornucopia of meaning in relation to Austen, obliterating the need for further commentary. His achievement would be so overarching that future generations would have to look elsewhere for new areas to research. The example of Zapp comes to mind when presented with *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*, the Gary R. Edgerton edited collection that unites a sterling collection of media experts in a bid to analyse the phenomenon that is Mathew Weiner's television series from an impressive number of perspectives. Ambitious in scope, execution and intent, Edgerton's multifarious yet focused collection seeks to map out the conceptual terrain for all future *Mad Men* collections. Premiering on the U.S. basic cable network AMC in the summer of 2007, *Mad Men* has insinuated itself into the public consciousness in a way that few series before or since could ever dream of. Sparking fashion trends, 1960s revivals, Mattel dolls (buy your very own Joan, Roger, Betty or Don) and parodies on *The Simpsons*, *Sesame Street*, *30 Rock* and *Saturday Night Live*, the series brought to the fore a heady world of Martini-fuelled capitalism, casual racism, caveman sexual politics and, above all, a visual style that was so different because it was so familiar: we had seen it all before in cinema retrospectives and DVDs, but never quite like this.

This disjunctive predilection for both knowing and seeing anew is neatly encapsulated by Maurice Yacowar in Chapter Six of *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*, "Suggestive Silence in Season One", when he writes that "if our awareness makes us feel superior we fall into Weiner's trap. For it is his advertising men's sense of superiority … that renders them hollow" (86). In other words, when we gasp at seeing Betty Draper's (January Jones) daughter play with plastic bags, or smirk knowingly at Bertram Cooper's (Robert Morse) endorsement of Richard Nixon over JFK, we do so with the benefit of having history on our side, exposing our own complacencies about the present in the process. The true strength of *Mad Men* is that it transcends the limitations of the period piece to ask questions of

contemporary North American society, even while it luxuriates in the temporal milieu of its retroactive environment. Thankfully, *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV* is similarly nuanced: it is an exceptionally detailed collection of essays that poses questions of the reader even as it rolls back the manifold layers that inform the series it investigates.

A measure of the collection's scope can be gleaned from a cursory recitation of some of the issues it engages with: sexual politics, the civil rights movement, collective memory, metanarrative, visual style, time travel, political assassination, the cinema of Billy Wilder, second-wave feminism, Bob Dylan, King Vidor and Frank O'Hara to name but a few. Like Morris Zapp's mooted opus it is seemingly exhaustive in scale. Despite the diversity of themes on display and the calibre of the contributors, the book's publication date ensures that the first three seasons form the backbone for the investigation and, as such, some narrative investigations overlap (Peggy's pregnancy, Don's relationship with Midge Daniels, Don's advertising pitch in the Season 1 finale "The Wheel"). The richness of the featured scholarship, however, mitigates against this becoming tedious and instead attests to the infinite analytic scope offered by *Mad Men*'s multilayered narrative. When Morris Zapp's outlook takes on a decidedly poststructuralist hue, he abandons his Jane Austen project, announcing its futility with the maxim that "every decoding is another encoding" (*Small World* 25). Similarly, it strikes me here that *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV* mirrors its subject, becoming itself an artefact; as the show it analyses moves on beyond its fifth season and attracts ever more scholarly attention, it cannot reasonably be expected to be definitive about anything. Far from closing off future avenues for study, however, the collection's topicality and consistent quality lays the groundwork for future investigations to build upon.

Comprising fourteen essays (fifteen if we count Edgerton's thought-provoking introduction—and we should) and an interview with the show's Executive Producer Scott Hornbacher, spread across five distinct sections ("Industry and Authorship", "Visual and Aural Stylistics and Influences", "Narrative Dynamics and Genealogy, Sexual Politics and Gender Roles", "Cultural Memory and the American Dream"), *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV* decodes its object of study from myriad standpoints. Edgerton himself begins Section One with "The Selling of *Mad Men*: A Production History", which outlines *Mad Men*'s debt to David Chase's *The Sopranos* and its central role in reviving the fortunes of an ailing AMC, a revival that, though unspoken here, would facilitate the later emergence of the equally captivating *Breaking Bad*. Brian Rose's interview with Hornbacher follows and, at first glance, appears mildly out of step in a collection of academically informed essays (at this point, it is worth stressing that, though critically erudite, the book clearly has a wider audience in mind than exclusively academic circles). Happily, Rose's contribution dovetails neatly with this gambit, his assured line of questioning allowing his subject to provide revealing insights into the intricacies and headaches of creating a series with such a distinctive mise en scène.

In "Don Draper Confronts the Maddest Men of the Sixties: Bob Dylan and George Lois", Ron Simon charts the show's reactions to a rock 'n' roll counterculture that Draper (Jon Hamm) has difficulty understanding. Lois, an *Esquire* cover designer who later directed music videos for Dylan in the 1980s, was instrumental in the shift away from the staid *modus operandi* of companies such as Sterling Cooper and, appropriately, he earns Don's incomprehension with his campaign for the Volkswagen Beetle. Simon argues that Don is inadvertently a living embodiment of some of Dylan's more cutting lyrical critiques; his ability to adapt and embrace the counterculture in future seasons, he suggests, may well be key to his survival in an industry where Lois's work is already rendering him anachronistic.

Jeremy G. Butler, Tim Anderson and Maurice Yacowar examine visual and aural motifs in *Mad Men* in Section Two of the book. Butler's is an intensive historical study of the media of film and television that traces the influence of period-specific productions such as *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960) and *All That Heaven Allows* (Douglas Sirk, 1955) on the series, but also, and more intriguingly, King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928), before undertaking a considerably more technical analysis of the show's visuals, locating considerations such as its appropriation of colour and aspect ratio within sociological contexts. Anderson, meanwhile, interrogates Weiner and his music supervisor Alexandra Patsavas's use of music in the series, demonstrating how *Mad Men*'s predominantly period-specific soundtrack frequently undercuts, critiques and plays upon its dominant themes and storylines. In fact, Anderson argues, Weiner and Patsavas's deliberate selection of a diverse range of artists (Perry Como, Ann-Margret, Miles Davis and Luiz Bonfá to name but a few) is calibrated to call into question cosy conceptions of 1960s American cultural touchstones and instead "deliberately defies our understanding of these recordings to inflect and contest our collective understanding of the period" (74). Yacowar's aforementioned essay does something different still, perceptively emphasising the silences that punctuate *Mad Men*'s narrative, those moments of suggestive tonal emptiness that we as twenty-first century viewers cannot but imbue with the assumed perspicacity afforded by the benefit of hindsight. As companion pieces, Anderson and Yacowar's essays work effectively in dialogue with one another. Yacowar's chapter is perhaps hamstrung by spatial limitations insofar as he ambitiously extends his argument to incorporate an episode-by-episode analysis of Season One that is somewhat breezy in style, yet never less than stimulating in the possibilities it highlights.

Yacowar's linking of Don's pitch for Kodak's "Carousel" slide projector ("this device isn't a space ship, it's a time machine") with Weiner's creation at large is taken up by Sean O'Sullivan in Section Three ("Space Ships and Time Machines: *Mad Men* and the Serial Condition"). O'Sullivan comments upon television's potential to traverse time and space, but particularly captures attention with his extension of the slide projector metaphor as a means of delineating the serial nature of television. A season, O'Sullivan contends, is not unlike a projector where an episode/slide follows nothingness, itself appearing carousel-like after an episode/slide. Echoes of Deleuze and indeed Baudry linger, as he considers the apparatus—in this case the projector—as a symbolic time machine, one where time and image exist in perpetual motion. By privileging such an apparatus at the end of Season One, Weiner allegorises television's ability to develop multiple narratives, its "discrete images intertwined as much by our desire to see patterns, to make stories out of separate events, as by any fixed narrative governing them" (122). This again calls into question postmodern spectatorship and the role of the viewer in decoding onscreen realities that jar with modern-day sensibilities, none more so perhaps than *Mad Men*'s depiction of sexual politics.

This same depiction provides the backdrop for the three essays that constitute Section Four of *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV*. Mimi White's "Mad Women" charts the lives of the show's leading female protagonists, Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss), Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks) and Betty Draper. White convincingly assays the imbalances that characterise a fictive world in which men's faults seldom threaten their privilege, quite unlike female characters for whom every conceivable pathway has an obvious downside (just as Joan must "pay a price for her active sexuality", Peggy must suffer for her "passive sexuality" (152)). Though such imbalances are to a degree inherent in the era that *Mad Men* portrays, White extends her treatise to encompass an analysis of a promotional documentary included in the box set of Season Two: *Birth of an Independent Woman*, which uses footage from the

series to advance its claims that this unfortunately was how things were for women in the 1960s. A subtle indication of *Mad Men*'s desire to have its cake and eat it, White astutely deduces that the documentary paratext in fact renders the show's "gender narratives self legitimating" as a fictive representation is allowed to subsume the status of historical artefact (157).

Although somewhat puzzled by her assertion that *Mad Men* "devotes relatively little narrative to exploring character motives or developing a sense of their 'interiority'" (153), I found White's essay to be reflective of a particularly strong section of the book. Mary Beth Haralovich's study of "Women on the Verge of the Second Wave" sees correlations between the struggles of Peggy, Joan et al. and third-wave feminists, referencing the work of Tamara Strauss and Kathleen Rowe Karlyn and placing at the centre of her treatise a *Forbes* magazine article penned in 2009 by "Anne Daley" [*sic*] entitled "Top 10 unwritten rules for working women", which she uses to critique Peggy's rise to prominence in Sterling Cooper.

In "*The Best of Everything*: The Limits of Being a Working Girl in *Mad Men*", Kim Akass and Janet McCabe interpolate Rona Jaffe's novel *The Best of Everything* (1958) into the dialogue surrounding *Mad Men*, drawing parallels between the two and thereby revealing an avenue through which current-day gender imbalances can be literalised. In looking backward knowingly at 1960s sexual mores through the medium of television, they identify a singular postmodern risk, namely that in othering Sterling Cooper's sexual politics we delineate irreducibly between now and then even as their legacy remains in evidence today.

Like Akass and McCabe, William Siska equates the top-down hierarchical dynamics of Sterling Cooper with the work of Michel Foucault in "Men Behaving as Boys: The Culture of *Mad Men*". Specifically, both essays reference the panoptical impositions imposed by Sterling Cooper upon female employees whose every movement is seemingly surveyed by male eyes. If we extend Foucault's meditations on panopticism to their gradual conclusions—as Zygmunt Bauman does, for example, in *Community: Seeking Solace in an Insecure World*—we reach the point where those in power begin to resist the stationary debilitations of their environment, for the guards too, no less than the prisoners, are bound physically to the workplace that they oversee. With this in mind, we should perhaps not be too surprised that the men who saunter through Sterling Cooper are a rather miserable lot whose slick façades (and *Mad Men* does façade better than most) cannot masquerade fully the limitations of their existence. Their boorishness is accounted for by Siska who, emphasising Ferdinand Tönnies's conceptualisation of a *gemeinschaft*, or community based upon friendship, posits that they are seeking not a regression into the childlike past, but are instead expressing a doomed desire to delay the restricting presence of the future (for example, takeover by larger companies which, even in Season One, is in the offing) by extending the present.

Elsewhere, Horace Newcomb ("Learning to Live with Television in *Mad Men*") and David Marc ("*Mad Men*: A Roots Tale of the Information Age") locate the series within the wider contexts of the mediums of television and advertising, with the former examining how television is used as a narrative metaphor within the series itself and the latter dramatising the "personal consequences of believing that the creative act can be devoid of moral consequence" (236). David Lavery, with "'The Catastrophe of My Personality': Frank O'Hara, Don Draper and the Poetics of *Mad Men*", and Allison Perlman ("The Strange Career of *Mad Men*: Race, Paratexts and Civil Rights Memory") suffuse their analyses of *Mad Men* with cultural and historical context. Lavery takes Don's brush with O'Hara's poem "Mayakovsky" from the collection *Meditations in an Emergency* (1957) as a starting point to

interrogate the artistic inclinations of a character whose alter ego Dick Whitman evokes one of America's foremost poetic figures in his namesake Walt. Located in the final section of Edgerton's collection, Perlman's timely essay, not unlike Akass and McCabe's before it, meditates upon *Mad Men*'s propensity to make us squirm by showcasing white male characters' archaic modes of relating to the world around them. In and of itself, Perlman argues, this forces modern viewers to confront the inequalities of the 1960s, yet *Mad Men*'s many paratexts (such as the aforementioned "documentary" *Birth of an Independent Woman*, fashion trends sparked by the series, or "Mad Men Yourself" apps available online) "simultaneously sanitize its historical critique", enabling viewers uncomfortable with having a light shone on the imbalances that still remain in modern society to revel instead in more palatable and ephemeral staples of 1960s America (222).

Since its publication in 2011, a wide variety of books and articles have surfaced that seek to shed new light on *Mad Men*, while the series itself has developed in ways that perhaps not even the contributors of *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV* could have envisaged. Echoing Morris Zapp's maxim that "every decoding is another encoding", these developments ensure that the book presents many tantalising opportunities for further discussion. Aptly, it makes the reader want to return to the series anew, a welcome development that in turn paves the way for continued social, aesthetic and historical reflection.

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