Mad Men and Memory

Nostalgia, Intertextuality and Seriality in 21st Century Retro Television

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Television is an evocative reference point in domestic spaces and daily lives. Watching a serial television program in an intimate setting on a prolonged routine basis tends to encourage an emotional connection and identification with its characters and, in turn, the formation of televisual memory. The long-running AMC television series *Mad Men* (2007–15), set in 1960s New York, lends itself to this process, creating memories in the present for both the text and the context in which it is viewed. In addition, it evokes 1960s televisual memory through its sets, narrative, and intertextualities, demonstrating retro's dual process of memory-making. *Mad Men* entwines these threads of televisual memory, interweaving the period television iconography and archival footage that form part of collective memory with the everyday personal memories formed by experiencing and interacting with its mediations of the former. In doing so, it creatively weds together memories old and new, cultural and personal; it creates a unique montage of televisual impressions tied together by continuities and dissonance and draws attention to the processes of mediation, selection, and sequencing of cultural memories.

Mad Men can be read as an example of contemporary American "retro," layering intertextual references from "high" and "low" 1960s culture and recalling 1960s cinema and television in its cinematography and stylized sets. Elizabeth E. Guffey traces retro's evolution from 1970s France, in which "*la mode rétro*" referred to art and cinema that resisted standardized narratives of World War II history and repackaged the past in a stylized and detached manner, to its eventual incorporation into American popular culture, where it served "as a shorthand for a period style situated in the immediate post-war years" (Guffey, 2006, pp. 9–10). Over time, the idea of retro has diversified

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to describe music genres, television, cinema, advertising, visual arts, architecture, design, and fashion, and, as Guffey argues, its temporal focus has broadened to include pasts so recent that they "might seem to have slipped out of sight only yesterday" (p. 17). Guffey suggests that while retro is often thought of as a form of nostalgia, its chief characteristic—its "ironic stance" (p. 20)—distinguishes it from the earnestness of nostalgia. Yet, the interrelations between retro and nostalgia are evolving and dynamic. Particularly relevant to the ideas presented in this essay is Svetlana Boym's (2001) recognition that nostalgic desires are situated at "the very core of modern condition" (p. xvi), and she acknowledges two distinctive forms of nostalgia—restorative and reflective—based on how "one's relationship to the past" is characterized (p. 41). She argues that the former "protects the absolute truth" while the latter "calls it into doubt" (p. xviii). When considered alongside reflective nostalgia, retro cannot be defined in direct opposition to nostalgia, as Guffey suggests it was in the '70s. As nostalgia increasingly accommodates critical stances, retro must be thought to work in conjunction with it.

In this essay, I outline three distinct ways in which *Mad Men* engages with memory. First, it does so textually, evoking memories of the 1960s through its narrative. It is self-conscious and reflectively nostalgic; it recalls but does not idolize. Second, it engages with memory intertextually, invoking the era's cultural artifacts in novel ways that add layers of emotion and interpretation. And third, because of its serial format and long run, *Mad Men* engages with processes of televisual memory, forming its own internal network of new memories in the present. Its mode of representation is definitively retro, maintaining detachment from the standardized iconography of the decade and seeking to challenge its audience's encyclopedic knowledge of history. In this process, the series shifts the focus to an alternative selection of memorable events borrowed from iconic ad campaigns, music, and movies from the '60s. *Mad Men*'s thoughtful integration of old memories and participation in producing new ones, I suggest, have developed new contexts of appreciation for its contemporary audience, facilitating a small memory boom in the present for the 1960s.

The Place That Cannot Be: Dislocation and Yearning in Mad Men

Mad Men follows the lives of wealthy, white advertising executives working at Sterling Cooper, a fictional Madison Avenue agency, throughout the 1960s. Most of these are men who, unhappy in their suburban domestic lives, aim to find meaning through their work, while the series' female characters are comprised of the male executives' bored housewives and of single women

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who work as secretaries. The agency's white, male elite is modeled on the WASP archetype who resists changes in structures of privilege. They choose to uphold '50s-style conservatism while disregarding the cultural and civil rights movements that are known to have marked the '60s. This unique focal point allows the series to represent and explore the continued preservation of the status quo in insulated pockets of white, upper-class America, conflicting with and challenging narratives of change popularly associated with the '60s. The era remains an insistent presence in the American imagination: it is seen as the cradle of many progressive movements, such as the countercultural movement, the feminist movement, the civil rights movement, the anti–Vietnam War movement, the environmental movement, and the gay rights movement. *Mad Men*, by upholding a contrasting image of conservatism and non-change, reminds viewers of the multiplicities of experience in the 1960s and interrogates the efficacy of these progressive projects.

There is room, among the privileged white enclaves wherein the series' story unfolds, for critical engagement with traditionally gendered institutions and with the subordination of women which happens irrespective of their class position or marital status. The sexism experienced by, and the familial pressures placed on, single (white) women living in places like Manhattan form an important theme, while marriage is shown to provide no refuge. By questioning the sanctity of institutions like marriage and family within a white, mid-century world of privilege, *Mad Men* questions the possibility of finding a sanctuary no matter how far one travels into the past. Still, the series' engagement with the past speaks to the decade's continued symbolic power over the present.

Processes of memory and nostalgia are explored directly in *Mad Men*'s narrative, where characters' yearnings for return are highlighted and often destabilized. This is notable from the first season; in the sixth episode, for instance, Sterling Cooper's creative head Donald Draper (Jon Hamm) approaches Jewish client Rachel Menken (Maggie Siff) in an effort to understand what Israel means to Jewish Americans, hoping for some insight to assist in the agency's ad campaign for Israel Tourism. Menken confesses that she feels closer to her American identity than her Jewish heritage, but explains reluctantly that although Jews have long lived in exile, they value the existence of Israel as a haven. When Draper asks, "Why aren't you [in Israel]?" Menken replies that her life is in New York, adding: "I'll visit but I don't have to live there." She stresses that Israel is more of an idea than a real place for her, and when Draper mentions utopia, she explains that "utopia" had two meanings for the Greeks: "*Eu-topos*, meaning the good place, and *ou-topos*, meaning the place that cannot be" ("Babylon," 2007).

Menken's relationship with Israel functions as a metaphor for contemporary Americans' ambivalent relationship to the early 1960s: as an idealized

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fantasy, the era at once sustains influence over contemporary American consciousness and is ultimately impossible. The metaphor extends beyond the sequence described above: thematically, dislocation lies at the heart of the series, epitomized by the falling man in the show's title sequence. Characters, in particular, are often displaced. Apart from Menken, these include those more attuned to 1950s values and customs, whether too old to be absorbed or too unwavering to adapt, who find it hard to cope with the rapid changes that mark the new decade. Reflective nostalgia as theorized by Boym often underpins the show's depiction of fractured and dislocated lives; Menken, for example, claims that despite the relevance of Israel for Jewish Americans, she can reconcile her hyphenated identity and negotiate a space between longing and belonging.

To a great extent, the narrative of *Mad Men* focuses on the negotiation of its central characters' longing for past modes of existence and on their eventual need to accept belonging in spaces that differ from what they expected. In a scene in Season 7's "The Strategy" (2014), the three central protagonists of *Mad Men* sit together and enjoy a meal at Burger Chef, reflectively enacting the negotiation between dislocation and yearning and the process of finding a space in between. Draper, Peggy Olson (Elisabeth Moss) and Pete Campbell (Vincent Kartheiser), colleagues at Sterling Cooper, share their awareness of alienation from familial relationships, forming an ersatz family at the Burger Chef table. They discuss archaic notions of the familial dining experience, changes in the traditional composition of the family, and the consideration of a new equation, even though temporary, which enables them to experience the familial warmth that they yearn. Their consolatory understanding of the impossibility of a return to traditional American family structures reassures them in their dislocation. Acknowledgment of ruptures inform a mediation of nostalgic yearning, creating a space which hints at the possibility of belonging.

Occasionally, the typically implicit relationship between dislocation and nostalgia is made explicit. This is true in the first season's final episode, "The Wheel" (2007), which thematically expands on an advertising pitch Draper makes for Kodak. In the pitch, Draper defines nostalgia, calling it "delicate but potent." He describes it as an emotional connection with "home," a transhistorical space that is reassuring and unchanging and where one always belongs, and compares it to a carousel, a carrier that transports us to pasts composed of postcard memories. He comments that nostalgia "takes us to a place where we ache to go again, […] where we know we are loved." The speech, suffused with restorative nostalgia, is accompanied by a slide show filled with compelling images from his own family moments. Moved by Draper's eloquence and artistry, the Kodak clients cancel their meetings with competing agencies.

Yet, Draper's restoratively nostalgic rhetoric contrasts his reality: he has

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had numerous affairs, of which his wife Betty Hofstadt (January Jones) is aware. The pair have grown distant and Betty has sought psychiatric help. Still, on Draper's train ride home after the pitch, energized by nostalgically revisiting his seemingly happier past and temporarily persuaded by his own rhetoric, he imagines reaching home just in time to accompany his wife and children to her parents' home for Thanksgiving. However, he arrives to find the house empty, undercutting the promise of homecoming. The scene fades and Bob Dylan's "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" (1963) plays as the credits roll. The widely recognizable song is itself nostalgic for viewers, evoking the sentimentality in Draper's pitch. Yet, if nostalgia is the axis of this episode, the song's opening line is a gesture to the irreversibility of past events that must be taken in stride.

Intertextuality and New Media: Appropriation, Adaptation and Online Participation

The use of "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right" exemplifies the thematic and tonal value of intertextuality to contemporary retro productions. *Mad Men* draws from a wealth of 1960s cultural texts, most prominently pop music, film, and television. These references chart a new way of experiencing the '60s as refracted through a contemporary television program. Pop music plays an essential role in *Mad Men*; although it is primarily used to ground the viewer in a place and time, it also contributes a further dimension of comprehension. On this point Tim Anderson has noted, with reference to *Mad Men*'s use of songs to conclude each episode, that they bring "a tone that provides one final critical dimension to the episode: Punctus contra punctum: the structure to shake out nascent meanings and allowing them to come to fruition" (2011, pp. 80–81). This sometimes manifests as an emphasis on the episode's themes, as a continuation of an ongoing dialogue, or as a counterpoint to the on-screen narrative. As suggested previously, the Bob Dylan song in "The Wheel" foreshadows the impending separation of the Drapers; there is an air of its inevitability given Draper's long absences and the breakdown in communication between him and his wife, and the lyrics confirm this, justifying their eventual parting. In "The Strategy," Draper and his former secretary Peggy Olson admit their mutual regret in not sustaining meaningful relationships. At this point, Frank Sinatra's "My Way" (1969) begins to play on the radio, and Draper and Olson share a slow, reassuring dance to the song. Its refrain speaks to Olson's isolation and struggle as a woman copywriter in a gendered work environment. As such, it acts as a continuation of the dialogue preceding it, offering the final word.

The selection of songs used in *Mad Men* is carefully meditated. The

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songs often highlight themes that underpin a particular episode or those that recur throughout the series' narrative. For example, in the episode "Shoot" (2007), the Bobby Helms single "My Special Angel" (1957) is used as a counterpoint to the onscreen image of Betty Draper shooting her neighbor's pigeons. The contrast between the sentimental lyrics and Betty's act of frustration foregrounds the schism between the identity she wants to assert throughout the episode—"I did do some modeling, you know"—and the expectation of motherhood imposed on her from the outside to be "[b]eautiful, and kind, and filled with love like an angel." By setting up contrasting images of motherhood, the episode demystifies the angelic mother myth, and the song at the end works to tie together these threads. The aural cue, although at odds with the onscreen image, supplements the narrative agenda. The dissonance between the visual and the aural stimuli provokes the audience's attention to the composition of the scene, and heightens the underlying theme of Betty's conflicting existence, which was stressed in the episode. The use of "My Special Angel," now widely forgotten, also exhibits retro television's ability to revive music and reframe it according to contemporary concerns. Many songs by Bob Dylan and Frank Sinatra continue to exert cultural influence and therefore belong to the present as much as they do to the past, but Helms' song resonates primarily as a '50s relic. While its use lends period specificity, as it would likely have been played regularly on the radio in the early 1960s, its status as a '50s hit also serves to further associate Betty Draper with '50s tastes and practices. The romantic ballad thus finds a new context for appreciation; *Mad Men* adds a new layer of interpretive possibility to the song at the very instance that it is revived.

Mad Men also features several cinematic references. These citations provide the opportunity to draw on and explore subjects and themes often central to 1960s cinema while simultaneously drawing attention to rifts in cinematic nostalgia. The easy solutions presented in the cited film representations of these subjects and themes are complicated by *Mad Men*'s more nuanced treatments, thus altering contemporary viewers' reception of its references. As such, these intertextualities transform cultural memories of the '60s, broadening the horizons of collectively remembered texts and their contexts. For example, Billy Wilder's *The Apartment* (1960) is invoked in an episode from the first season that deals with anxieties felt by single working women in the 1960s ("Long Weekend," 2007). Office manager Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks) references *The Apartment* to her boss and lover, Roger Sterling (John Slattery), noting the similarities between her own life and that of the film's central female character, elevator operator Fran (Shirley MacLaine), who is also in a relationship with her boss. Joan explains that Fran attempts suicide after discovering that she is but one among many of her boss' casual affairs and that he does not intend to divorce his wife.

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Joan's reference to *The Apartment* is significant; although the film depicts the pressures faced by single working women, it ultimately opts for a romantic resolution, thus neutralizing those stresses by making them appear easily surmountable. *Mad Men*, by comparison, frequently stresses the everyday humiliation faced by single working women. Later in the same episode, when Sterling has a heart attack, founding partner Bertram Cooper (Robert Morse) calls Joan to the office to send telegrams to clients, ensuring them that business will continue as usual. While leaving the office late at night, they get into the elevator and Cooper asks Joan to operate it. At that moment, Joan *becomes* Fran. A few episodes later, Joan, having evidently taken note, ends her affair with Sterling and attempts to settle down by getting engaged to a young medical student.

The Apartment also provides an influence for *Mad Men*'s office set designs. Jeremy G. Butler suggests that the Sterling Cooper set's "most striking element […] is its ceiling—an oppressive grid of fluorescent lights," and notes its indebtedness to *The Apartment* director Billy Wilder's visual designs, which also recognize "this lighting fixture's oppressiveness" (2011, pp. 60–61). Indeed, in its set design and cinematography the series draws heavily on 1960s cinema and television, and in this regard, *Mad Men*'s location on AMC introduces an interesting paratext to its expectations and reception. Originally known as American Movie Classics, AMC is a site of televisual memory and a place of remembrance, circulating old American classics, and, as such, it creates an expectation of cinematic continuities for its audience. In the early 2000s, AMC embarked on a rebranding strategy, expanding its repertoire to include original "quality" programming that aimed to be both cinematically on a par with and complementary to its exhaustive library of classic American films (Edgerton, 2011, p. 8). *Mad Men* benefits from sharing network space with AMC's oeuvre and delivers on the expectation of cinematic continuity. Its title sequence is a nod to the opening sequence of *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959) which was designed by Saul Bass, as well as the falling man poster of *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958). Evidencing the extent to which the *Mad Men* viewing experience is intertwined with cinematic nostalgia, the exhibition "Mathew Weiner's *Mad Men*" (Museum of the Moving Image, New York, March 14–April 26, 2015) featured screenings of ten films—including *North by Northwest* and *Vertigo*—that influenced the show. The series of film screenings, entitled "Required Viewing: *Mad Men*'s Movie Influences," was curated by Weiner, who wrote descriptions for each of the films on the museum's website ("Exhibition," 2015).

Curated lists like Weiner's also have the capacity to create new networks for the circulation of memories of the 1960s, and online responses to *Mad Men* suggest that these circuits have contributed to a small '60s memory boom among its audience. Many contemporary viewers who are active in

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online forums confess to researching intertextual references to fully decode the episodes' conveyed messages. For example, a *Mad Men* viewer, who goes by the username "60'schild," writes of *The Apartment* on the AMC *Mad Men* talk forum: "If it wasn't for *Mad Men*, and the people who write on this Forum, I wouldn't have watched [*The Apartment*]. It has now become one of my favorite early '60s flicks" (60'schild, 2010). The viewer's comment reveals how *Mad Men*'s references do more than provide additional layers of textual meaning, also encouraging its audience to seek out extratextual knowledge. Citation validates *Mad Men*'s position as a quality cultural product suited for a niche audience with cultural capital, and online activity suggests that both critics and fans consider a model *Mad Men* viewer to be one who can recognize its cultural and historical references. Even so, contextual information is made readily available online by critics and commentators, with weekly recaps and review articles published by television critics after each episode. Most of them include lists of references, such as those published by television critics in *The Guardian Online*'s "Mad Men: Notes from the Break Room" (Dean, 2010). Articles also often provide links to short *YouTube* clips.

The online platforms described above, which enable and invite participatory viewing practices, are characteristic of contemporary "quality" television serials. In these online contexts, episodes in which significant events occur take on certain qualities of factual televised events, encouraging viewers to ask one another what they did after watching, where they were when they watched, and other questions related to memories of mediation. For *Mad Men*, these shared memories contain two layers: the memory of the episode itself and the newly mediated memory of its 1960s reference. This was notable after the death of Bertram Cooper in Season 7, a fictional "event" that triggered the publication of several online articles, blogs, and fan-produced videos commemorating the character on *YouTube*. In the process, memories of the character became intertwined with memories of actor Robert Morse, whose presence in the series is itself an intertextual citation: Morse's performance as J. Pierrepont Finch in the stage and onscreen productions of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (Burrows, 1961; Swift, 1967) inextricably ties him to cultural memories of the 1960s. "Waterloo" (2014), the episode in which Cooper dies, features an imagined song and dance sequence in which Morse performs "The Best Things in Life Are Free" (Brown, DeSylva and Henderson, 1927), self-consciously drawing on viewers' memories of Morse's 1960s musical comedy fame. The episode motivated viewers to share not just their memories of viewing the program, but also of Robert Morse's 1960s performances, with critics such as *The Moderate Voice* editor-in-chief Joe Gandelman (2014) calling attention to Morse's former fame and several fans uploading clips from previous Morse films to *YouTube*.

The above example indicates how *Mad Men*'s intertextualities stir the

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desire to revisit the past by pointing to continuities and relevance; Robert Morse's final song and dance sequence reminds viewers of the continued exchanges between the 1960s and contemporary popular culture. However, in interviews with the series' producers and crew, the value of intertextuality is never located in its potential to restore a point of origin in cultural history; instead, it is located in the opportunities it affords to appropriate, adapt, and repackage 1960s texts in exciting and challenging ways. For instance, cinematographer Phil Abraham points out, "Movies [of the '60s] were an influence, but we didn't say, 'Let's make *The Apartment*'" (Feld, Oppenheimer and Stasukevich, 2008). Similarly, Steve Fuller explains of *Mad Men*'s title sequence, which he co-created, that it is "a kind of an update of Saul Bass" (Landekic, 2011). The word "update" is significant here: technological advances in cinematography, styling and graphics play an important role in the series' transformations. In the case of the title sequence, its After Effects 3D graphics at once echo Bass' work, evoking nostalgia for 1960s cinema, and render it novel and contemporary. By technologically updating its intertextual references, *Mad Men* both highlights continuities with 1960s popular culture and re-imagines contemporary contexts for its reception, validating its persistence in American culture. Simultaneously, new technologies aid in the dispersal of this new hybrid content via video-streaming and other online platforms, sustaining the memory boom initiated by the televisual text.

Generating New Memories: Television Seriality and Nostalgia for Mad Men

As *Mad Men* textually explores states of dislocation and yearning and intertextually engages with contemporary practices of nostalgia and recollection, a third process of memory emerges: the series begins to refer to its own internal networks of serial memory. *Mad Men*'s complex narration, serial format, and long run, featuring seven seasons and 92 episodes in total, encourages sustained engagement in its narrative and an intimate connection to its characters. As the narrative progresses, the series contains increasing references to its earlier episodes, embedding its own, new, televisual memories into the text. For viewers, these memories which the show increasingly invokes are simultaneously of both the events in the narrative (the text) and of the contexts in which they viewed *Mad Men* over time. Nostalgia, in this respect, is distinct from nostalgia generated for the '60s and the intertextual references in the text; the nostalgia here is within and for *Mad Men*. In the following section I use two examples from the text to show how *Mad Men* evokes nostalgia for its early episodes through mnemonic devices of serialized television to achieve identification and narrative depth. This resonates with

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viewers' memories for the long periods in their everyday life spent with the characters. The show's amalgamation of textual and contextual serial memory speaks to the interactive nature of contemporary memory processes in relation to television viewing practices. The examples elucidate a consistent posture of the series towards nostalgia; there is a correspondence between the relationship of the series to the '60s and the relationship that it has with its own diegetic past.

In Season 4's "Waldorf Stories" (2010), Draper returns to the office on a high after celebrating the win of a Clio Award, and offers a drunk and unprepared pitch for Life Cereal. In the sequence, he delivers fragments of his earlier Kodak pitch, evidently trying to recreate its spell: "Look, there are sweeter cereals than this, but I kept thinking about, you know, nostalgia. How you remember something in the past, and it feels good, but it's a little bit painful, like when you were a kid" (2010). The clients are not impressed this time with Draper's appeals to nostalgia, and in a desperate attempt to maintain the client, he lifts ideas from the work of a mediocre copywriter that he had earlier regarded with contempt; the clients settle on the copywriter's "Life: the cure for the common breakfast." By alluding to Draper's successful Kodak pitch, the series calls on its audience's televisual memory to highlight Draper's debasement. Increasingly, viewers' assumed memories of characters' pasts inform *Mad Men*'s depictions of their present situations.

In addition, the audience's memory is refreshed from time to time by mirrored storylines which subtly pay homage to earlier episodes. Serial memory thrives on episodes which share thematic similarities or make indirect allusions to previous episodes because comparing the past and the present is a device central to the function of memorizing. *Mad Men* enables this process by introducing episodes that recall earlier ones in theme and composition, provoking viewers to take stock of events within its diegetic universe. These become more frequent and explicit in Season 7, the program's final season. They include repeated patterns; for instance, a coup in its seventh episode, "Waterloo," alludes to a similar coup in Season 3's "Shut the Door. Have a Seat" (2009). Other Season 7 episodes recall previous episodes thematically; "The Strategy," for example, pays homage to Season 4's "The Suitcase" (2010). Both are organized around a similar temporal marker, Peggy Olson's birthday, which calls for an occasion to compare and review Olson's growth and her relationship to the other central protagonist, Draper. "The Strategy" acts as a point of culmination, reflecting on the repercussions of Olson's choice to value work over family in the earlier "The Suitcase." Viewers who have witnessed Olson's growth as a professional in the time since can participate in validating this choice despite her own anxieties about it. By offering audiences comparable episodes in which events repeat (birthdays, coups) and by presenting circumstances in which previous decisions made

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by characters are validated, *Mad Men* establishes character consistency, thus encouraging immersion and a sense of identification. These occasions particularly draw attention to the passage of time, the growth of characters, and the deepening of their interpersonal relationships.

The extent to which this engagement with the mechanics of memorizing was contemplated in *Mad Men*'s production is clear in a comment made by Mathew Weiner on the relationship between memory and long-running serial television. He notes that

> part of my intention when I pitched the show, even before I talked to anybody, was wouldn't it be amazing to do ten or 12 years of these people's lives, have the actors age that amount. And you will immediately, no matter how many bad things happen that first season, you see Peggy and you have nostalgia for her first day at work because you knew her then—there's just that process of the human mind, just because it's in the past [Poniewozik, 2014].

Here, Weiner recognizes how the passage of time is crucial for serial television, arguing that it enables mediated intimacy and even nostalgia for the characters. This nostalgia is arguably reinforced by nostalgia for the experience of watching *Mad Men*; it is a result of the interaction between the televisual text and the context in which the text is viewed. Experiential memory of watching a long-running serial is coextensive with televisual memory, and these multiplicities of remembrance point to the porous and assimilative nature of contemporary memory, which integrates divergent strands—televisual and contextual, immediate and cultural.

Because of its breadth, serialized television provides the opportunity for a retro production to rework its own representation of the past. In addition to *Mad Men*'s long run (2007–15), the time frame of the narrative is spread over a decade (March 1960–November 1970), and this temporal stretch allows character engagement to be both intense (a particular event or personal crisis can be concentrated upon in one or more consecutive episodes) and expansive (repercussions of actions and choices can be explored over an entire decade). *Mad Men*'s circular structure—a byproduct of its hybridization of the series and the serial by combining episodic closures with continuous plot development—facilitates returns to previous events while denying absolute closures. Furthermore, commonplace, day-to-day experiences often constitute the basis of serialized narratives and, as such, *Mad Men* naturally moves beyond depictions of historical events and popular cultural memories towards an exploration of the everyday. In these ways, the show's structure both suits and enables its posture of reflective nostalgia. For instance, even if Joan's story is mapped upon Fran's "happily ever after" from *The Apartment*, Joan's trajectory continues in the serial beyond that apparent closure to open up again to the possibility of another struggle. *Mad Men*'s seriality keeps the process of negotiation with history and cultural memories open and dynamic, and

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in so doing broadly implies that reprising historic periods always involves a process of meaning-making that shifts in accordance with present needs.

Conclusion

Contexts of television viewing have changed substantially in recent years, with televisual texts now available in multiple formats. DVD box sets and streaming platforms like Netflix have transformed the traditional parameters that define television texts, making it possible for viewers to regulate how much of the text is consumed in one sitting, to pause the narration at any point to interact with the content, and so forth. *Mad Men*'s unique approach to depicting the past resonates with these autonomous and interactive television viewing practices. The series negotiates interactions between the past and the present without favoring one over the other. It acknowledges the need to revisit the past; yet, when Menken claims, "I'll visit," what is implied is that she will visit *when she wants to. Mad Men*'s intertextualities work similarly: they are heterogeneous, derived from both high and low cultures, and ultimately serve the series' present needs. These references are not trivialized; their significances are acknowledged in the intelligent and creative ways by which they are incorporated into the televisual text. Still, the series emphasizes the capacity of the contemporary, whether in the form of ideas, of technologies, or otherwise, to transform the cultural memories that it reintroduces to present-day consciousness. It also encourages viewers to become invested in its appropriated fragments of 1960s popular culture, to participate in online discussions around them, and to derive pleasure from seeing them recalled in novel ways.

Contemporary memory is inundated by sites and cultures of memory (Huyssen, 2003); our intensely connected environment makes the transference of memories easy and accessible. New technologies for storing memories have given rise to new cultures of memorizing in a present marked by its capacity to accommodate various interpretations of history and uses of cultural memories. Retro productions are symptomatic of this climate of memorizing. The proliferation of memory cultures and the consequent diversity of narratives of the past has complicated neat closures and nostalgia for *one* particular interpretation of history. The expansion of nostalgia discourse to include reflective and critical stances evinces our overall acclimation to this environment. History is no longer sacred; it is shared. It is not reverence for intertextual references, but instead the manner in which they are creatively woven into contemporary narratives that holds our attention. If, as Boym argues, nostalgia is at the core of our modern existence, the majority of us become every day all the more reflectively nostalgic. This might explain the

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popularity of retro television and cinema: we are ever-more enthusiastic to see historical periods uniquely and unconventionally re-enacted.

Retro is invested in contemplating the past, albeit with new perspectives or through novel appropriations of the old. While its authenticity rests in the *mise-en-scène*, its goal is adaptation. Retro's emphasis is always on the present, forming a continuum between two networks of memory: memories of the past's cultural artifacts and the new memories that are created daily. Instead of approaching the American '60s as a monolith to be preserved, *Mad Men* engages with the era interactively. It provides a space for multiple registers of language, form, and cinematic vocabulary to co-exist, equalizing and subsuming in its flow its various centers of cultural influence. By revisiting the 1960s in a way that is intertextual, idiosyncratic, and imperfect, *Mad Men* highlights contradictions in notions of historical authenticity and offers up the 1960s in a way that is suited to its contemporary audience's constant interactions and participation with the past.

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