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LIFE ON MARS. Convergence oder Connectivity Anxiety?

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LIFE ON MARS

Convergence or Connectivity Anxiety?

BY NICOLA GLAUBITZ

Tales of paranormal media are important [...] not as timeless expressions of some undying electronic superstition, but as a permeable language in which to express a culture's changing relationship to a historical sequence of technologies.¹

This was no arena for nuance. Collingswood wasn't concerned with fine points of post-Lawrence policing, sensitivity training, community outreach. This was about the city's daydream. A fetishised seventies full of *proper men*.

There went a DVD of *Life on Mars* onto the pyre. What Collingswood did was motivate into being tenacious gung-ho clichés that believed themselves.²

I. TALES OF PARANORMAL MEDIA

The (literal) burning of a *Life on Mars* DVD that China Miéville describes in his 2010 urban fantasy novel *Kraken. An Anatomy* is part of a magic ritual. Police officer Collingswood fights magic with magic here: She commits the disc to the flames in order to conjure up some straightforwardly brutal police ghosts, hoping for unbureaucratic help in a complicated war between esoteric pop culture cults. While her methods are unorthodox, her choice of material is not. *Life on Mars*, a police procedural that ran for two seasons on BBC 1 in 2006 and 2007, tells the story of Manchester detective inspector Sam Tyler who finds himself transposed from the year 2006 to 1973. His feeling of having landed on a different planet is due to the violence, machismo, corruption and racial prejudice rampant in the 1970s police department. The »tenacious gung-ho clichés« the show presented with both irony and gusto was indeed some of the main points of attraction for its audience, and the »fetishised seventies«³ – a lovingly detailed reconstruction

1 Sconce: *Haunted Media*, p. 10.

2 Miéville: *Kraken*, p. 191.

3 Both quotations: Miéville: *Kraken*, p. 191. See Lacey/McElroy: »Introduction«, p. 5, on the show's popularity. Ruth McElroy (»Consuming Retrosexualities«) analyzes the appeal of retrosexuality – the half-nostalgic, half ironic revival of older gender relations in the wake of a post-feminist backlash – in *Life on Mars* and its British sequel *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC 1, 2008-2010). *Ashes to Ashes* again featured Philip Glenister as Gene Hunt, the

of a 1970s world full of old cars, interior decoration items, fashion and pop music of that decade was another.

But the casual inclusion of a still current storage medium in arcane practice, as described in Miéville's novel, points to another important issue in *Life on Mars*: The program stages media technologies as haunted, uncanny, quasi-magical objects, and mediated communication as a form of unpredictable intrusion that creates slippages between mind and world, imagination and reality, past and present. As Jeffrey Sconce argues, fantastic tales endowing media technologies with paranormal, magical, spiritual, or anthropomorphic qualities should not be dismissed as childish nonsense – they can be read as commentaries on media change and media anxieties, and therefore as commentaries on social change.⁴ My essay will ask which media anxieties are expressed in the representation of television as an old medium in *Life on Mars*, and I will interrogate Matt Hills' argument that media nostalgia is to be read as a symptom for convergence anxiety here.

2. MEDIA AND THE READING OPTIONS OF *LIFE ON MARS*

What is the function of media practices and media technologies in the narrative of *Life on Mars*? Representations of media perform the vital function of linking different diegetic spaces, and they also encourage different ways of constructing the narrative. Sam Tyler's voiceover in each episode's title sequence gives three options for reading the series' overarching plot: »Am I mad, in a coma, or back in time?« Time travel is paradoxically both the most and the least plausible interpretation of the plot. It is suggested by the fact that the diegesis is almost exclusively set in 1973 Manchester – only parts of the first and last episodes, and a few scenes in between give us glimpses of 2006. Furthermore, the show exploits the well-known (and well-worn) dramatic and comic potentials of time travel narratives such as *Back to the Future* (USA 1985, d: Robert Zemeckis) or *Terminator II* (USA 1991, d: James Cameron) – the protagonist meets his young parents and has to cope with the fledgling serial killer who will kidnap his girlfriend in 2006. He is plunged into the »dark ages before personal computers, mobile phones, and DNA testing«⁵, and his disorientation provokes predictable (and predictably lame) jokes – for example when he regains consciousness in 1973 beside an old Ford model and asks a baffled policeman where his jeep is (»You were driving a military vehicle?«⁶).

Time travel is also suggested by the detailed presentation of 1970s cars, décor, fashion, and music as indicators of pastness; noughties media technologies

sexist, brutal, and corrupt character that appealed especially to women (p. 126-12, see also Cook/Irwin: »Moonage Daydreams«, p. 84-85).

4 Sconce: *Haunted Media*, p. 8-10, 17.

5 Frosh: »Television and the Imagination of Memory«, p. 118.

6 *Life on Mars*, 1;01, 00:08:37.

are conspicuously absent. The contrast between media-cluttered private rooms and office spaces and 1973 interiors is explicitly marked in the first episode. When Tyler enters the building where his office used to be, 33 years earlier, he notices the absence of his desk and personal computer with disbelief and gazes astonishedly into a dark, open-plan office full of desks piled high with dog-eared files and yellowing paper. Apart from telephones, a television is the only electronic medium in the office – showing an old public information film.⁷ Tyler has a flash of media nostalgia when he stumbles into a record shop in 1;01 and remembers how he bought his first LPs – but on the whole, he has a hard time getting accustomed to police work without computers. He pines for a »decent search engine«⁸ and a reliable database when he rummages through a chaotic paper archive with his colleague Annie Cartwright. These examples show how deeply the absence of digital media unsettles Tyler's approach to police work: Crime solving, for him, involves techniques of systematic fact finding, data collecting and access to various databases. Viewers of popular forensic dramas like *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000-) are familiar with this kind of idealized police procedure where even the most remote piece of information is usually just a mouseclick away and perfectly reliable. In *Life on Mars*, this ideal of data collecting and sharing – the digital present – clashes comically with the methods preferred by Tyler's boss Gene Hunt, who relies on intuition, prejudice and physical violence.

While the time travel option is not presented as technically feasible in the original British version of the show and is implied exclusively by *generic* conventions,⁹ the option of reading the 2006 parts of the narrative as symptoms of mental delusion in 1973 is also kept in play since the first episode. It is spelled out by Cartwright and underlined by Tyler's constant worries about the unreality of the world he finds himself in – both characters alert the audience to the different interpretative options for making sense of the diegesis. She applies her training in psychology to talk him out of his persistent sense of dreaming or hallucinating his world and explains his disorientation as the consequence of an accident that Tyler has apparently also suffered in the 1970s reality (shortly before his transfer from Hyde to Manchester, see 1;07). Again, this option is rendered plausible with reference to media: Tyler's media practices (talking to a television set as if it were a two-way-communication device) are depicted as decisively odd and keep in place the suspicion that he is somehow deranged. Hills draws attention

7 *Life on Mars*, 1;01, 11:50-13:41, 00:14:56. The shooting script also has him notice the absence of electronic security barriers: Graham: »Life on Mars Episode One – Shooting Script«, p. 25.

8 *Life on Mars*, 1;07.

9 As opposed to the American remake (ABC 2008-2009), where a third time frame (2035), along with a Mars colony justifying the show's title, is established and explained technologically.

to the use of »self-conscious, artificial over-lighting«¹⁰ in such moments, heightening the sense of being suspended in between dream and reality, or imagination and reality. The diegetically uncertain status of these messages – are they figments of Tyler’s imagination or real events? – is underlined by the fact that Tyler is usually alone in his room when he receives them, and often drunk, half asleep, dreaming or hallucinating under medication¹¹ (as in 1;01, 2;05).

While media technologies allow for transitions between the diegetic spaces of 1973 and 2006 in some instances, they are not performing this function exclusively or reliably. The Open University lecturer talking on an old black-and-white TV set in 1;01 while Tyler dozes in a chair suddenly seems to voice the observations of a doctor commenting on the condition of his brain after the accident, but he returns to his math problem as soon as Tyler’s attention focuses on him (see fig. 1).¹²

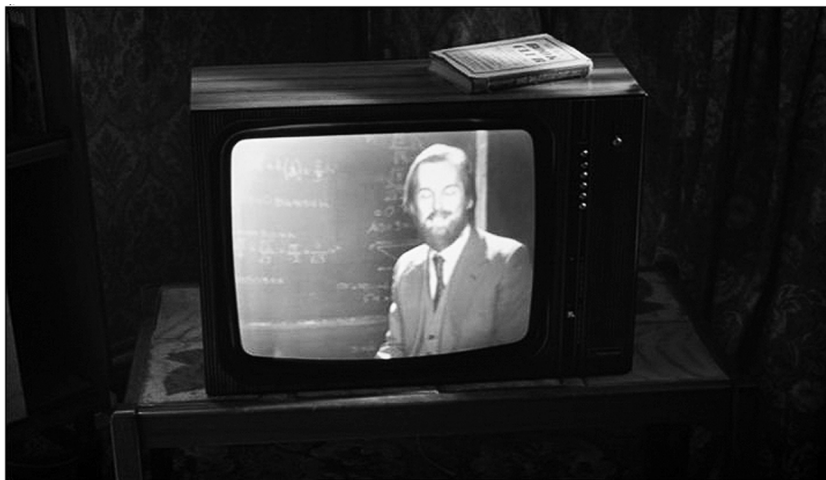


Fig. 1: Adult education program on television, *Life on Mars* 1;01, 28:22.

The little girl in a red dress which, for decades, formed part of the test card image at the end of daily television transmissions in Britain, also and literally enters the diegetic space of 1973 (in 1;02, 1;03, 2;03 and 2;08; see fig. 2).

She may be part of Tyler’s imagination or a personification of television in general (that is, of a whole program sequence containing the diegetic space of a cop show). The test card girl performs a full-fledged *mise en abyme* when she emerges from a group of children playing on the street, turns to the camera in episode 2;08 (59:10) and switches off the set. The image turns black and a white dot remains in the middle – the image one would have seen on an old TV set after turning it off.

10 Hills: »The Medium is the Monster«, p. 108.

11 See Hills: »The Medium is the Monster«, p. 108.

12 *Life on Mars*, 1;01 28:19-28:54. See also 2;03; here, the radio set and the Open University lecturer on TV seem to channel a dialogue between doctors, disagreeing about Tyler’s condition (00:10-00:33).



Fig. 2: Tyler and Test Card Girl, *Life on Mars* 2;03, 26:37.

The coma option, finally, introduces more complex interpretative ambiguities that, again, pivot on the representation of media. The idea that Tyler is suffering from locked-in syndrome is carefully established: The 2006 car accident depicted in the first episode and interferences of Tyler's 2006 hospital reality with the 1973 world suggest that the diegetic reality in which Tyler acts as his own avatar can be read as a mental space composed of firsthand memories of his early childhood (he is born in 1969) and from second-hand, collective and that is: mediated memories of the seventies.¹³ Rather than having travelled back in time, Tyler seems to have strayed into 1970s cop shows like *The Sweeney* (ITV, 1975-78) or *Starsky and Hutch* (ABC, 1975-1979): suspense- and action-laden, often humorous police procedurals structured around single episodes. This narrative device suggests intertextual frames like *Pleasantville* (USA 1998, d: Gary Ross) or *eXistenZ* (Canada 1999, d: David Cronenberg) where protagonists enter the diegetic and ludic worlds of a TV show or a computer game, but the concrete realization of this trope is closer to Irvine Welsh's novel *Marabou Stork Nightmares* (1995) or Christopher Nolan's film *Inception* (USA 2010) – in both texts, an apparently outside diegesis is in fact a world inside a comatose patient's or dreamer's mind. In *Life on Mars*, the diegetic space of 1973 is doubly coded as a remembered media reality, which provides materials for acting out psychological and somatic issues. Tyler, for example, re-enacts a childhood trauma in 1;08 (the sudden disappearance of his father in 1973) and discovers why he wanted to join the police in the first place.

Other episodes imply that his dangerous and action-laden investigations are metonymies for battles against his comatose state: in 1;06 (2:10), Tyler learns (this time over a telephone connection that sometimes works as a communication channel to 2006) that his life support machine will be turned off at 2.00 p.m. while he and his colleagues are involved in a kidnapping case, and have to prevent

13 Frosh: »Television and the Imagination of Memory«, p. 126, 130.

a criminal from killing his hostages before 2.00 p.m. His smile of satisfaction when they meet the deadline and manage to bring the case to a non-violent end is apparently also part of the 2006 diegesis: his mother sees him react and withdraws her consent to switching off the life support. A similar metonymic relation between the 1973 and the 2006 diegeses occurs in 2;05 when an apparent mistake in medication in 2006 leaves Tyler with a bad 'flu, feverish nightmares and an even more impaired sense of reality in '73. In the second season, Tyler begins to see and interpret the tribulations of police work and an alleged undercover investigation he is involved in as part of the psychological and bodily resistance he has to summon up in order to survive an operation of the brain tumor he is now being diagnosed with. He considers his antagonistic colleagues as avatars representing his unconscious, and thus invites spectators to share this metonymic interpretation of what they see.

3. UNCANNY MEDIA

This metonymic operation is also encouraged for the presentations of media technologies. The old television and radio sets, cassette players and turntables are more than just indicators of historical difference, as Matt Hills argues:

what tends to be glossed over in readings of *Life on Mars* as centrally nostalgic, or as critically contrasting 1973/2006 policing, are its complex depictions of media technology. The fact that Sam Tyler [...] receives messages from 2006 on radio and television makes these media highly significant as [...] monstrous disruptions of Sam's world.¹⁴

Media in *Life on Mars* are, as we have seen, highlighted as transitional points between past and present that, moreover, encourage audiences to ponder different options for interpretation. The representation of television (and to a lesser extent, radio) as an uncanny and monstrous medium, Hills argues further, addresses a specific and contemporary media anxiety even though it simply seems to quote much older commonplaces of media criticism and media anxiety. According to Hills, the uncanny old media in *Life on Mars* must be read as metonymies for 21st century media and are expressive of convergence anxiety.

Hills' argument needs to be unpicked carefully because it is, as I will argue, only partly convincing. *Life on Mars* certainly evokes nostalgia for old tape decks, LPs, radio sets and in particular for old television by drawing attention to earlier technological standards and viewing conventions, such as grainy black and white images and the image vanishing in a white dot after switching off the set in 2;08, the test card, or the animation techniques of seventies childrens' television (puppet animation in 1;04, the clay animation of *Camberwick Green* (BBC 1, 1966) in 2;01). But these evocations of familiarity with media technology (shared by the

¹⁴ Hills: »The Medium is the Monster«, p. 105.

40-somethings generation of viewers who are likely to identify with the protagonist, and to remember the childrens' shows) are introduced only to be defamiliarised. The old technologies appear unsettling because they acquire functions that are impossible given their technical properties. The Open University lecturer in episode 1 seems to look back at Tyler, who talks at the TV set, for a short moment before returning to his maths problem. Then, a blurred close-up of the lecturer seems to respond to Tyler's frantic shouts and his patting the screen.¹⁵ A similar and more pronounced example for the television screen as touchscreen is shown in episode 2;05 (44:45) where Cartwright seems to respond to Tyler's touching her face on screen (see figure 3).



Fig. 3: Cartwright responds to Tyler's touch, *Life on Mars* 2;05, 44:45.

Furthermore, the messages are unpredictable and unreliable: the messages from 2006 (of vital importance for him) come and go unbidden; they often vanish as soon as they have caught Tyler's attention, and static usually interrupts them before he has grasped their full import. A sense of grotesque disproportion is achieved in 2;08 (00:40), for example, where the radio set looms in the foreground and Tyler is confined to a corner of the image (see figure 4).

By turning thoroughly familiar, ordinary, and banal home settings into latently threatening scenarios, representations of old media evoke an atmosphere of uncanniness in the sense described by Sigmund Freud: the opposite of the intimately known, the comfortable, the familiar; the feeling of disorientation and helplessness experienced in dreams.¹⁶ Freud's idea that uncanniness has to do with the recovery of forgotten childhood experiences, and is often associated with liminal situations such as uncertain boundaries between self and world or self and others, or with the uncertainty whether an object is animate or inani-

15 *Life on Mars* 1;01, 28:19-28:56. The camera pans from a close-up of the TV screen through the room to Tyler sleeping, then the image cuts back and forth between him and the screen. The use of this typical convention for filming dialogue, and the short pause in the lecturer's speech while looking at the camera suggest two-way communication.

16 See Freud: »The Uncanny«, p. 237; cf. 220, 224.

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mate¹⁷ is useful for an analysis of the particular anxiety evoked in *Life on Mars*. Liminal spaces and situations are the very settings in which mediated messages unfold a disruptive impact, and violations of diegetic coherence are at the same time violations of Sam's privacy. Visual and narrative devices underline the *intrusive* character of the messages Tyler receives through television by locating them in his private and intimate sphere: They usually occur inside his room in threshold situations – transitional moments in between sleep and waking, work and leisure, day and night. Moreover, they usually catch Tyler while he is engaged in normally unobserved, private activities like shaving or brushing his teeth in the morning. They also intrude in moments of vulnerability or intimacy – when he sleeps off a hangover, is apparently daydreaming or resting.



Fig. 4: Looming radio set, *Life on Mars* 2;08, 00:40.

Alice R. Bell observes that apart from »allowing contemporary viewers the nostalgic delight of re-experiencing programmes they enjoyed as children via the slightly ironic distance of 21st century eyes«, the show also suggests that »Sam may be reliving playing make-believe as a child«¹⁸ – and one can add that he also revisits the more sombre and unsettling events of his early childhood. The frightening and uncanny aspects of this process are, again, associated with mediation and with the genre of animated film. Puppet and clay animation as apparently harmless childhood entertainment acquire serious and uncanny overtones when they are placed in liminal settings and are made to convey messages: Tyler, asleep, is shown with the still running television in the background in episode 1;04. A children's program featuring puppets made from socks is running and one of the puppets begins to speak with his mother's voice. Similarly, in an opening sequence that is both funny and nightmarish, Tyler dreams of himself and his boss Gene Hunt as animated clay figures from *Camberwick Green* (2;01), and this dream intensifies his grudge against Hunt throughout the episode. The test card

17 See Freud: »The Uncanny«, p. 228, 236.

18 Bell: »The Anachronistic Fantastic«, p. 8.

girl turns into a menacing, hypnotizing presence in 1;02 (24:49) and 1;03 (41:26). She voices doubts that Tyler will survive his comatose state, and suggests he give up the fight. Finally, the childish behaviour of Tyler (banging on the television set, shaking it, shouting at it or talking to it in moments of communication breakdown) also points to the recurring, half-ironic and half-serious image of media as sentient and autonomous beings that Jeffrey Sconce identifies as a central trope for media anxieties in the 1960s.

4. CONVERGENCE OR CONNECTIVITY ANXIETY?

The show's presentation of uncanny or haunted media also cites the 1960s trope of television as an intrusive technology that, so to speak, colonizes the private sphere and renders it public.¹⁹ Furthermore, the coma narrative to some extent normalizes the 1970s/1980s trope of media immersion as psychosis and loss of self (as e.g. in *Videodrome*, Canada 1983, d: David Cronenberg) by framing it as a somatic medical condition. How, then, can these tropes for earlier stages of media anxiety address newer concerns, given their obsolescence and their familiarity for contemporary audiences? Sconce holds that there is a continuity of figurations for media anxieties over time and that the specific concerns they address are revealed only if one connects them to the changes in media technological development and the discourses accompanying that change.²⁰ Matt Hills follows Sconce when he argues that *Life on Mars* points to *convergence anxiety*: *Convergence culture*, a term coined by Henry Jenkins, refers to »the flow of content across multiple media platforms, to cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.«²¹ According to Jenkins, convergence is not so much a technological phenomenon as a new audience culture based on the active participation in following storylines across different media platforms. This mode of exploration (which Jenkins compares to hunting and gathering²²) is strategically encouraged by media industries creating complex storylines, sprawling fictional worlds and merchandizing platforms catering to such reception practices.

Life on Mars, Hills argues, metaphorically appropriates »contemporary television discourses of hyperdiegetic immersion and interactivity«, projects them on old media and thus »responds to ›convergence anxiety.«²³ Interactivity, though, is hardly ever evoked in *Life on Mars* – more or less successful, delayed, and often interrupted two-way communication via an old television set is the

19 And vice versa, see Sconce: *Haunted Media*. p. 171.

20 See Sconce: *Haunted Media*, p. 10.

21 See Jenkins: *Convergence Culture*, p. 2.

22 Jenkins: *Convergence Culture*, p. 21.

23 Hills: »The Medium is the Monster«, p. 113/114, cf. 106.

rule. Some primitive and again quite jerky interaction with another mediated, diegetic space is only shown in 2;05, when the television seems to function as a touchscreen. The second trope, immersion, is more salient and invoked on several levels. Hills reads (for example) the 360 degree pans around Tyler in the first episode, showing him embedded in the 1970s reality, and his final decision to remain in the seventies as instances of escapist immersion in a media reality. The idea of escape from the overly bureaucratic, complex professional world of 2006 into the literally more colourful and warmer world of the 1970s is strongly suggested in this last episode, when the warm colours of the past contrast with the bluish tints of the present. Tyler, as Hills argues,

is placed in exactly the position of an ideal, fantasised twenty-first century audience member: that is, he is immersed in a highly distinctive, high-concept narrative world [...] it is a virtual, hyperdiegetic space so vivid, so seemingly ›alive‹ that Sam Tyler ultimately chooses to live inside it [...] Like the participatory audiences metaphorically ›invited in‹ [...] to transmedia, Sam chooses proximity and participation in his very own hyperdiegesis.²⁴

But firstly, the instances of immersion Hills refers to are not linked to the presence of old media technologies. These situations stand for immersion in a diegesis in a general (and historically unspecific) sense – and it is not clear why they should refer to the ›hyperdiegetic immersion‹ characteristic for transmediality. The immersion tropes in *Life on Mars* do not differ much from the well-known representations of television described by Sconce in 1960s media fantasies. Here, television is already staged as a nowhere or limbo, and as an unreal »phantom or double of the real social world«²⁵ which eventually engulfs and replaces the real world. The »television viewer who is somehow transported into this virtual realm within the TV set«²⁶ is another already familiar premise. Secondly, the test card girl intruding into the diegesis and switching off the television set (as well as the show) to end the last episode (2;08) is a *mise en abyme* effectively closing out all references to *media other than television*. And Tyler watching his colleagues on a black-and-white television screen in 2;05 also points to television within television – is he looking at another scenario within the same diegesis, or is he watching the show *Life on Mars*? Only when he touches the screen and Annie Cartwright reacts, something like interaction between *different* media platforms is suggested.

The tropes of immersion and interactivity, and the examples Hills names are either not specific or not salient enough to warrant a reading of *Life on Mars* as expressing convergence anxiety. I would argue that the show is primarily (and

24 Hills: »The Medium is the Monster«, p. 112.

25 Sconce: *Haunted Media*, p. 18.

26 Sconce: *Haunted Media*, p. 17.

not only marginally, as Hills suggests²⁷) concerned with the effects of social media that have become the focus of media discourses in the noughties, and with the *connectivity* resulting from mobile media. The erosion of privacy is one of the major issues in the debates on platforms like *Facebook* or *MySpace* and to a lesser extent *YouTube*.²⁸ In *Life on Mars*, oblique hints at social media embedded in the recycled topoi of older, television-related fantasies gain prominence through the stylistic and narrative devices that point to the permeability of private and public spaces. The avoidance of a surface/depth spatialization within the coma narrative in favour of an inside/outside contiguity is one example. The recurring synchronization of intrusions into Tyler's intimate sphere with intrusions of other diegetic spaces is another. This motif also suggests an erosion of privacy in terms of time; Tyler, like the ideal-typical employee and netizen, is connected 24/7 to communication networks.

But the most obvious suggestion that *Life on Mars* concerns anxieties projected on connectivity lies in the brief switches to 2006. Here, an even older topos of media anxiety, namely distraction and the dangers of multitasking²⁹, is called up. Old, defamiliarised media take over the role of disruptive, distracting technologies, exerting pressure on Tyler to attend to different, equally important tasks at the same moment. It is made quite clear that without the uncanny intrusions of old (read: new) media, Tyler would be able to concentrate on his cases, relate to his colleagues in a friendlier way, embark on the romance with Annie Cartwright, and (in 2;08) be more resolute in saving his colleagues from armed gangsters. Instead, he has a shaky sense of reality and is unwilling to perceive and treat his 1973 colleagues as humans (something Annie Cartwright constantly reminds him of).

If one looks at the shooting script for the first episode, the issues of distraction and connectivity are even more dominant. Had the opening scenes become part of the version finally broadcast, they would have provided a template for reading the old mediascape of 1973 in these terms. Since they were cut in favour of a more action-oriented beginning, the script can only be used as evidence for a perspective on media that was originally planned by the creators of the show,

27 See Hills: »The Medium is the Monster«, p. 113.

28 Many early accounts of the emerging social media register the wide circulation of private information and consumer data, and the insecurity of data storage on the internet. The spectre of the transparent citizen in a new totalitarian society is conjured up e.g. by Whitaker, *The End of Privacy*, and David Brin, *The Transparent Society*. The willingness of web users to disclose personal information and to share it freely was turned into corporate policy by *Facebook* CEO Mark Zuckerberg in 2010 when he proclaimed that privacy is no longer a social norm (see Younge, »Social media and the Post-Privacy Society«).

29 For the history of this trope see Crary: *Suspensions of Perception*, p. 49-51; for a newer example see the recent debate in Germany about 'digital dementia' (initiated by neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer: *Digitale Demenz*), an alleged loss of the ability to concentrate and focus due to multitasking with digital gadgets.

and that may yet have informed many of the following episodes. In the script, the first episode was meant to begin with a close-up of a photograph (Sam Tyler as a boy). A state-of-the art television set is defined as the audience's and the protagonist's centre of attention:

Close-up – photograph. A small boy – 4 or 5 wearing an oversized policeman's hat. Freckles. Toothy grin. Reflected in the glass of the photo – a dozen separate News 24 items explode onto a plasma screen.

The widescreen TV spews up a giddy-making cocktail of current affairs. These images usher in a fast set of very contemporary TITLES.

The TV with Dolby 5.1 dominates one half of the apartment and holds the attention of SAM TYLER. [...]

SAM [...] is talking into his mobile and negotiating the News 24 menu simultaneously. Girlfriend MAYA cradles her coffee, watching him.³⁰

Tyler is busy with a mobile phone and news channel at the same time in this scene and ignores Maya's attempts to begin a serious conversation about the precarious state of their relationship. (Maya finally and desperately tries to reach him by sending him a text message from the next room.³¹) Later at the office he continues to multitask between computer screens, mobile phone, surveillance cameras, and recordings of earlier interrogations.

In the light of these examples, it is highly doubtful if immersion and its consequences are actually at stake in *Life on Mars*. On the contrary: the inability to immerse, to really take a world and its social life for granted, is Tyler's predicament. The media anxiety with which the serial engages relates to the perceived effects of social media.

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